

Focus is on citizen experiences while aiming to enhance consumer interfaces

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At the level of national vision statements, it is one of the grandest yet. But ground reality poses challenges to creating those first 100 smart cities in India. And not least because from incomes to infrastructure, the country makes for a disparate landscape.

How can smart cities be built from scratch when existing infrastructure, regardless of its varied quality, is the lifeline of most of our cities? And what sense would it make to build a smart city on virgin ground, where few services exist? For Tata Elxsi's technology and design leaders, integration of technologies and services, as well as branding, is the way to go.

Case for design thinking

"Design is the interface between technology and people. In the

end, Smart Cities will be about citizen experiences," says Narendra Ghate, Chief Designer - Service & Experience Design, Tata Elxsi Ltd.

An overwhelming amount of technology wouldn't necessarily make business sense if masses aren't able to use citizen services optimally.

And in many cities, infrastructure upgrades may be in order before they can be smarter. But successful precedents make a point.

"Think of how once the Golden Quadrilateral came about; every State could think of having something similar. Such transitions need to happen with Smart Cities," RR Bipin, Vice-President, Digital Services, Tata Elxsi.

So could consumers soon buy movie tickets that have train or bus fares included, for example? Or could one card take care of



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everything from purchase of groceries to user's transport and travel requirements? It's possible, but as Narendra Ghate points out, all that integration takes a fair bit of work.

Underlining the value of tackling one bit at a time, RR Bipin adds, "Eventually technology investments will happen where business returns are pretty

good. That can happen if we are able to solve some of the most burning problems India faces today." And according to Bipin and Ghate, when design-thinking leads the way, those burning problems can be solved.

Smart approach

As they say, you have to start somewhere. If the Metro rail project will, in time, be one of the longer-term answers to the problem of urban congestion in India, Tata Elxsi has used its project with the Bengaluru Metro to showcase how simple solutions can solve big problems.

"With the signage project for Bengaluru Metro, we were able to create a brand identity for the city's Metro and a scalable solution. Because signage isn't just about guiding people where to go. Our pictogram system, for example, works well for everyone, even those who can't read," says Ghate.

After projects with the Bengaluru International Airport, Chennai Metro and Mumbai's



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monorail, more recently, Tata Elxsi has been involved with the Kochi Metro project.

It's the company's first smart city project. Already at the initial stages, deliberations are on to have pickup points at all Kochi Metro stations for groceries

and other deliveries. Reshmi CR, Senior DGM, Corporate Communications, Kochi Metro Rail Ltd, shares, "We're definitely in the race to be a smart city. Mostly, we're able to work with existing infrastructure to enhance services. We'll have a smart card tie-up with a prominent bank. It will be a co-branded card which will enable transactions for services beyond the Metro, like a Kochi card which will even enable citizens to pay service taxes or land taxes."

Branding exercise

Kerala has in the past been very successful with its tourism campaign 'God's Own Country'. It's just one example of how brands can align people on a large scale.

And even as Gujarat gets ready to bring India's first smart city to completion, it will be interesting to see how working with existing infrastructure such as the Metro can help move cities across the country to smart city status.