

First lessons for the second city

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THE significance, importance and consequence of a public transportation system run by a city authority in conjunction with a corresponding national or regional service or single-handedly for carrying passengers in a densely populated city can hardly be over emphasised.

While common carriers (bus, tram and train) that belong to the City can supplement and often substitute the otherwise more mobile contract carriers such as taxi and rickshaws, mass transportation is essentially a result of increased traffic congestion added to lack of parking space for private vehicles as typified by large cities. Since mass transportation attempts to disentangle a complex set of parameters, some even decades old, the resulting system is itself not a straightforward solution, nor inexpensive, and never above controversy.

Understandably the traffic problem in Chittagong is minuscule compared to capital Dhaka's mayhem, but with the port city forever expanding the time is perhaps right to address the issue if only to attempt to tackle a situation before it goes further out of hand and becomes more difficult to manage. All ready the entry to Chittagong City from Dhaka and exit from it is a nightmare even if you are travelling by day.

One of the major concerns for Chittagong (and much more for Dhaka) shall be the ratio of the road-rail system with the area it serves, as the existing network is little more than paltry.

Unlike Chittagong, which is also characterised by undulations, Dhaka is however blessed with a circular waterway; although the effectiveness of the recently

inaugurated service linking Buriganga and Turag is yet to be fully understood or embraced by the commuting public.

Less number of personal vehicles on the road, economic benefits, saving on fuel, greener environment and time saved are all bonuses of effective mass transportation.

In the first part of their article on Urban Mass Transportation for Chittagong

Imon Chowdhoree and Kanu Kumar Das focus on existing road and rail transportation for the city and its satellite towns. The second and concluding part of the article shall be published on 22 April.

Whatever measures Chittagong chooses to adopt lessons from as far flung as New York and as close as Calcutta dictate the incorporation of road and rail systems to cope with the situation in a city that is destined to grow.

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Traffic jam

Urban mass transportation for Chittagong - I

IMON CHOWDHOREE AND KANU KUMAR DAS

CHITTAGONG having the gifts of nature was once called 'the Queen of the Orient'. Moreover, its seaport, because of its geographical location and as the country's busiest, is one of the most important harbours of Asia; and thereby also considered as the soul of our national economy.

Chittagong may be considered as the 'catchment area' for heavy industrial and commercial developments as well as for tourism facilities for a large area covering the Seven Sister Provinces of India, Nepal, Bhutan and China on the Northern and North-eastern parts, and Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore on the South-eastern region.

Considering the regional importance and its growth potentialities, it has become a crying need to provide Chittagong, the commercial capital of Bangladesh, with urban facilities of

international standard and to create the necessary infrastructure. Urban mass transportation is one such service, which deserves optimum attention.

Like other important cities of the developing countries, Chittagong is under considerable pressure from distress migration from the rural areas in its hinterland. To accommodate the increasing population satellite towns have developed at Sitakunda, Hathazari, Fateyabad, Paliya, Boalkhali and elsewhere. At present these are mainly residential developments. Industries have primarily been located in selected zones such as Bhatiyar, Patenga, South Halishahar, Kalurghat and Sitakunda. The central business district (CBD) of Chittagong has remained in its original position.

The huge conglomeration of commercial facilities in the city centre triggers massive flows of traffic. To avoid the gruelling commuting (average may be up to four hours each way) people try to live as close as

possible to their workplaces, defeating the very purpose of the satellite towns which was to reduce the load on the old city centre.

Lack of proper MRT (mass rapid transit) is restricting urban growth in the port city. Additionally, the established developments are facing multiple constraints. As elsewhere in the country, Chittagong's MRT is road-based and is not only facing serious problems but it fails to meet the demand.

Railway tracks also connect central Chittagong with northern and southern parts of the district. The British government took it as a very effective mode of transportation but that too have been almost destroyed. Therefore, the time is ripe to consider rail-based MRT.

