

# 4 yrs later, stink stays on city-B'luru trains

Earlier Study Showed Toilets Dirty; Remains Main Problem

Yogesh Kabirdoss & Daniel George | TNN

**F**our years after an Indo-American study on passenger comfort in AC coaches of trains between Chennai and Bengaluru revealed that unclean toilets and poor quality of food were the biggest grievances, nothing seems to have changed on the ground.

The Double Decker train has been introduced and the number of passengers has increased but for those frequenting the route on any one of the trains including Brindavan Express, Lalbagh Express, Kaveri Express or Shatabdi, food and hygiene are still a problem. "I usually travel to Chennai for work and return the same evening. Though the ticket pricing is high as it includes meals, the quality of food has gone from bad to worse. You get better upma in a roadside eatery, and the soggy omelettes are just inedible," said N James, a businessman.

In Shatabdi, which is supposed to cater to high-end customers, the toilets are hardly cleaned making them unusable. "The railways should organise a meeting with the passengers to find out which services need to be improved. Railways should not take passengers for granted. The reason why buses of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) between Bengaluru and Chennai are popular is because of the quality of services they offer," said James.

The study titled 'An approach to prioritise customer-based, cost effective service enhancements' was published in 'The Service Industries Journal' in 2016. Co-authored by academicians including professors from the Indian Institute of Management,

## ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

A survey was conducted among 325 randomly selected passengers across trains operating between Chennai and Bengaluru. Here are some of the top demands:



> **Cleaner toilets and coaches and platforms**



> **Greater safety**

> **Better quality food**

> **Shorter travel time with trains being more punctual**



> **More comfortable seats with additional luggage space**



> **Ensure internet access and availability of newspapers/magazines**



> **More trains/coaches**



**OTHER ISSUES:** Arrival and departure times should be announced inside coaches; unauthorised people should not be allowed inside reserved coaches; more service-oriented staff

Bangalore (IIMB) and Stanford University, USA, the study surveyed 325 passengers aboard air-conditioned compartments of multiple day trains operating between Chennai and Bengaluru.

While cleaner toilets, greater safety and quality food were the top priorities for passengers, it found that on-board internet/Wi-Fi access is also sought by passengers, many of whom are information technology professionals.

As part of the study, commuters were asked to list their priorities in services and rank them. Based on it, the surveyors arrived at 19 services that needed improvement.

V Seenu Srinivasan, professor from Stanford University and one of the co-authors of the study, said respondents rated cleanliness highest among the 19 services that re-

quired improvement. "High priority was given for cleaner toilets and low priority for greater luggage space. Shorter travel time was important but was not among the pressing demands," he said.

The researchers also conducted a similar survey among 16 railway officials to gauge the expenditure for enhancing these services. "Railway officials told us that reducing travel time is more costly and difficult. Cleaning toilets is much cheaper," said Srinivasan, also an adjunct professor at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai.

Replying to a question on what developments the railways should prioritise, he said, "If railways has a limited budget, will they be spending on bullet trains or clean toilets? The simple answer is clean the toilets first."

In the study, the researchers focused on core services of the overall travel experience