

Chapter 73

The Challenge of Achieving Sustainable Mobility in the Cities of South Asia

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ABSTRACT

The world's countries have committed to assure by 2030 reliable mobility to all, even in the largest cities. Review of experience of three fastest-growing cities in South Asian countries underlines reforms that will need to be applied very widely: more private-vehicle restrictions in dense zones, and reservation of some road-lanes for bus use; rapid expansion of metro/bus systems, with service franchises subject to periodic open competition; integration of land-use and transport planning, at street and city level; active collaboration of the planners with developers and builders; activation of competitive building of affordable housing; radical improvement of land market functioning; modernization of traditional building-height restrictions to encourage greater variation, against appropriate payment to the state; increased provision and maintenance of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety; and consideration of tolling use of private vehicles for journeys that would otherwise be undertaken by mass transit.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, at a special three-day Summit Session during the UN General Assembly, the governments of the world gave unanimous and final approval and commitment to a new set of 15-year goals for socio-economic development around the globe 2015-30. The positive results widely attributed to the 5 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that had been agreed in 2000 had stimulated much wider participation in shaping the new goals and a broader coverage – with a shared emphasis on further progress in reducing poverty and on making results in all fields more sustainable. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in New York were 17 in number, with 169 underlying targets.

In the case of urban transport the emphasis on sustainability reflects in part, of course, the serious threat to the world climate from global warming. At the latest UN Conference on Climate Change, in

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5646-6.ch073

December 2015 in Paris (COP21), the validity of not permitting world temperatures to rise more than 2 degrees Centigrade above pre-industrial levels was strongly reaffirmed and all the UN members renewed their individual commitment to these limits and hence to the need to restrain the growth of liquid fuel consumption.

However, the aspects of sustainability which most worry those faced with direct responsibility for managing cities and absorbing the coming large expected additions to their population are the more immediate problems of congestion, air pollution, traffic accidents, health burdens and travel delays that have already become so familiar in the larger cities. 2014 had seen production of a first report (Global Road Safety Facility 2014) examining more fully the health costs of road transport, taking account of air pollution – believed to cause now 800,000 deaths every year – as well as traffic accidents. The annual accident toll, 90% of it now falling on developing countries, is running at about 1,300,000 deaths – a third of them pedestrians – and 50 million life-years lost to injuries.

Aside from the commitments for road safety and for rationalization of fuel subsidies, the SDGs clearly depict a single top-priority objective for the transport sector, provision of access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable urban transport for all by 2030 (target 11.2), a main dimension of the urban goal, No. 11, Making Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable (United Nations 2015). And the statement emphasizes that this objective would be fulfilled notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations: women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

The problems that have arisen are largely phenomena of the last 25 or 30 years. Before that, time had certainly to be allowed for longer travel in the largest cities, but lengthy delays and traffic hold-ups were rare until the late 1990s. Then the situation changed very fast, especially in India and other Asian countries (Pucher et al., 2005). The combination of reasonably strong economic growth through the end of the century, incipient spread of car ownership, introduction of improved and less expensive models of two-wheel vehicles and the start of accelerated urbanization made widespread congestion and travel delays a significant problem by early in the new century.

FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter is to assess experience to date in improving mobility in some of the fastest growing major cities of South Asia to help identify the policies and solutions which may be most promising for the coming period. Populations of the three cities focused, now ranging between 7 and 18 million, have been growing since 2000 at the fast average rate of about 3.5% p.a., exceeded for this period only by six other large cities anywhere in the world – most strikingly Lagos and Kinshasa (about 4% p.a. growth), Beijing and Chengdu in China, Bangalore in India and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2016).

The three cities focused – Ahmedabad and Hyderabad, respectively on the western and eastern sides of India, and Dhaka, capital of neighboring Bangladesh, as shown in the map above – were selected for known interesting aspects of their transport efforts, a fairly high degree of comparability, and reasonable abundance of published information and discussion about their economic and social development. The assessments were based solely on information in the public domain. They attempted to cover briefly all major dimensions and aspects of within-city human mobility, keeping in mind the broader context of social and economic development and aspirations affecting each city. The analytical effort focused on:

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