Development of railway in Chittagong

The railway service started its journey within the geographic borderline of present Bangladesh from 15 November 1862 with the construction by Eastern Bengal Railway of 53.11km



Chittagong Rail Bhaban

of broad-gauge (5'6" or 1676 mm wide) line between Darsana and Jagti, Kushtia. On 1 July 1895, a 149.80km meter-gauge (3' 33/8" or 1000 mm wide) line between Laksam and Chandpur was opened by Assam Bengal Railway. On 3 November 1895, the Chittagong-to-Chittagong Port line was constructed. In 1929 the Chittagong-Hathazari meter-gauge section, in 1930 the Hathazari-Nazirhat meter-gauge section and in 1931 the Sholasahar-Dohazari section were opened. On 1 Jan. 1942, Assam Bengal Railway was merged with the Eastern Bengal Railway under the name Bengal and Assam Railway. In 1947 Bengal and Assam Railway was split up and the portion within the boundary of former East Pakistan was named as Eastern Bengal Railway, the control remaining with the central government of Pakistan. On 1 February 1961, Eastern Bengal Railway was renamed as Pakistan Eastern Railway and in 1972 it was renamed as Bangladesh Railway.

Terminals

There are three major terminals and a depot within the Chittagong City Corporation area: Kadamtoli Bus Terminal, Rangamati Bus Terminal, Chandgaon Bus Terminal and the BRTC Bus Depot. Kadamtoli Bus Terminal: This terminal is in the heart of the city near New Market. Around 1200 intercity private buses operate through this terminal daily. This terminal causes traffic congestion in the busy city area.

Bus routes From Chittagong City to Feni, Comilla, Noakhali, Sylhet, Moulavibazar, Habiganj, Sunamganj, Laxmipur, Khulna, Jessore, Agartala, Benapole, Chandpur, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Kushtia, Bogra, Rajshahi, Brahmanbaria, Dhaka, Narayanganj, Kishoreganj

Rangamati Bus Terminal: It is near Muradpur, which is a little far from the city's busiest area. Around 250 intercity and inner district private buses operate from here.

Intercity bus route From Chittagong City to Rangamati and Khagrachhari

Inner district bus route From Chittagong City to Raouzan, Fatikchhari, Hathazari

Chandgaon Bus Terminal: It is at Chandgaon, which is also a little far from the city's busiest area. Around 400 intercity and inner district private buses operate from here.

Intercity bus route From Chittagong City to Cox's Bazaar, Bandarban and Kaptai (Rangamati)

Inner district bus route From Chittagong City to Paliya, Dohazari, Satkania, Amonabad, Burkali, Anowara and Chandanaisah

BRTC Bus Depot: It is on the periphery of the City Corporation area near the Chittagong Cantonment Area. In Greater Chittagong there is no BRTC bus service. Various private agencies are giving the service without any coordination among them. According to BRTA about 400 buses, minibuses, maxis and riders operate.

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Performance of service

The amount of roads in Chittagong is only 10% of the total area whereas the requirement is 24%, according to Karim (2005). The entire sector lacks a well thought out plan. There are many deficiencies.

Loading condition: Overloading on buses in the city is a habitual scenario. People always struggle for place on the foothold of buses because the buses generally remain jam-packed during the peak hours.

Ticketing and queuing: Ticketing is responsible for the quality of bus service. In Chittagong, conductors of mass transit modes collect fare from the passengers on board, but they do not issue any ticket against the fare. Queuing for using the bus service is not practised. Normally the tendency of the passengers is to rush in and out of the bus in an undisciplined manner.

Problems identified

The major problems observed are

- (1) Double-decker bus is suitable for mass transportation by road. Nevertheless, in Chittagong instead of double-decker, such kind of buses and other motorised vehicles ply which have maximum capacity from 10 to 45 passengers
- (2) Although more suitable for city service, buses are not designed for standing passengers
- (3) Non-motorised and motorized vehicles as well as intercity and city bus services run on the same road
- (4) Travel time is longer than required because of narrow roads and traffic jam (Image 2) which also contributes to pollution
- (5) As proper queuing system and bus stoppage are absent, using bus transport is risky, especially for children and elderly persons
- (6) Although from October 2003 local bus service on all routes except two (Route 5 and 7) was withdrawn, people are not getting proper service in those so called special seating service buses.

