



## Public transportation : a policy perspective on how public is it in an urban context.

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### Abstract

The understanding of various nuances related to urban transportation system leads to better management of the urban development process itself. In India, the issue received a serious attention as a policy perspective only in 2006 with declaration of the National Urban Transport Policy and subsequent initiatives including that of Twelve Five Years Plan and declaration of National Urban Transport Policy again in 2014 have a focus on the issues of lack of Constitutional and institutional authoritative measures for urban issues. The present paper brings to light policy perspectives and mechanisms of bus transportation in the city of Guwahati within a long span. A connected issue of road infrastructure also has been highlighted. It is an investigation of the ground realities, where the question is raised about how public the whole pattern of transportation is. It reveals in what ways the system in the city departs from the promoted and state sponsored moves and has grown on its own. The paper is a statement on one of the issues of urban development pattern in the developing societies.

**Keywords:** association, mobility, management, private, routes, traffic.

### 1. Introduction

Public transportation system is an essential component of the infrastructural aspects of the urban development process. In fact, there is an intimate relationship between the expansion of city and its transportation system. The connection between the urban land use and urban transportation is symbolic with one being as much the cause as the effect of the other (Bola, 1986). It is a matter of simple urban analysis that transportation system in a city contributes towards its role in economic growth, socio-cultural mobility, environmental issues and sustainable urban development, quality of traffic and public security and many others. An analysis of the urban transport policy in India highlights the nature and extent of public management and control. The urbanization process in India is growing rapidly. The decadal growth rate of

total, urban and rural population in the 2001 census are 21.54%, 31.2% and 17.9% respectively which ascended to 17.64%, 31.80% and 12.18% respectively in 2011 (Census, 2001 and 2011). However, provisioning of urban services has not kept pace of urbanization leading to a situation of chaos and gridlock in most of the cities and also in many of smaller cities and towns. Tackling this huge challenge would require massive investment in urban areas both for clearing the backlog as well as for newly urbanized areas. Two recent independent study reports, one each by McKinsey Global Institute and the 'High powered expert committee' commissioned by Ministry of Urban Development Government of India have projected that Mass rapid transit services and roads which are the main infrastructure for urban transport, together require nearly more than 50% of the projected

investment for urban services including housing in cities in India . It is more than Rs one lac crore per year for the next 20 years for urban transport (Planning Commission Report, 2012).

National Urban Transport Policy, 2006, seeks to promote greater use of public transport through various measures. To encourage public transport, the government has taken up various projects such as financing of buses and Bus Rapid Transit Systems under Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, preparation of Urban Bus Specifications to promote use of comfortable buses equipped with latest Intelligent Transport System and technology, encouraging reforms in urban transport administration and management at both city and state level by requiring setting up of Urban Metropolitan Transport Authority , Urban Transport Fund etc., organizing annual conference and exhibition on urban transport for knowledge sharing amongst experts and stakeholders, and recognizing the exemplary achievements in the field of urban transport through awards.

The National Urban Transport Policy, 2014 reasserts the fact that the growth of transport not only increases pressure on the limited non-renewable energy resources and increase in foreign exchange outgo but also considerably increases environmental pollution. Increasing car dependence in India especially in the urban areas is most visible at the local level – vehicular emissions causing air pollution, noise pollution, and corresponding health effects. Increasing energy consumption, operational pollution, land intrusion and congestion are some of the areas of concern. Therefore the policy aims at increasing the use of green energy sources, energy efficiency and environmental protection.

It is evident that the policy perspectives are based on high idealism to integrate all related issues: land use and transport integration at the stage of master planning , road network, environment protection, service to the public through proper management and coordination of public transport operating system so on and so forth. The policy perspectives are very comprehensive and take into account the fact that urban transport sector needs serious attention . On this backdrop , the paper makes an attempt to reveal the reality where neither public nor private spirit of management exist.

## 2. Objectives

The present study aims to :

- Study the nature of city bus transportation in Guwahati
- Assess the presence of public authority in transportation in the city
- Different problems associated with the management system
- Suggest strategies for planning purpose.

## 3. Methodology

In a situation where, the growth of the city is fast but the management system lags behind, a descriptive mode of revealing the picture has been considered necessary. The study has been carried out systematically on the basis of both secondary and primary data collected from various sources. Secondary data have been collected from sources such like books, journals, articles, reports and internet. Information and data so collected have been processed and analyzed in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions. The primary data have been collected from interview sessions with bus owners associations and concerned authorities. Specific cases have been investigated on the basis of information on harassments of public.

