



US\$ 5.2 BILLION STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLAN

# Pedestrian interest almost set aside

TAWFIQUE ALI

The proposed Strategic Transport Plan (STP) for the capital city has ignored the interests of pedestrians, environmental concerns and importance of non-motorised transports by suggesting allocation of very insignificant amount of investment.

The suggestions and allocation of resources in the STP have frustrated the experts, who have long been urging the planners to give topmost priority to pedestrians, followed by cyclists, rickshaws, public transports and then private cars.

Though pedestrians and fuel-free transports (FFT) together constitute the highest share in the city's public transport system, the plan makers have suggested the lowest allocation of resources for those two significant segments.

While FFTs constitute 34 percent share and pedestrians 14 percent, the STP allocates for them only 0.44 percent and 0.24 percent resources respectively of the total investment.

According to the STP, if implemented, the proposed underground rail service will carry only 8 percent of the total traffic but the plan recommends allocation of 62 percent resources of the 5.2-billion-dollar project for metro rail.

According to competent sources, initially transport solutions suggested in the STP were supposed to be based on detailed analysis of socio-economic factors but some ambitious infrastructures like elevated expressway and metro rail were incorporated without analysis as per wish of the then communications minister Nazmul Huda.

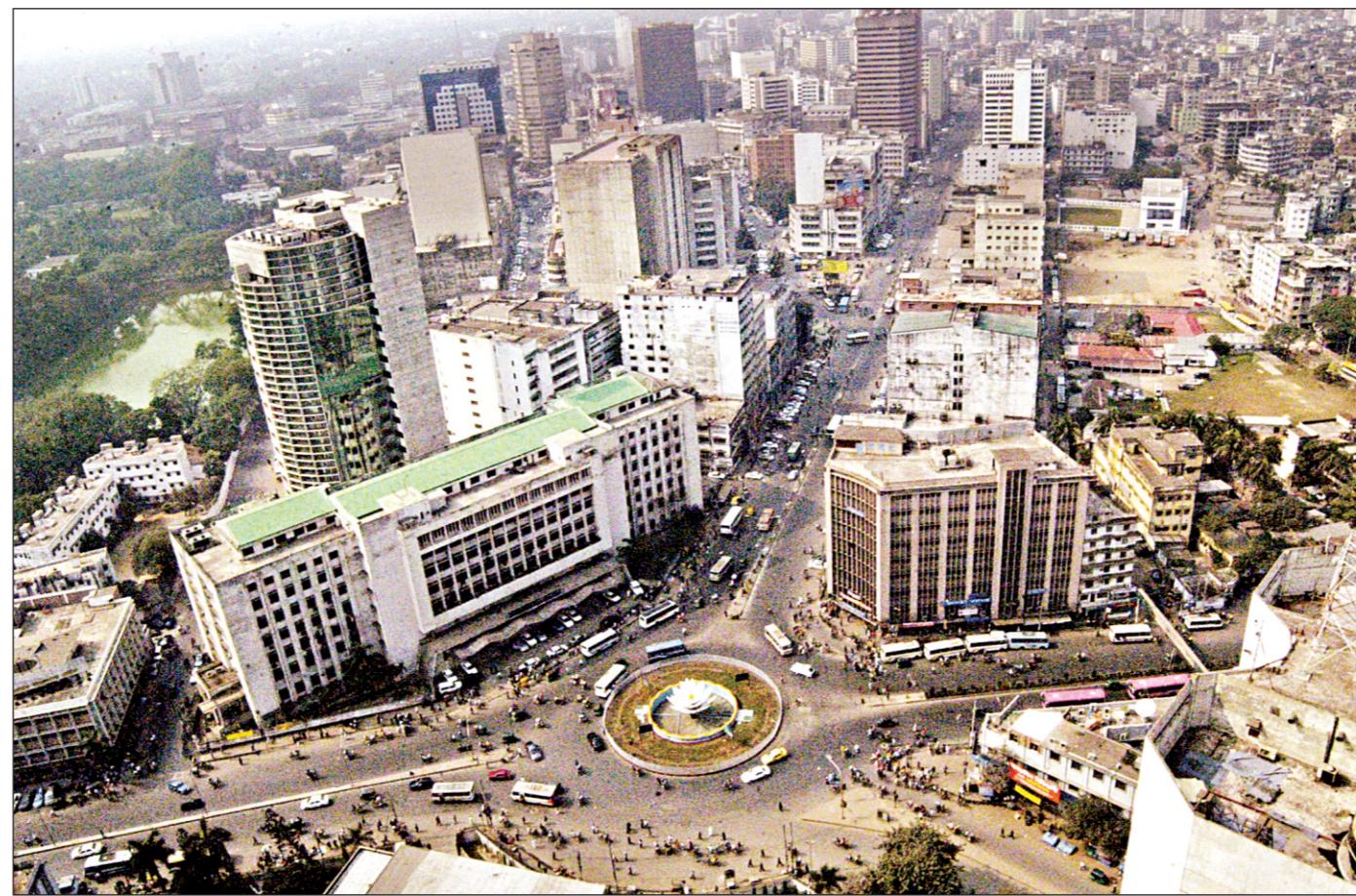
Installation of the metro (underground) rail will be an extremely expensive venture. According to sources, international financing institutions, multinational investor organisations, contractors and government officials concerned will be benefited out of such development work.

