



Intracity conventional buses



Jakarta, Indonesia
Photo: Ko Sakamoto

Conventional buses explained

Traditionally bus services have been provided by the public sector. However, numerous private bus operators have appeared in cities in developing countries often operating on routes duplicating public sector routes, using small vehicles and refusing to carry exempt or reduced fare passengers.

Performance, evaluated

Capacity	Low to high (from up to 1,000 people to beyond 10,000 people per direction per hour), Overall capacity depends on operating patterns.
Geographical range	Medium (up to 20 km)
Implementing cost	Low (up to US\$100,000 per km excluding cost of road building)
Payback period	Low (within 5 years)
Applicable city size ¹	Small, medium and large (from 500,000 to more than 5 million inhabitants)
Applicable stage of development	Least developed, developing and developed countries
Examples	Bus franchising in Hong Kong, China ² and Santiago, Chile ³

Strengths of conventional buses

- **Flexible:** Compared with fixed-track systems, such as the LRT and MRT, bus routes can be redesigned relatively easily to adapt to new patterns of demand.
- **Accessible:** Services are generally cheap and thus accessible to poorer urban residents.
- **Supports other public transport modes:** If integrated effectively, bus services can provide a valuable feeder service to other modes of public transport, such as light and heavy rail and waterborne modes.

¹ Note that there is no standard definition of small, medium and large sized cities. In this study, thresholds used in Asian Development Bank (2008), *Managing Asian Cities* are simplified into three categories. The ADB study is available from www.adb.org/Documents/Studies/Managing-Asian-Cities/mac-report.pdf (accessed 22 January 2012).

² Richard Meakin, *Sourcebook Module 3c: Bus Regulation and Planning* (Eschborn, GIZ, 2004b).

³ Ken Gwilliam, "Bus franchising in developing countries: Some recent World Bank experience", PowerPoint presentation, 2005. Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTURBANTRANSPORT/Resources/340136-1120662668760/gwilliam.pdf> (accessed on 16 November 2011).

Challenges to using bus rapid transit

- In some countries, bus service is largely provided by private bus operators without coordinating with other modes of transport and outside the control of the local authorities. These operators are often informal in nature and undermine the quality of bus services (reliability, punctuality, comfort) as well as road safety (due to lack of driver training) and air quality (due to lack of vehicle maintenance and renewal). This practice has endured for decades due to:
 - Lack of political commitment for full regulatory reform
 - Lack of government subsidies required for state-owned operations that operate at a loss⁴
 - Lack of financial incentives to improve vehicle quality
 - Fragmented ownership, which is common because no one operator has responsibility for the effective operation of a route

Limitations

Heavy congestion in many developing cities has a negative impact on service quality, reliability, energy consumption, economy and overall profitability.

Implementing strategies

Improving the quality of bus services is important to attract more people. The government's role is critical for establishing a framework in which public and private players contribute in a more effective way to a sustainable urban transport system. Such a framework should include the following strategic elements:

- **An administrative body** (such as local transport authority) to manage the urban transport network, planning routes, and fare structures for bus services in close coordination with other modes (such as LRT and MRT).
- **An appropriate regulatory arrangement for operators**, such as franchises for securing service on key routes that are issued through competitive tendering.⁵
- **Vigilant regulation of the performance of private operators**, including service frequency, safety, vehicle environmental performance and punctuality, possibly through performance-based contracts.
- **Carefully planned subsidies**, so that they are targeted specifically at disadvantaged groups (such as through discounted travel cards) as opposed to a more generic subsidy for the whole sector.

Further reading

Bus Franchising in Developing Countries: Some Recent World Bank Experiences, by G. William (Washington, D.C., 2005).

Sourcebook Module 3c: Bus Regulation and Planning, by R. Meakin (Eschborn, GTZ (GIZ), 2004).

⁴ Richard Meakin, *Sourcebook Module 3c: Bus Regulation and Planning* (Eschborn, GIZ, 2004b).

⁵ Ken Gwilliam, "Bus franchising in developing countries: Some recent World Bank experience", PowerPoint presentation, 2005. Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTURBANTRANSPORT/Resources/340136-1120662668760/gwilliam.pdf> (accessed on 16 November 2011).