## 4. An idea of realism

The spatial growth of Guwahati city has been accompanied by growth of population. This in turn has contributed towards the continuous growth of the city revealed through the high density of population and magnitude of function. Guwahati is the largest city in the North Eastern Region and enjoys a prime status with broad population base in relation to the other centres of the region. The rapid population growth indicates increased functional efficiency of the city. At the same time demographic attributes in a development process influences the urban condition including the infrastructural facilities to a great extent.

### 4.1 Population dynamics

The census data shows that the population increased from 43,615 in 1951 to 5,84,342 in 1991. The decadal growth rate of population was 188.25% in 1991. The population of Guwahati accounted for 23.3% of the total urban population of Assam. However, there was speculation about under-enumeration of the number of population in the Guwahati Municipal Corporation area. The floating population in the city was more than a lakh every day. The population for the Guwahati Master Plan area for the year 2001 was projected as 10,67,400. However

at the expert level it was estimated that the number of population in greater Guwahati was more than 10 lakh in 1994. Development management policy was logically confronted with such volume of population. The continuous increase of population because of the natural increase is a common phenomenon. But in the case of Guwahati the influx of population from within and outside the state is a major factor of explosion of urban population. Un-official projection of population of Guwahati in the end of the century was 20 lakhs. The growth rate of the population for the period 1991-2001 was 3.32 percent per year and the decadal growth rate of population for this period was 38.24 percent. As per the recent census report of 2011 the decadal growth rate is 27.61. The urban population within the Guwahati Metropolitan Area in 2011 is 968,549 (Census, 2011).

#### 4.2 Historicity of the situation

In Guwahati the transportation system has played a major role in determining the spatial patterns of urban activities; the urban morphology, particularly the settlement pattern; and the price of land in the city. This paper concentrates on the role of a major mode of the urban transportation system in Guwahati, the city bus services. This transportation system for the public in the city is the most prominent service sector run by private ownership. In fact the provisions for public transportation system through buses in Guwahati reflect the general tendency of the Assamese people to take initiative in transportation activities as one of the cardinal urban infrastructural arrangements particularly since the independence. In an ever expanding urban situation like Guwahati this service sector is playing a major role running on the profit making basis. The government has never withdrawn its presence from the scenario, the Assam State Transport Corporation under its city service scheme has undertaken bus services both within and outside the city. However it enjoys a secondary position as private ownership is playing a major role in connecting the various areas of the city, including the sub-urban area.

Up to the period 1961-62 the sole bus route within the city covered a distance of only 8 km. The route connected the old section of the present Guwahati – from Silpukhuri to Bharalumukh. Since then a new route was advented from Paltanbazar to Khanapara, on the southern part of the city. The Guwahati Transport Association (GTA) established in 1962 was the initial organized move to direct and manage the

city bus service by private entrepreneurship. The Association combined these two routes and with a total number of 150 buses was regularly running the city transportation service. In 1975 the Khanapara route on the south and in 1984 the Pandu-Noonmati road on the east – west route were nationalized. The Assam State Corporation with 64 number of buses operated the service on the nationalized roads. During that period the service was not extended to suburban areas and the number of buses was not sufficient for the ever growing population. As the bus service is the only organized sector of passenger road transport in the city, the demand was made for expansion of the service to newly developed areas. In 1988 the Government of Assam decided to issue city bus permits to the non-governmental sector and introduced mini city bus service in almost all the major roads of greater Guwahati. Since then the public transportations has been a major business activity in the city run by associations.

#### 5. Management and coordination

All the private bus operators within the greater Guwahati area are organized into bus syndicates. These syndicates are associations of bus owners entrusted with the duty of organizing the service and looking after the interests of the operators. They serve the purpose of the common platforms for the bus operators. The transport associations in the city acting as agencies of urban infrastructure supervise the services through formulation of code of conduct. There are enforcement wings of these associations which are units of control at the operational level. Three associations are working in the city with the purpose of providing city bus service to the people. The city bus service caters to the all major roads of the city within and outside the municipal boundary.