Present condition of Railway and railway services

The contribution of Bangladesh

Railway (BR) to urban public transport is very small. British wisdom had given Chittagong a head start by connecting the city with the northern and southern parts of the city. Nowadays not only in developed countries like England, Germany and Japan but also in many developing SAARC countries like India and Sri Lanka the MRT is rail-based. "But in our country for the will of donor groups and corrupted politicians only the road transportation has been given the most magnitude in our total transportation sector, and rail or nautical transportation has been neglected totally. (Kibria; 2004). Nevertheless, historically rail transportation system generated several developments in Chittagong and the surrounding areas of Sitakunda, Nazirhat, Hathazari, Paliya, Dohazari and so on. The rail tracks and stations still exist today but most of them are out of use now for long or only a few trains run on them.

There is no express train from Sitakunda to Chittagong or from Chittagong to Sitakunda. Some intercity express trains (Sylhet-Chittagong, Chandpu-Chittagong, and Dhaka-Chittagong) stop at Sitakunda station and carry small share of the commuter traffic load.

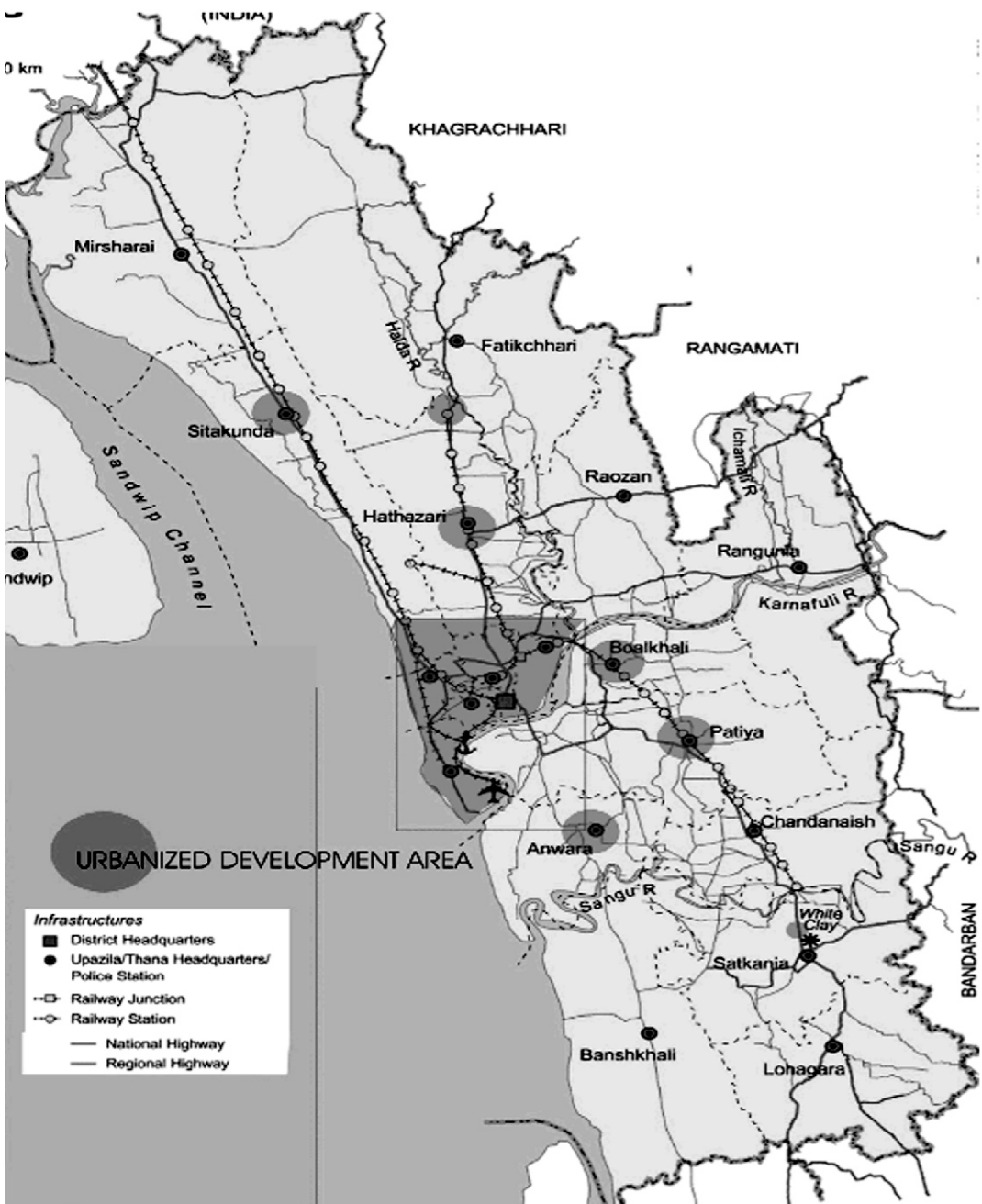
Comments on service:

1. The number and types of trains are reducing year by year
2. Most of the trains never maintain the time schedule whereas legend has it that during the British and the Pakistani periods it was rare for trains not to maintain schedule
3. The rate of unscheduled break of journey has increased because of risky rail line, repair works, signalling problems and careless attitude of staff
4. The timetable is not synchronised to the work time of majority of the people
5. A local train stops at all important, less important, or very unimportant stations, which increase the travel time.
6. On most occasions the trains run at the lowest speed of around 15 km per hour. (Source: Several Station Masters and users by interview)

(Incomplete)

Part 2 of the article shall be published on this page on 22 April 2004

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Chittagong urbanized development
Approximating many other seaports around the world, Chittagong is located on a long and narrow breakwater, protecting the marina from the open sea. The total urbanized area of Chittagong may be divided into three broad areas:
Northern Chittagong: Sitakunda, Hathazari, Fatikchhari, Fateyabad, Rawzan etc. are developed locations of this part of Chittagong.
Southern Chittagong: Boalkhali, Paliya, Anowara, Dohazari etc. are developed locations of this part of Chittagong.
Central Chittagong (CCC area): Chittagong (Town) consists of 6 thanas, 68 wards, and 236 mahallas (neighbourhoods). It has an area of 209.66 sq km.

Land-use pattern
Industrial areas: Patenga, CEPZ, Sagarika, Kattali, Bhatiyar, Kalurghat, Nasirabad, BSCIC Shilpa Nagari
Commercial area: Agrabad
Residential areas: Combined, Port Colony, Halishahar, Agrabad, Chakta, Chandgo, WAPDA colony, Katalganj, Shymoli, Nasirabad, Kulshi
(Source: Chittagong City Corporation, 2004)

Mode of mass transportation		
Type of Vehicle	Number of Passengers	Fare (Taka/km)
Bus (special)	45	2.00
Minibus (special)	30	2.00
Maxi	12	2.00
Rider/Diganta/Duranta	14	2.00
Tempo	10	2.00
Local Bus	40	1.00

Source: field survey; 2005

Central Chittagong to urban growth centres			
No.	Route	Bus No	Travel Time
1	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?paliya	12	1 Hours 45 Minutes 28.75
2	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?dohazari	15	2 Hours 30 Minutes 44.25
3	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?boalkhali	14	1 Hours 30 Minutes 14
4	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?anowara	10	2 Hours 29
5	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?hathazari	16	1 Hour 20 Minutes 15.65
6	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?nazirhat	13	2 Hours 10 Minutes 36
7	Chittagong(chandgaon Terminal)?raouzan	08	2 Hours 35
8	Chittagong(Chandgaon Terminal)?Sitakunkda	12	2 hours 30 minutes



Road widening by demolition