



UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Reclaim the Footpath: Walking as a Constitutional Right

 THE HINDU

20 July 2026 ·

POLITY

GS2

GS1

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotesFree UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**bharatnotes.com → **ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 epicbharat@gmail.com

Reclaim the Footpath: Walking as a Constitutional Right

 The Hindu

20 July 2026

GS2

GS1

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

A city that cannot be walked safely has quietly decided that some of its citizens do not matter. When a pedestrian steps off a broken footpath into fast traffic because a vendor cart, a parked car and an open drain have swallowed the pavement, that is not an accident of bad luck. It is the visible result of a design choice that puts the private car first and the human body last.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This editorial sits at the meeting point of fundamental rights and urban governance, which is exactly where UPSC likes to test whether an aspirant can turn a lived civic grievance into a constitutional argument. A 2026 Supreme Court reading of the right to walk safely as part of the right to life shows the Court continuing to expand Article 21 into the everyday texture of city life, the way it earlier did with clean air, health and shelter.

The second reason it matters is that walkability connects rights language to hard data on road safety and public health, giving you a ready-made GS2 answer that is not just theory. **GS Paper 2:** fundamental rights, the expanding content of Article 21, and urban local governance. **GS Paper 1:** urbanisation, its problems and the shape of Indian cities. For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the right to walk safely flows from the **right to life under Article 21** and the freedom of movement under **Article 19(1)(d)**; India records **over 1.5 lakh road-crash deaths a year**, with pedestrians and cyclists forming a large and rising share; the **Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014** governs vending zones; the **Smart Cities Mission** promotes non-motorised transport and walkability. For **Mains**, be ready to argue that streets are a public commons and that footpath design is a test of whether governance serves the majority who walk.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

For most of the twentieth century, Indian city planning imported a car-centric template. Road widening, flyovers and parking became the measure of progress, while the pedestrian was treated as an obstruction to smooth traffic flow. The footpath, where it existed at all, became a residual strip, narrow, discontinuous,

broken by transformer boxes, encroached by parked two-wheelers and eaten into by everything the road could not hold.

Yet the arithmetic of the Indian city has always favoured the walker. A very large share of urban trips are short and made on foot or by cycle, especially by the poor, the young, women and the elderly, who own no car. To design streets only for the minority who drive is therefore not neutral. It is a transfer of public space and public safety away from the many toward the few. The 2026 ruling names this inversion for what it is and insists that the state has a positive duty to provide safe, continuous, accessible walking space.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

Walking is a right, not a residual courtesy

The core shift is from viewing the footpath as leftover space to viewing safe passage as an enforceable entitlement. If Article 21 guarantees life, and the leading cause of preventable death on our streets is the crash, then a state that fails to protect the pedestrian is failing a constitutional obligation, not merely a civic one. This reframing turns potholes and missing crossings from complaints into rights violations that courts and citizens can act upon.

Vendors and walkers are not enemies

The lazy response pits the street vendor against the pedestrian, as if reclaiming the footpath means bulldozing livelihoods. The **Street Vendors Act, 2014** rejects that binary. It mandates surveys, vending zones and Town Vending Committees precisely so that hawking, which is itself a source of eyes on the street and safety, is regulated rather than banished. Good street design allocates space to both, with clearly marked vending bays that do not block the through-walking path.

The public health and equity dividend

DIMENSION	CAR-FIRST STREET	PEOPLE-FIRST STREET
Primary user served	Private vehicle owner (minority)	Pedestrian, cyclist, vendor (majority)
Road safety	High pedestrian fatality risk	Slower speeds, protected crossings
Public health	Sedentary, polluted, heat-trapping	Active travel, cleaner air, shade
Equity	Space captured by the car-owning few	Commons shared across class and age
Economic life	Sterile carriageway	Vendors, footfall, local trade

The table makes the point that walkability is not a soft amenity. It reduces crash deaths, encourages the physical activity that lowers non-communicable disease, cuts local pollution and returns public space to the citizens who fund it.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Frame the footpath through three lenses that stack rather than compete. The **rights lens** treats safe walking as flowing from Articles 21 and 19(1)(d), giving citizens standing to demand it. The **commons lens** treats the street as shared public property whose default user should be the pedestrian, with the car as a guest that must slow down. The **governance lens** asks who actually delivers: urban local bodies design and maintain footpaths, so the Seventy-fourth Amendment vision of empowered municipalities is inseparable from walkability. Weakness in one lens leaks into the others; a strong right on paper fails if the municipality has neither funds nor teeth.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Car-centric design -> narrow, broken footpaths -> pedestrians forced onto carriageway -> crash deaths and exclusion -> Article 21 and 19(1)(d) claim -> streets redesigned as commons -> vending bays plus continuous walking path -> safer, healthier, more equal city

WAY FORWARD

- ① **Design for the walker first.** Adopt binding street-design guidelines that **mandate** continuous, obstruction-free footpaths of adequate width, safe crossings and traffic-calming, with the carriageway sized only after pedestrian space is secured.
- ② **Integrate vendors, do not evict them.** Complete Street Vendors Act surveys, notify vending zones and constitute Town Vending Committees so that hawking is designed into the street through marked bays rather than treated as **encroachment**.
- ③ **Fund and empower municipalities.** Tie non-motorised transport funding under the Smart Cities and urban mission framework to measurable walkability outcomes, and give urban local bodies the finances and staff to maintain footpaths, not just build them once.
- ④ **Make safety measurable and accountable.** Publish ward-level pedestrian crash data, set a target for reducing pedestrian and cyclist deaths, and treat unsafe streets as an actionable failure of the local body, echoing the constitutional standard the Court has set.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has repeatedly probed the judicial expansion of Article 21 (right to life read to include shelter, clean environment and livelihood) and the working of urban local governance under the Seventy-fourth Amendment. This editorial lets you fuse both strands, using pedestrian rights as a fresh, concrete illustration of an old constitutional trend and a live governance gap.

Practice question: “Safe, walkable streets are less a question of urban convenience and more a test of constitutional and municipal accountability.” Critically examine in the light of the right to life and the framework for urban local governance. (15 marks, 250 words)

Sources: The Hindu - editorial and opinion pages, The Street Vendors Act, 2014 - PRS Legislative Research

Source: Reclaim the Footpath: Walking as a Constitutional Right — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

25 Jul **Dharmendra Pradhan Resigns Over Exam Leaks: Ministerial...**

24 Jul **Tougher Penalties for Exam Paper Leaks: The 2026...**

23 Jul **The Supreme Court Number of Judges Amendment Bill 2026**

21 Jul **A Bill to Protect Vande Mataram Under the National...**



CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/th-pedestrian-rights-footpaths-2026/>

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → bharatnotes.com](#)

📌 OPPORTUNITY

Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

Ideal for: Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · bharatnotes.com