

A Comparison of the Characteristics of Urban and Rural Bus Transport in Sri Lanka – A Case Study

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Abstract: The public bus transport systems in most developing countries are not at a satisfactory level especially from the passenger point of view. Overloading at peak hours, waiting and travel time delay during the off peak, anti-social behaviour of bus crews, unacceptable noise levels, inadequate and unacceptable user comfort, lack of user rights, lack of night services and of non profitable routes are few of the major issues in the public bus transport system in Sri Lanka as well. There are a number of reasons for this situation. One of the main reasons is the lack of management of the demand and provision of adequate supply of public bus transport that satisfied both the user and operator simultaneously. Inability to understand the qualitative parameters of the transport supply demanded leads to poor response to this situation by both passengers and their communities as well as policy agencies. These parameters differ contextually. For example the requirements of typical urban passengers differ from those of rural passengers.

This paper analyses the results of a case study which compares the inherited problems in a bus transport system under typical urban and rural situations. The user response by interviews, bus loading and travel time surveys, from each of these locations has been analysed to understand and compare the problems in each situation. The analysis also shows a significant difference in supply and demand characteristics of the bus transport system between urban and rural areas in Sri Lanka. The research paper also discusses the need for passenger empowerment as one of the interventions needed to mitigate the present problems in Sri Lanka's public bus transport system.

Keywords: Urban and Rural Bus Transport, Demand and Supply Management, Passenger empowerment