Since 1989 the mini buses have overwhelmingly grown as the means of city transportation. The fare structure was determined in 1988. Since then the associations are facing consumer resistance in respect of raising the bus fare. It was learnt during field investigation that the bus operators have to face many difficulties in running the service because of narrow roads. The road conditions are not suitable for speedy public commutation and at peak hours the large number of buses creates great problems of congestion on the major roads. However the city bus service meets the demand of commuting people to a great extent. The services cover a route of 45 km. in a trip and with the expansion of the city domain it is gradually

increasing. As the buses owned by Assam Transport Corporation do not cover the entire length of G.M.A, the private service caters to the need of people in an extensive way within the city and its peripheral areas. The public transport system in the city has some organizational problems too. As regards the city buses, there are seven organizations, including the ASTC, which are functioning independent of one another. Initially a number of organizations were formed to manage the running of the city bus service. But in course of time a unified action was taken and the United Motor Transport Association (GGUMTA) and Greater Guwahati Motor Bus Owners Association (GGMBOA) was formed. In Dec, 2005, Central Government has formally launched JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) in 63 cities in the country. Under this scheme Guwahati city was also facilitated with low-fare hi-tech buses for improving urban transportation.

The Government Regional Transport Authority and the District Transport Office retain the power to control and co-ordinate various aspects of bus management. The authority has to give fitness certificate to the buses (DTO, 2014). However, little investigation is made regarding conditions of buses. No concrete and remedial steps have been taken by the govt. or the district authority to solve the problems of public and the owners in the management of the service. In the absence of a well-laid out transport policy for the city, problems arise in the issues like parking of vehicles, issue of ticket, seat capacity, route determinations, over-speeding etc.

## 6. Apathetical situation

The district authorities from time to time take limited initiatives to have a realistic view of the situation. However the curative measures are found scanty in their reports. The authority seizes city buses on various grounds. The reasons vary from vehicles being unfit to be driven to lack of proper disaster management aids. Sometimes drivers are without valid driving licenses. Besides, cases have been registered against some city buses for not having proper documentation .Kamrup (Metro) district transport officer (registration and licensing) reveals this. The district transport office (DTO) of Kamrup (Metro) also launches operations against city buses that violate safety rules and other traffic guidelines. City buses that were not following the norms are in large numbers. Dearth of qualified professional drivers has been posing a serious problem for operating the Guwahati

city buses. Therefore, the Transport Department is now trying to fully activate the Betkuchi Driver and Conductor Training School, which is expected to be operative on a regular basis, sources said. The city has around 1,200 privately operated city buses. The Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) operates around 250 city buses in Guwahati, including the ones the city has received from the Central Government under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewable Mission (JNNURM).

About 3 lakh Guwahatians use city buses to travel to various destinations every day. About 2 lakh of them travel by the city buses during the peak hours—that is, between 8-30 am and 10-30am and 3 pm and 6 pm. Going by this estimate, Guwahati needs around 5,700 city buses, each carrying 35 passengers. For that the capacity of the city roads is to be assessed. As regards the auto-rickshaws operating in the city, five organizations are working independently in the city, while there are three trekker owners' organizations, they are operating without monitoring the operation of the services of the vehicles they are supposed to regulate. All these have led to a free-for-all situation concerning the public transport system of the city.

The plight of the passengers is affected by so many negative syndromes. They don't believe in the DTO and police action. They fear that here is a nexus between the authorities and the bus associations, which has given rise to many problems of disorganization. It is evident that no one is bothered about the public. City buses here never give tickets to passengers. They don't reserve seats for senior citizens, the staff do not wear uniforms and moreover they misbehave with passengers.

## 7. Road system

During the British period the road system in the city was developed only in the present old and central areas of the city. Since then various phases of city development contributed towards development of roads in accordance with situational demands. The shifting of capital put great pressure on the system as it was not at all adequate for increased number of population and vehicular traffic. The immediate requirement was to formulate a co-ordinated road development plan in conformity with the pattern of traffic movement and circulation pattern. As a result the problem of traffic congestion was accentuated through the years.

Mobility in the city is maintained by ten major roads – namely, A.T. Road, G.S. Road, R. G. Baruah



Road, (Zoo Road), N.H. 37 and N.H. 37 Bypass, N.H. 31., M.G. Road (River side up to Uzan bazaar), G.N.B. Road (leading to Noonmati), Zoo – Narengi Road, VIP road, Fatasil and Lokhra Road, Barasapara and Panzabari Road, Kahilipara road, Hatigaon road and Beltola Basistharoad. The total number of roads, streets and byelanes in the city in 1994 was 305 and 120 roads served as major link roads (GMDA, 1995). Under Guwahati Municipal Corporation there is much increase in the total length of the road but there is little increase in the total length of surfaced roads under the corporation.

