Just how to make individual mobility low-carbon and sustainable?

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NEW DELHI: The need to provide an overlap between individual mobility and public transport becomes imperative in a context where individual mobility leads to greater congestion, lower speed and increased land use, said The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) Director-General R. K. Pachauri here on Friday. But taking it in isolation, how do we make individual mobility low-carbon and sustainable?

“Individual mobility is going to change, especially in countries such as India. For every 1,000 people here, we only have 10 passenger cars — which is very low in comparison to Thailand and Germany,” said Union Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises Secretary M. F. Farooqui at the 13th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (DSDS). “While the headroom is available for growth, it brings up huge concerns for climate change. So we need to find other ways to mitigate it such as better urban planning, better infrastructure planning and efficiency.”

Mr. Farooqui spoke in the context of the automobile sector in India, which is the sixth largest in vehicle manufacture, and said the discourse should revolve round how to reduce emissions, increase fuel efficiency and bring about electric mobility.

“The National Electric Mobility Mission Plan-2020, which was launched earlier this month, will target six million units of which two-wheelers will be the bulk.”

While 350,000 e-bikes ply on Indian roads and close to 55,000 on the streets of Delhi, the growth of e-bikes has, however, not been consistent, said Hero Electric CEO Suhinder Gill. “Demand side incentives are major contributors to e-bike penetration, but cost of ownership and convenience are also equally important. For instance, buyers of e-bikes do not get loans from banks as opposed to petrol bikes, which are funded through loans…. The lead acid battery used is unreliable in an Indian context since it cannot handle the road conditions or the extreme temperatures.”

Mr. Gill said the option then was to go in for building a battery that is suitable for Indian conditions or go in for a better battery. “The problem with that is the cost of the battery will be more than the two-wheeler.”

He also highlighted the problem of unreliable electricity, which has, in the past months, pushed sales down to zero in places such as Tamil Nadu.

However, Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers Director-General Vishnu Mathur said the focus is not only on vehicle improvement but should be an integrated approach. “Any progress in reductions are undermined by road infrastructure, improper maintenance of vehicles, insufficient inspection and certification system. Regulation should encourage environment friendly growth of the automobile industry.”

The 13th DSDS is organised by TERI. The Hindu is the media partner.