

From Ideas to Impact

What MInT-athon Taught Us About Building the Future of Mobility

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What happens when you bring together students, professionals, startups, technology, industry and real-world mobility challenges—and give ideas the opportunity to move beyond the pitch?

At the MInT Collaborative, we set out to explore exactly that question through MInT-athon 2025-2026: AI for Safe and Sustainable Mobility.

What began as a hackathon evolved into something much larger: a structured innovation journey designed to take promising ideas from problem identification to solution development, prototyping and real-world demonstration.

Across two dedicated tracks—Students & Industry Professionals and Startups—MInT-athon brought together a diverse community of innovators working on some of the most pressing challenges in mobility.

And perhaps the most important outcome was not simply the number of ideas submitted or prototypes developed. It was seeing what happens when the right ecosystem is created around an idea.

Beyond the Hackathon: Designing an Innovation Journey

Hackathons are often associated with a short burst of activity: teams come together, build something over a limited period, pitch their ideas and the event concludes.

We wanted to approach MInT-athon differently.

Mobility challenges are rarely solved in a weekend. They involve complex systems, multiple stakeholders, physical infrastructure, behavioural patterns, regulations, data, technology and, ultimately, people.

A promising idea therefore needs more than a stage. It needs time, mentorship, resources, evaluation, iteration and access to an ecosystem.

MInT-athon was designed around this philosophy.

Instead of treating the hackathon as a single event, we treated it as a journey.

Ideas were evaluated at multiple stages. Shortlisted teams were given opportunities to refine their solutions, demonstrate progress, build prototypes and respond to feedback. The process allowed the teams to move from “This could work” to “Here is what we have built.”

That shift—from concept to evidence—is where innovation starts becoming tangible.

Two Tracks, One Shared Ambition

Students & Industry Professionals: Creating Space for New Ideas

The Students & Industry Professionals track invited participants from across the country to address challenges related to AI, safety, sustainability, accessibility, traffic management, emissions and mobility optimisation.

The response demonstrated the depth of interest in solving mobility challenges through technology, with more than 270 proposals received.

Following multiple rounds of evaluation, promising teams progressed through the programme. The journey eventually led to a prototype showcase at IIT Madras, where selected teams demonstrated the solutions they had developed.

The process was intentionally designed to ask increasingly difficult questions at every stage: Is the problem relevant? Does the proposed solution address it meaningfully? Is it technically feasible? What has actually been built? What has changed since the previous evaluation? Can the solution move beyond a prototype?

These questions helped shift the focus from presentation quality to progress, feasibility and potential impact.

The Students & Industry Professionals track was supported by Bosch India Foundation, whose support helped create the platform for teams to develop their ideas further.

Startups: Moving from Innovation to Scale

The Startup track approached the same ambition from a different angle.

Startups already operate in an environment where solutions must respond to users, markets, partnerships, technology and scalability.

The programme therefore looked beyond the idea itself.

The evaluation considered factors such as problem relevance, proposed solution, impact, target users, technical feasibility, partnerships, business model and scalability.

From the proposals received, selected startups progressed into the prototype phase, with finalists eventually developing solutions for further demonstration.

The Startup track was supported by the Airawat Research Foundation, enabling promising mobility-focused startups to receive support as they developed and advanced their solutions.

This created an important bridge between innovation and implementation.

Because a mobility solution does not create impact simply because it is technically impressive. It creates impact when someone can use it, adopt it, integrate it, scale it and sustain it.

What We Learnt Along the Way

1. Good ideas need an ecosystem, not just a competition.

Innovation rarely follows a straight line. An idea may look compelling during a pitch and encounter unexpected technical, operational or user challenges during development.

Creating multiple evaluation and feedback stages gives teams the opportunity to learn and adapt.

The role of an innovation programme, therefore, is not simply to identify winners. It is to create the conditions in which promising ideas can become stronger.

2. Prototyping changes the conversation.

There is a significant difference between explaining what a solution could do and demonstrating what it does.

Once teams began developing prototypes, conversations became more concrete.

Instead of asking only, “Is this a good idea?” we could ask: “Does it work?”, “For whom?”, “Under what conditions?”, “What data does it require?”, “Can it integrate with existing systems?”, and “What would it take to deploy this in the real world?”

That transition is one of the most important steps in turning innovation into implementation.

3. Mobility innovation must be interdisciplinary.

The mobility ecosystem does not belong to one discipline. It brings together transportation planning, artificial intelligence, data science, engineering, public policy, infrastructure, sustainability, urban planning, behavioural science and business.

The diversity of MInT-athon participants reinforced this reality.

A technically strong solution still needs to understand the city in which it will operate. A commercially viable product still needs to solve a genuine mobility problem. And a promising AI application still needs the right data, infrastructure and institutional ecosystem around it.

The best mobility innovations emerge at these intersections.

4. Industry and institutional participation can accelerate the journey.

For emerging innovators, access to an ecosystem can be as important as access to funding.

Engagement with industry, academia, institutions and domain experts allows teams to understand constraints that may not be visible from outside the system.

This is where collaborative programmes can create value beyond the competition itself.

The objective is not simply to build more solutions. It is to build solutions that have a pathway to relevance.

From Competition to Community

One of the most encouraging aspects of MInT-ATHON was the community that developed around the programme.

Teams that initially entered as participants became part of a larger mobility innovation ecosystem.

Industry partners contributed perspectives and support. Academic and domain experts brought knowledge and critical feedback. The MInT Collaborative provided the programme structure, coordination and platform for these interactions.

And the teams themselves brought something that every innovation ecosystem needs: the willingness to experiment.

That is perhaps the real value of programmes like MInT-ATHON. They create a space where a student with an idea, an industry professional with a problem statement and a startup with a deployable technology can enter the same ecosystem and begin a conversation.

From Prototype to Possibility

The culmination of the Students & Industry Professionals track at the MInT Mobility Summit 2026 provided an opportunity for selected teams to showcase their solutions to a wider ecosystem of mobility stakeholders.

But the showcase was not an endpoint. It represented another transition: from building to demonstrating, and from demonstrating to exploring what comes next.

For us, this is an important distinction.

A hackathon can end when the judging ends. An innovation programme should not.

The real question after a prototype is: Where can this go next?

Can it be piloted? Can it be integrated with existing infrastructure? Can it find the right institutional partner? Can it be tested with users? Can it become a product? Can it contribute to a larger public mobility infrastructure?

These are the questions that determine whether an innovation remains an interesting prototype or becomes part of a real mobility solution.

Building the Future of Mobility, Together

MInT-athon has reinforced a belief at the heart of the MInT Collaborative: India does not lack ideas. What we need are stronger pathways for ideas to become impact.

Those pathways require collaboration.

They require academia and industry to work together. They require startups and institutions to understand each other's realities. They require young innovators to have access to mentors, data, technology and opportunities to test their ideas. And they require programmes that are willing to stay with an idea long enough to see whether it can move beyond the pitch.

MInT-athon was our attempt to build one such pathway.

The journey—from hundreds of ideas to shortlisted concepts, from concepts to prototypes, and from prototypes towards real-world possibilities—has been a reminder that innovation is not a single moment.

It is a process.

And when that process is supported by the right people, institutions and ecosystem, an idea can travel much further than its creator initially imagined.

The next chapter is not about asking, “Who won the MInT-athon?” It is about asking: “Which of these ideas can help us build safer, more sustainable, accessible and intelligent mobility systems—and what will it take to get them there?”

That is the journey we hope MInT-athon has begun.

And it is a journey that will require all of us to move together.