Within the administrative boundary of Guwahati Kamrup (Metro) District, the Public Works Department (PWD), Govt. of Assam, provide 360.90 K.M. of surfaced road. P.W.D., Assam is entrusted with the construction and maintenance of most of the major roads such as G.N.B. Roads, G.S. Road, R.G.B. Road, A. T. Road, Kahilipara Road and road from Ganeshguri Police Point to Khanapara. These major roads connect the important work centres and the major traffic modes in the city. 'The Guwahati City Division 1 and 11 of the P.W.D. Roads' within the administrative hierarchy of the P.W.D. is responsible for provision and maintenance of these major roads. The city Division 1 covers G.N.B. Road, G.S. Road, A.T. Road, Kahilipara Road. The "Flyover construction Project Division" is in charge of the Chandmari Flyover upto Zoo Narengi tinali. The Division executed several schemes of road development. However, the lack of continuity of grant left scheme executions partial. Nonpayment of bills for road construction and development works amounted to crores. During 1988-90 development works of major roads were undertaken. The city wore a new look with the flyover and three number of four lane divided roads, namely – R.G. Baruah Road, G.S. Road and Zoo-Narengi Road (PWD, 2014).

The Guwahati Municipal Corporation from time to time handovers certain roads under it to the P.W.D. During 1989-95, 176 roads were transferred to the P.W.D. due to its scarcity of funds. Flood damage repair of roads and drains is a major preoccupation of G.M.C. The other participants in the road development and maintenance are the North Eastern Council (Highway), the Railway Authority (railway campus), the Oil Refinery Authority (Refinery Campus), Army Authority (Cantonment areas); such authorities within their functional jurisdiction provide much developed road service in comparison to the other parts.

Road system in the city suffers from certain

deficiencies. In the absence of a well laid out Road Development Policy, there is lack of uniformity of roads in old and new areas. As pointed out by the T&CP, the city and the various residential localities have their own separate road pattern unrelated to each other. The survey made by an order of the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority revealed that around 53% of road network has right of way between 20m to 30m. Around 39% roads had right of way more than 40m while the rest 8% of the road network in the city had right of way less than 20m. Divided carriage way is observed only on 4 major roads. The only east-west corridor of the city comply show the worst consequences of haphazard growth of shops and houses along a major road. The road, named as GNB Road towards the eastern side gained importance in a phased manner along with the process of city's growth particularly since 1960s. The peak hour traffic volume is maximum on most of the important roads. They remain congested in most of the time, but the scope for widening the roads is limited due to the nature of development on both sides of the roads. The congested Intersections of busy areas, narrow and weak wooden bridges along certain important roads, narrow bye lanes, encroachment for commercial purposes are major problems of the road net work in the city. The problem also arises because of the fact of multiple authorities involved in road development.

Two important issues were observed during the field investigation which largely hampers the road development in the city. One, lack of co-ordination between the road development agencies and the Telecom Department function in an area, the Telecom Department starts digging up the road to play telephone cables. The Telecom Department obtains prior permission from the PWD for digging up the roads to lay or repair telephone cables and provide funds to the PWD to complete restoration work of the roads. It becomes the responsibility of the PWD to restore the roads to its original shape. PWD do not undertake restoration work in time, thereby putting the pedestrians and motorists to a great deal of hardship. The Proper investigation is needed into whither the funds have been actually utilized for restoration work or spent for some other purposes. The dug-up roads lying unattended are a common sight in the city.

## 7. Conclusion

Most of the issues of urban development in developing societies suffer from some inherent problems. Urban unpreparedness, multiple authorities

and rules, policy perspectives on western concepts, lack of commitments to follow rules and regulations and above all non implementation of urban policies are some of the negative syndromes of urban development management process in the developing societies. The present study reveals that the concept of urban development is intricately related to manifold dimensions of optimizing opportunities and the mode of sustaining challenges in the context of a city. Human factor of motivation and effort, technical factor of knowledge, political factor of leadership and affordability are essential elements of such a process. In ultimate analysis the management of the

development process of the city determines its efficacy and sustainability. The reality has been analysed in the context of Guwahati city as that, the provision for city buses was made from very early stage and that too by private sector. Government sector had its presence as a limited provider and as an ultimate controlling authority. National, state and local level participation is not only partial but also haphazard. Structural policies for many related issues, as discussed above and coordination among them is highly necessary. Micro level initiatives to address the problems can be taken in some specific situations and for this an urban vision in the present context is the need of the hour.

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