

Mean Streets

How do you create order from chaos in Ahmedabad, India? With a little help from the Stantec Research & Development (R&D) Fund.

by Alison Smith

Six million people share the streets of Ahmedabad—in cars, motorcycles, and rickshaws, as well as on bike and foot.



Top: Birds, cows, cyclists—they all stake a claim to Ahmedabad's streets.

Bottom: Many sidewalks aren't exactly pedestrian friendly, forcing walkers into the street.

Walking along the streets of Ahmedabad, India, is . . . an adventure. A lack of useful sidewalks. Cars, rickshaws, bicycles, animals everywhere. No logical traffic patterns. Cars whiz by you from all directions. A camel-drawn cart crosses your path while a cow lies down next to a fruit vendor.

"If you're walking—or even driving—it's risky," says urban designer Neha Karode. For years, designers in our Ahmedabad office wanted to do something about the problem, but this wasn't their focus. They worked mostly on private building and development projects, getting little opportunity to work on public sites.

R&D to the Rescue

But then in late 2010, Burt Hill—with its Ahmedabad office—joined Stantec. As Ahmedabad staff learned about their greatly expanded network of resources and capabilities, working on public streetscapes and intersections became a possibility.

So when business center managing leader, Gopinath (Gopi) Akalkotkar, heard about Stantec's Research & Development (R&D) Fund, he talked with his team about getting the project off the ground. With improving safety and creating a walkable city for Ahmedabad's six million people the chief goals, senior urban designer, Saumil Mevada, applied for an R&D Fund grant—and was successful!

Laying the Groundwork

With the necessary financial support, Gopi and Saumil assembled a team, starting with hiring Neha Karode and enlisting staff in the office, including

architect, Damini Patel, and junior architect, Priyanka Dave.

The team undertook an exhaustive course of research into the conditions of the city's streets and identified examples of what is and isn't working in other intersections in India and across the globe. The goal? To conduct a case study of a select site, complete with solutions to discuss with the city—at no cost to the client.





Today, the intersection at Iskon Circle is a mishmash of pedestrians, cars, rickshaws, and bicyclists, all using the same open corridor. Our team developed three alternatives for redesigning the intersection to be more organized, welcoming, and safe.

The team studied Iskon Circle, a busy intersection of a major artery with satellite roads, service lanes, and a tangle of pedestrian walkways, vendors, and storefronts. For months, they visited Iskon Circle several times, talking to people, observing behavior, and documenting and photographing everything.

They identified several key issues in Iskon Circle, pinpointing traffic movement and parking as the biggest concerns. With no clear hierarchy among users—and no traffic signals, crosswalks, or usable sidewalks—pedestrians and bicyclists could be sharing a lane with cars and trucks. What’s more, few parking spaces but many open areas meant drivers parked their cars haphazardly, further muddling traffic patterns.

Creating the Vision

After studying best practices from around the world, the team developed three design concepts for the intersection (see next page), each representing a different level of intervention and some sort of identifiable gateway for the city. “The whole idea is

to help create a safe environment that also creates a sense of place,” says Saumil.

The team presented its research and preliminary concepts internally to other senior staff members, and after further refinements, the research was presented to the city last fall. So far, the reception has been positive. The next challenge is getting the funding from the city to move the ideas forward. “We are now trying to get more people in the city interested and excited about this,” says Gopi. “This was just a starting point. We want to do more projects like this that could help make a difference to our community.”

The plan may already be working. The team presented its Iskon Circle research as part of an interview with the city for a project to create guidelines for a central business district—and won! “We’ve wanted to do this kind of work for the city but never had the resources to pursue it,” says Saumil. “The Stantec R&D Fund grant made it possible for us to do that.”

The Iskon Circle research team included (l-r) Damini Patel, Priyanka Dave, Neha Karode, Saumil Mevada, and Gopinath Akalkotkar.



Split Plaza The split plaza concept more clearly defines travel lanes and adds attractive sidewalks and art to create a sense of belonging.



Central Plaza The central plaza concept adds clear overhead traffic signals, signage, and a large landscaped island. The concept removes billboards and overhead cables to streamline sight lines.



Foot Over Bridge The foot over bridge (also referred to as foot-bridge above) concept allows pedestrians to cross above traffic, adds a tensile roof for protection from the weather, and defines architectural guidelines for buildings.