Khondker Neaz Rahman, an urban planner and architect, said that the foremost inconsistency in the STP is its negligence to the fuel free transport (non-motorised) and pedestrian facilities. Another is that it has not focused adequately on maximising the potential of the city's existing rail infrastructures and waterways.

"The STP is far more investor-friendly than people and environment-friendly," said Rahman, who is currently working on a strategic environmental assessment for Dhaka. "Because it recommends capital-intensive transport infrastructures."

Considering affordability of the general mass and environment, the STP should have explored opportunities for developing pedestrian-friendly and non-motorised transport facilities more, designating adequate lanes and spaces for them instead of recommending enormously expensive and investment-oriented infrastructures, he suggested.

The existing regular rail service within the metropolitan area should be exploited efficiently to derive benefits of metro services, he said, adding that the existing circular waterways around the capital city too can be of great service to ease up the city's heavily messed-up transportation, if utilised in an appropriate manner.



City centre: Anything for the pedestrians?

Experts at workshops organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok (Bapa) recently said that it is unfortunate that minimisation of vehicle-hour on roads has been set as the main target of STP, ignoring the mobility of the majority of the city dwellers.

According to review at the Bapa workshops, priority should have been given to ten people walking one kilometre to reach their workplace easily and conveniently than facilitating one person travelling ten kilometres by a motorcar.

Any plan to develop urban

transport system must aim at harvesting maximum benefit out of minimum investment, said Rahman. But in this case, the scenario is quite opposite -- the highest investment to yield minimum benefit to the commoners and environment.

The proposed ambitious infrastructures like elevated expressway, flyovers and subway will be hardly of any use for the commoners though they have to pay for them, he said.

Dr Mahbubul Bari, senior assistant manager of model devel-

opment, Transport for London, UK, attended a number of seminars on STP one organised by Bapa on June 10 and another by the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh, on June 14.

In his critical review, he suggested complete ban on car parking on footpaths and introduction of car-free zones in the central commercial and shopping areas.

He mentioned that construction of three proposed elevated expressways would imply not only additional expense of 614 million US dollars but would also cast

adverse impact on environment and transport system.

Though STP proposes for development of circular waterways, it allocates only 1.11 percent of the total investment, he said.

Professor Jobair Bin Alam of civil engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) said the suggestions made in the STP are not well based on detailed analysis of feasibility and crucial related factors.

"The STP needs further comprehensive analysis of all the

related issues," he said. "Socio-economic conditions, environmental and energy issues must be taken into consideration."

According to findings of the Dhaka Urban Transport Plan (DUTP) survey, pedestrians constitute 60 percent share of Dhaka's transport 10 years ago.

