

After seven-year slump, it will be business as usual on Anna Salai

With Two-Way Traffic Set To Resume, Establishments Anticipate More Footfalls

U.Tejommayam@timesgroup.com

New mannequins clad in shimmering saris and crisp men's formal shirts under the fluorescent lights at Thakurdas Chaitram, a textile showroom next to the LIC building, as work is underway to accommodate more display racks. The 20-year-old showroom is being spruced up as metro rail construction is complete, and the stretch is going to be made two-way for traffic from August 3.

"We hope to get more customers from now on," said Habibullah, the store manager.

Many businesses that bore the brunt of metro rail construction in the past seven years and managed to survive are now refurbishing showrooms as the restoration of traffic flow is expected to give Anna Salai its life back. "The last few years had been tough. We stopped stocking up. Our business had dropped considerably," said Habibullah.

For decades, Anna Salai has been the central business district, catering to corporate offices, banks, book stores, publishing houses, libraries, textile shops and automobile showrooms. While it lost its premium commercial hub tag to Radhakrishnan Salai when many big brands shifted their businesses and eventually to shopping malls, it was worst hit by metro rail construction since 2012.

While many coffee shops, restaurants and publishing houses either shifted or shut, landmark stores such as Poompuhar and Higginbothams managed to survive through barter and large holes stole their visibility and discouraged customers from visiting due to lack of space and traffic diversions. "We saw a huge drop in footfalls as the space in front of our store was dug up and customers had no place to park. But in the past few months, we have seen a growth of around 20%," said a staff at Higginbothams.

A senior staff at Poompuhar said, "We didn't see much drop but our customers may no longer have to take a circuitous route to come to our store."

The nearly 65-year-old American Book Centre, which shifted to a commercial complex before the metro rail construction began, is now preparing to put new display boards.

Old buildings have started making way for new ones. A car showroom is being set up next to Thousand Lights metro station and two big builders have started constructing commercial complexes.

The new metro stations along Anna Salai, including LIC and Thousand Lights, are expected to enhance connectivity and help create more business. Real estate experts said demand for space as well as rentals may go up. "Demand will increase exponentially because connectivity will improve. The buildings will become a hub for corporate activity," said Jerry Kingsley senior director and head, Capital Markets, South India. For instance, Kingsley said, Akshya Builders had taken over Shanthi Theatre, VST Motors service centre has been converted into a commercial office and Prestige is building a new commercial building. "Old factories and sheds will make way for new commercial offices. The rents on the arterial road have already gone up from ₹60 to ₹65 per sqft to ₹80 to ₹85," he said.

Pics: A Prathap & BA Raju



LIMPING BACK

HIGGINBOTHAMS | GP Road-Anna Salai remains a bottleneck for motorists after it was made one-way in 2012

ANNA FLYOVER-AG-DMS | Motorists zipping down Anna Flyover have to slow down while nearing AG-DMS as the road is narrow

SIET SIGNAL | Traffic is slow due to diversions and passenger crowd waiting at the SIET bus stop

NANDANAM JUNCTION | Traffic from Venkatanarayana Road to Charniers Road Via Anna Salai restored

SAIDAPET | Metro rail has vacated the stretch but the road remains uneven. Highways department is building medians



THEN & NOW: Anna Salai from either side of LIC Building before and after metro rail

Cenotaph Road-Anna Salai junction may open for traffic to both directions

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

The city traffic police are considering a plan to allow traffic from Cenotaph Road to be allowed to move right at Anna Salai to proceed towards Teynampet. After four-way traffic was allowed at Nandanam traffic junction, traffic enforcement officials found vehicles were piling up at the junction, clogging Charniers Road, Venkata Narayana Road and Anna Salai.

On Monday, K Ejileestrasane, joint commissioner of police, traffic (south), reviewed the situation at Nandanam junction and found that the pile-up was being caused also by vehicles moving from Cenotaph Road to Anna Salai not being allowed to take a right, thereby forcing them to turn left and proceed till

GUINDY | Elevated line soars above Kathipara grade separator. The road to race course has been relaid and bus bays were set up near railway station

THE LAST FEW YEARS HAD BEEN TOUGH ... WE HOPE TO GET MORE CUSTOMERS FROM NOW ON

Habibullah | STORE MANAGER, THAKURDAS CHAITRAM

Nandanam junction to take a 'U' turn.

"Opening the Cenotaph Road-Anna Salai junction for movement of vehicles to both the directions on Anna Salai will bring down the congestion," said a traffic police officer.

In April this year, the city traffic police opened up the Cenotaph Road-Anna Salai junction, but it had to be reversed within a few days after some commercial establishments complained of vehicles piling up on Cenotaph Road. Several road users, however, preferred a right turn on Anna Salai from Cenotaph Road. "Coming from Kotturpuram, I am forced to travel in the opposite direction on Anna Salai before taking a 'U' turn if I have to go towards LIC," said Pramad Kumar, who works in a software company in Ramanujar IT City.