



HOW LUCKNOW CLIMBED THE CLEANLINESS LADDER: LESSONS FROM ITS TRANSFORMATION

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Lucknow's recent leap up the national cleanliness rankings felt sudden to many observers, but the city's rise is the result of a concentrated push: a mix of visible political attention, practical service upgrades, big-ticket infrastructure for specific waste streams, and citizen-facing digital tools. While Indore remains the benchmark the city that has repeatedly showed how steady systems beat one-off campaigns Lucknow's story is useful because it shows how targeted interventions can produce rapid, measurable gains when they're well executed.

At the Swachh Survekshan 2024–25 awards, Lucknow announced itself as a serious contender by finishing among the top cities in the million-plus category a jump that city officials and local media marked as a turning point. The result was celebrated across the municipality with rallies and public acknowledgements of sanitation workers, and it signaled that months of planning and implementation had begun to show up in hard scores.

To understand what changed, it helps to

separate three interlocking strands of action: political and civic mobilization; fixing specific operational problems; and investing in infrastructure and technology where it matters most.

The political and civic strand began with visible leadership and a narrative that tied cleanliness to civic pride and to the city's cultural identity. State-level initiatives framed projects such as the Gomti river revival not just as environmental remediation but as a civic movement that needed mass participation. The revival mission combined technical measures drain surveys, removal of invasive aquatic weeds, and plans to upgrade sewage-treatment capacity with awareness campaigns and regular progress reviews. The effect was twofold: it created momentum across departments and gave citizens a frame to hold their elected officials and bureaucracy accountable.

Operationally, municipal authorities targeted the places and waste streams that cause public nuisance: illegal dumping from construction sites, gaps in door-to-door collection, and low

processing rates for dry and C&D (construction & demolition) waste. For residents, the most tangible change was the arrival of tools and services that made it easier to comply. The Lucknow Municipal Corporation rolled out a mobile app called “Lucknow One” to help people locate authorised drop-off points for C&D debris and to discourage ad-hoc dumping a practical fix that reduces street litter and improves the efficiency of collection services.

Infrastructure investments followed the operational diagnosis. Rather than relying solely on more trucks or more fines, the corporation-built processing capacity tailored to the city’s actual waste profile. A high-capacity C&D processing plant (reported at 300 tonnes per day) converted construction debris into usable precast material, turning a chronic source of roadside refuse into a feedstock for construction and thereby closing a waste loop. These targeted capacity additions lift the numbers that the national survey measures the percentage of waste that is safely processed rather than dumped.

Alongside pipes, plants and apps, Lucknow emphasized measurement and accountability. Municipal staff increasingly used digital tracking for collection routes and real-time monitoring, and the civic narrative stressed verifiable metrics such as door-to-door collection coverage and the share of waste being processed. That combination of measurement and visible public action is what turns administrative work into survey wins: when collection is recorded, bins are emptied on schedule, processing plants have throughput, and C&D is diverted from streets, survey auditors can and do verify progress.

If Lucknow’s surge shows the value of focused, short-to-medium-term drives, Indore reminds us why longevity matters. Indore’s decades-long strategy rests on the everyday systems that most citizens experience: near-universal segregation at source, rigorous door-to-door collection schedules, well-integrated composting for organics, recycling for dry waste, and continuous training and welfare measures for sanitation workers. Those practices create

institutional resilience; they are not flashy, but they are durable, and they repeatedly register in national surveys. Indore has been recognised at the top for multiple consecutive years precisely because the city invested in systems that kept working even when leadership changed.

What sets Lucknow apart is that its authorities combined the quick wins of visible public campaigns with targeted system fixes. The river-revival campaigns created momentum and broad civic engagement; the app and the new C&D plant closed specific operational gaps; the tighter monitoring ensured improvements were documented. Together, these moves produced a burst of measurable improvement in the period that the Survekshan auditors examined.

That said, two tests remain. One is sustainability: the challenge for Lucknow is to turn its campaign-era gains into institutional routines that persist across successive survey cycles. The other is inclusivity: cleanliness cannot be sustained unless the workers who collect, sort and process waste are secured with training, equipment and social protections, and unless informal recycling sectors are integrated, not displaced. Indore’s model succeeds in part because it addressed these softer governance questions steadily over time; Lucknow’s next task will be to copy those habits while keeping the public mobilisation that produced the initial jump.

Lucknow’s rise is a reminder that rapid progress is possible when political will, focused infrastructure investment and operational fixes meet citizen engagement. Indore provides the playbook for how to keep that progress durable. Together, their experiences map the practical route for Indian cities that want both fast improvement and long-term resilience: mobilise people, fix the friction points, build the right plants and tools, measure relentlessly and then keep doing it, year after year.