Prof Alam termed it just ridiculous and unacceptable that 60 percent share of the pedestrian in 1997 fell suddenly down to 14 percent in 2005 with no such tangible development in the society.

"The idea of metro rail was nowhere in the entire analysis of the planning process," said Prof Alam, who was involved with analysis of suggested solutions in STP.

"It is highly questionable how far the concept of metro rail is feasible in the present day socio-economic context of the country," he said.

Components like elevated expressway and metro rail are not based on analysis of our existing social condition, economic affordability of the common masses, energy issue and environmental aspects," said Prof Alam.

According to him, Buet experts have vigorously asked the authorities concerned for detailed analysis of all the related factors like environmental consequences and benefit of general people before making any suggestions in the STP.

Experts at Bapa workshops said that metro system for Dhaka is technically difficult and potentially unfeasible. It will imply extremely high installation and operational costs.

Metro service requires constant supply of power but Dhaka

that has perennially been reeling under load-shedding, is not in a position to run such rail service, they said.

Prof Alam said Bangladesh has to spend around Tk 15,000 crore on importing 3.5 million tonnes of fuel every year and half of the imported energy is consumed in transport sector.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who headed a 31-member advisory committee on STP, said that the advisory committee too submitted a report alongside the STP 'disagreeing' with some recommendations made in the STP.

"We differed with some of the recommendations made by the consultants," he said.

However, responding to the criticism of STP Additional Executive Director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) Dr SM Saleh Uddin said: "We have to keep pace with modernisation and development worldwide."

A 17-member high-powered taskforce has been formed, headed by Communications Adviser MA Matin and including 11 secretaries, to review the proposed STP in details.

The committee is reviewing which components will be viable in policy, financial and environmental aspects, he said expressing his hope that the plan would get the cabinet approval within a month.

The Louis Berger Group INC, USA prepared the 20-year STP and submitted it to DTCB on 16 January last year. The nine-month study involved Tk 10 crore funded by the World Bank. The development period of this plan is 2004 to 2024.

## Preserving city's ageing trees



Old over-arching trees in the campus of Dhaka University.

FIDA-E-TASHFIA

In the absence of proper preservation, old drooping branches and stag-headed dead trees make dangerous roadside denizens, threatening to drop on vehicles and passers-by on the city roads.

On Sunday, a large dead branch overhanging the Farmgate road adjacent to Monipuripara crashed onto the road. Luckily, the spot where it fell was unoccupied at the time, but traffic was blocked for almost thirty minutes before some people from a nearby tempo stand hauled it away.

This was not the first time that a dead branch collapsed onto the road at this location. In April

2006, two people were killed by a heavy branch that crushed their CNG auto-rickshaw as it waited at the traffic signal.

Dr Syed Hadiuzzaman, professor of Botany at Dhaka University (DU) and DU Arboriculture division in-charge, said dead branches, whether on a diseased or a healthy tree, are very brittle and prone to breaking, and should be trimmed away immediately. "Regular trimming is the best way to preserve the beautiful old trees in the city, and make sure the branches do not fall onto passers-by," according to him.

Unfortunately, it is not only dead trees that fall, as extended branches of old trees are often pulled down by their own

weight. There have been multiple cases of unsupported drooping branches being struck down during storms in Farmgate, Indira Road, Kakrak, DU campus, and other parts of the city.

"It also depends what kind of tree. Old Krishnachura trees, rain trees, and very tall old Albizia trees like the ones opposite Curzon Hall become weaker with age, and are more prone to breaking in a storm than trees like mahogany, which are very stable even in old age," said Dr. Hadiuzzaman.

He stressed however, that wherever possible, the trees should be preserved. "Many of these magnificent old trees have taken years to grow, some planted during the British colo-

nial period. To chop them down would mean cutting away a piece of our heritage," he said.

In developed countries, the common practice is to prune trees every year, generally in February-March, in a way that restores balance to the trees, and brings center of mass back to the main trunk. Where extended branches are cut away, the spot is often sealed with bitumen or asphalt so that the branch does not re-grow, but rather the tree grows straight upwards.

