

CRISIS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND OUR CONCERN

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Palanquin, horse, hand-pull rickshaw, paddle rickshaw, tram, bus, auto-rickshaw, and finally today's pollution controlled Bharat Stage (BS) - III-IV bus ----- more or less this is the evolution of passenger transport of Kolkata. Transport demand in most of the Indian cities has increased substantially during last few decades due to increase in population (natural increase and migration from rural areas and smaller towns). Availability of motorized transport, increase in household income, and increase in commercial and industrial activities has further added to it. Unfortunately, public transport systems in Indian cities have not been able to keep pace with the rapid and substantial increase in travel demand. Rail based public transport services and well-organized bus transport services are limited to few big cities only. Qualitatively, the available public transport services are overcrowded particularly during peak hours and involve long waiting periods. As a result, there is a massive shift towards personalized transport, specially cars and two-wheelers, and also proliferation of various types of intermediate public transport modes, such as auto-rickshaws and taxis.

For the last 66 years the passenger transport scenario of India has changed a lot. And in the last 10 year's development may be termed as unprecedented. In independent India we have not witnessed any significant development in

the field of passenger transport infrastructure especially in road transport. Particularly due to the absence of good quality roads through out the country there has been a little scope for better passenger transport (specially by road). Like poverty eradication and employment generation, no special attention has been given on passenger transport also after independence by the government of India.



As the state of West Bengal is not an independent country, therefore, there must be and should be a reflection of central policies in this state. It is the responsibility of government of India to shoulder the major financial burden for the infrastructure development of passenger transport through out the country. It is the government that is solely responsible for development of highways (national and state) as well as the price for automobile ancillaries. Nobody can deny the fact that due to under developed road transport infrastructure we have suffered a lot in the field of socio-economic

development of rural India. And un-controlled population growth is creating additional threat.



As already said, West Bengal is facing the problem with same gravity. Especially in a metropolitan city like Kolkata the demand for passenger transport is accelerating day by day. But in today's scenario it is not sufficient to solve the problem on adhoc basis. It will be wise to take a long-term concrete plan regarding the issue at the earliest possible. Passenger shared by various mode of transport in Kolkata:

Mode of Transport	Passenger carry / day (lakh)
Auto Rickshaw	31.50
Suburban Rail	33.90
Metro Railway	4.5
Circular Railway	0.026
State Transport Corpn.	15.6
Taxi	14.7
Private Bus	42.8

Source: Times of India

It is reality that Kolkata is having the lowest percentage of road space (6%) available among all the metropolitan cities in India. The average speed of vehicles in Kolkata is 10-11 kmph. Whereas in Delhi the road space is 14% of total land. So the cost of transport and

vehicular emission is higher in Kolkata against other metropolitan cities. There has been a success by making unidirectional flow of traffic up to a certain level in Kolkata. But we have to think for multi-stage fly-overs to solve the problem for another 50 years or so.

The advent of new technology for vehicular pollution control has put a new threat to the passenger transport industry because the price of vehicle is jumping day-by-day. It is true that auto-emission cause a lot to human health, but in today's world we are not in a position to solve all the human-generated



problem with the available tools. Enforcing law can be a solution for this, but actual solution lies with the proper education of our society. This is also true that proper implementation of rules depends much on the availability of proper infrastructure. To cite an example - it is an offence to generate sound level beyond 65 decibels. But people of localities around Dum Dum airport and the staff of airport have and will have to bear the sound level beyond the prescribed limit. We are not seeing any effort or any technology to minimise this discordant noise in near future. Therefore we are unknowingly considering the reality even while

enforcing the law.

BS-II and BS-III norms, formed by government of India, are giving the automobile industry a new threat. In a developing country like India we do not need and cannot afford to run all the vehicles through out the country



with BS-II or BS-III complied engines. Even there is no infrastructure through out the country to supply the special quality fuel, which is required to run these engines. Despite automobile manufacturers has stopped the production of non-BS complied engines for their own interest. Therefore common people of rural India are being forced to bear the additional cost of these engines unnecessarily.

Apart from the technological as well as the issues related to law we the Kolkatans are being victimised of another problem, which is competition among bus drivers. Darwin's theory is being implemented on roads and especially in the peak hours. The one and only one aim is to get passengers of other buses. If people of both India and Pakistan take decision not to war against each other then both the countries will benefit. Because both the countries will be able to reduce the defence expenditure significantly. But most probably

we will never understand this or we will never be allowed to do so. Similarly, the bus crews are not being convinced that the total number of passenger is a fixed quantity. We cannot increase the total number only by speedy driving. Actually by doing so bus owners are losing a lot, because technologically optimisation of fuel consumption does when we run the vehicle at a certain speed and at a certain gear position.



Bus or auto rickshaw? Actually both of these have merits and demerits. In today's world only capital intensive industries are coming up, only exception is the rapidly increasing transport and tourism industry. A single bus can generate 5 to 6 direct employment, whereas auto rickshaws carrying the same number of passengers of a bus can generate 25 to 30 direct employments. Now we may draw the main problem. We can think of a situation where there will be no bus, only auto rickshaws will ply all over the city or vice-versa. Hope any body can understand the impossibility of both the situation. Therefore, it may be assumed that we understand the necessity of having both the options. And by

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and large the government is trying to maintain this balance. But time has come to concentrate on this balance issue very seriously. We should not allow auto rickshaws in those roads where there is a bus in every minute. By allowing this we are neglecting passenger safety as well. As scientifically 3 wheeler vehicles are less balanced than a 4-wheeler vehicle, so we should not allow both type of vehicles to run side by side in the same lane. Particularly in Kolkata's scenario, because of its scarcity of road space, we should avoid auto rickshaws which occupies more road space compared to bus for the same number of passengers, through the main roads.



The time has indeed come to plan rail based mass transport system in all the cities having population more than 2 million. However, considering the financial health of various levels of governments (central, state, and local governments) and investment requirement to introduce and improve rail based public transport system, it is evident that bus transport will have to play a major role in providing passenger transport services in all million plus cities. Therefore, urban transport plans should specially emphasize on bus transport system.

The traffic character of Kolkata is highly complex in nature, which has a multimodal bus transport system of both public as well as private sectors. In this context, it is highly desirable to have a bus transportation system at an affordable cost with reasonable comfort, safety and frequency and high degree of connectivity. A casual planning of mass transport modes will have multifold effect on various factors, which cause enormous damages to the society, which sometimes could be estimated in terms of money as the number of people concerned, is very high. While STUs in other states and cities are maintaining a viable operational management in running STUs buses (like BMTC in Bangaluru, BEST Bus in Mumbai etc), it is the duty of the state government to formulate master plan for the renovation of all the STUs as a practicable and viable alternative. At last, a detailed feasibility study is needed in terms of reorganization and integration of transport systems as highlighted for achieving a sustainable transport system in West Bengal and especially in Kolkata.