Another alternative is to tie the top of the tree to four firmly grounded poles, which will make the tree grow straight instead of leaning over the road, and support the weight of its branches. In Japan, where this practice is quite popular, the poles are usually made of pine, but according to experts, any material can be used that matches the strength of the particular tree concerned.

As regards dead trees, the only option is to chop them down, but only if their condition is such that no new branches may grow. These can be distinguished by their dry, ashen appearance, and the stubbed, leafless branches at the top that have earned them the name 'stag-headed trees'.

Mohammad Fosilullah, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Executive Officer for Zone-6, said that the several dead trees lining the Farmgate road had caught his attention, and he had already filed a report with DCC Chief Wealth Department to auction the trees for removal.

"I filed the report on July 16<sup>th</sup>, and in next few days it should be attended to. Auctioning may take 15 days, and then the dead trees, not only of the Farmgate road, but in my whole zone, will be removed for public safety," he said.

## Jacuzzi, beware!

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The recent case of a man who narrowly escaped fatal burns while using the Jacuzzi at Gold's Gym has brought to light safety lapses in the club's world famous facilities.

People using the Dhaka branch of the internationally renowned Gold's Gym chain must ensure the safety of the club's equipments and facilities before using them, unless they wish to share the fate of M.A.Khan.

Khan, a resident of Dhanmondi, was enjoying a dip in the swimming pool of the Gold's Gym in Bashundhara City complex on Thursday last week. Having purchased a day pass for Tk.1000, he took several plunges in the swimming pool to shake off the drudgery of the workweek, and then moved on to the nearby Jacuzzi for relaxation.

With no gym officials attending the Jacuzzi, he assumed that it was in working order and was safe for use. Drained from his swimming session, Khan stretched his tired body in the temperate water of the jacuzzi. To his utter horror, minutes after he sat down in the tub, boiling hot water started to gush out of the Jacuzzi without any warning.

"All of a sudden, a surge of scorching water hit me from the bottom, and before I could react it engulfed me, scalding my whole body," said Khan.

Apparently, one of the gym officials responsible for overseeing the operation of the Jacuzzi switched on the temperature control mechanism of the Jacuzzi while Khan was in the tub.

"No officials or attendants were around the Jacuzzi to ask me to leave the tub before turning on the boiling water. There were not even any signs or any other noti-

cation measures around the Jacuzzi," said Khan.

...

The 50-year-old man suffered skin burns in several places of his body, including a serious blister on his back, before he managed to haul himself out of the Jacuzzi.

...

"I was fortunate to have gotten away from that boiling tub of water with injuries that are minor compared to what they could have been," he added.

...

According to Abdullah, manager of Gold's Gym, four officials

are responsible for supervising the swimming pool and Jacuzzi facilities, and the mishap was due to their negligence.

"The unfortunate incident occurred due to the inattention of the attendants in the swimming pool and Jacuzzi area, and we have already taken action against the careless attendants," said Abdullah, manager of Gold's Gym.

Following the incident, warning signs have been posted around the Jacuzzi, and extra inspectors and lifeguards have been posted around the area. The management has vowed to do its utmost to prevent the recurrence of any accidents in future.

Some of the equipment in this well-reputed health club was also seen to be quite unsafe for use. A fitting example would be a hair dryer found in the men's department. The dryer was haphazardly mended with scotch tape with tips of electric wires hanging outside, exposing its users to the dangers of electrocution.

However, Abdullah, the manager of Gold's Gym at Dhaka denied any allegations about negligence in the health club.

"I assure you that there are no cases of mismanagement in our gym. That particular accident happened not because of any failing in our equipments, rather it happened because of a human mistake, and we have already taken actions against the responsible officials," said Abdullah.

Following the incident, warning signs have been posted around the Jacuzzi, and extra inspectors and lifeguards have been posted around the area. The management has vowed to do its utmost to prevent the recurrence of any accidents in future.