

## Metro rail: Look before you leap, suggest experts

TAWFIQUE ALI

Leading transport planners suggest that the government should go for feasibility study on the proposed underground rail system in Dhaka involving experts with adequate knowledge and expertise in developing such a system.

The proposed feasibility study may fail to attract private and foreign investment for the project unless internationally reputed experts are involved, they said.

The government at an inter-ministerial meeting on October 13 took the decision to carry out a Tk 10-crore feasibility study on the metro rail.

"Feasibility study of such a complex subject should involve experts who have expertise in developing metro underground rail system," said Dr Rahmatullah, a policy adviser of Transport Sector Management Reform of the Planning Commission.

A top official of the communications ministry said since Bangladesh does not have any expertise in developing metro rail, it should involve foreign experts for the study.

Rahmatullah, who also worked as an urban transport-planning expert for STP, suggested that the terms of reference (TOR) of the feasibility study must be very well defined with outputs clearly mentioned. Duration of study should be at least 10 to 12 months.

Involvement of the international experts, who have practical experience in undertaking feasibility study of metro Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) elsewhere in the region, would ensure credibility to the study and attract private sector investment, he said.

He recommended sharing of experience from regional experts. New Delhi has developed a 65-kilometre MRT system consisting of 20 percent underground and 80 percent elevated railway. A study on metro system in Kolkata is being carried out at present.

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ground rail system by the middle of next year and complete it by 2013 to facilitate mobility of the city dwellers and ease the perennial traffic congestions in the capital.

The study is set to start in December and be completed by next June. Tender for the study was supposed to be floated this month, but the planning ministry is yet to approve it.

A top official of the communications ministry said the initiative would have advanced quite far if the donors and private sector investors were involved at the very outset.

The study must involve transport economists, competent personnel with international reputation in data collection and analysis and those who have

been internationally involved with feasibility study and development of metro system, said Rahmatullah.

He recommended for a team of experts or advisers comprising government officials and transport experts to monitor and oversee the progress of the study.

According to him, cost of underground metro transport system is so high that mere Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) type of contract will not be successful. Public-private partnership will be required to make it a success. It will also require government subsidy.

Compared to elevated railway, underground rail cost is double and its construction too is much more difficult.

The study should adequately focus on how much of metro rail should be underground and how much elevated. Besides, experts involved in the study must keep in mind the recommendations in the STP and then suggest any modification.

The STP identifies six possible MRT routes out of which three may function as bus rapid transit (BRT) for the time being but subsequently have to be turned into rail-based MRT.

The other three routes are supposed to be rail-based MRT from the very beginning. Study also should identify locations of the stations and integration with other modes.

Belayet Hossain, director general of Bangladesh Railway, said that they are not looking for

fund for the feasibility study. The study cost would be reimbursed from the winning bidders who will implement the project, he said.

The government on November 4, 2007 decided to go for underground railway network on a priority basis to resolve transport need and mitigate traffic congestion.

A 12-member committee headed by communications adviser formed on October 25, 2007 decided to implement the project with private entrepreneurs on build-own-operate basis.

According to the experts, there is no mention of underground railway in the STP. It mentions only metro system, which may be underground railway or elevated railway or bus rapid transit (BRT), they said.

"Metro transport system does not necessarily mean underground railway," said Rahmatullah. "It may be partly underground, on-the-surface, or elevated railway. It may be an integration of different types as well."

Feasibility study is required to determine the suitable mode of transport at affordable cost, he said adding that one cannot guarantee without prior study that just underground railway will resolve the transport problems of the capital city. It all depends on study where to construct underground rail and where elevated rail.

Though the issue of feasibility study came up in 2002, it got stuck in the question on who should fund it. The planning ministry insisted again and again on looking for foreign funds. Finally, the communications ministry came up with the idea in April this year that the study would be done with public money but it would be reimbursed as a "success fee" by the winning bidder of the project.

The grand project aims at building a 60-km metro railway at an estimated cost of Tk 10,000 crore with a target to carry 4,000 people per hour.



A portion of the Gulshan-Banani Lake -- a spot at the end of the Gulshan road no 26 is being encroached by a section of influential locals. The lakesides are also being gradually filled up in the same manner.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

## 1000-taka bills on sale!

**Vendors doing brisk business with newly released banknote**

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The recently released 1000-taka bill has become a source of curiosity and attraction for many who are collecting them from the street vendors.

For them, the fresh banknote vendors at Gulistan, Nababpur and Sadarghat are so far the only source of the new note launched on November 27 for the first time in Bangladesh.

The vendors doing brisk business with the notes said the fresh 1000-taka bill has become the hottest merchandise and people are paying extra to get hold of one.

The 1000-taka note with a blend of reddish-violet shade bears a picture of the Central Shaheed Minar on one side and a picture of Curzon Hall of Dhaka University on the other side. It also has a few Bangla alphabets printed on it.

The central bank also considered the cause of the blind people in designing the note. The 1000-taka note, a little larger in size than any other notes, has the amount written in Braille system. It has dots on the right side of the note.

Monirul Islam, a fresh note dealer at Gulistan said, "For us Eid is usually the best time for business when most people exchange old notes for new ones. However, after the 1000-taka note was launched everyone who walks by has shown tremendous interest."

Despite the benefits, electronic ticketing systems are not without problems, especially during the initial start-up. Officials at the BRTA said the use of such advanced technology during the first months of operation might cause frequent confusion among passengers and transit employees alike.

"While we expect some initial disliking from passengers who have used tokens all their lives, they will eventually become accustomed to fare cards, just like the people using bank cards today," he said.

Each of the card reading devices will cost around 1.5 lakh. "While the money seems quite outrageous, it will be beneficial in the long term as it will help slash fare evasion," said Chowdhury, "we have urged Sony to keep the price of the devices as low as possible."



They charge Tk 10 to 20 as commission for each 1000-taka bill.

Ahmed, another trader at Gulistan said, "Every day we are selling at least 50 notes. Sale was even higher right after it was released. Many people made extra efforts just to come here and take a look at the new note. Our business is quite good because of it."

Ahmed said their source of the 1000-taka notes is dealers or agents who collect them directly from Bangladesh Bank counters.

A man "buying" the note from a vendor at Gulistan said, "I want to collect it as it has been released for the first time in the country." Another buyer Abdul Halim, a trader from Stadium Market, said he will present the note to his daughter.

Abul Mansur Ahmed, currency officer of Bangladesh

Bank, said, "From Bangladesh Bank the notes will first go to commercial banks, then the people will get it. Business transactions with different parties will circulate the notes further."

"It is taking time to reach the mass people because when we deal with kitchen market traders, grocers, bus conductors or rickshawpullers, we need smaller notes more. They exchange hands more than the bigger ones," he added.

The official told Star City that so far 30 lakh pieces of 1000-taka notes have been circulated and another 5 crore will hit the market before Eid-ul-Azha next month.

The notes have been printed by the Security Printing Corporation (Bangladesh) Limited, a subsidiary organisation of the central bank.

## Electronic ticketing for buses under study



Days are not too far away when these bus ticket counters on pavements will be a matter of the past.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A private bus operator's desire to begin a new era in ticketing may not come true as early they may have wanted. But the days are not too far away.

Officials at Trans Silva Transport Bangladesh Limited are planning to abolish paper-ticket system and install electronic fare card readers in its buses. But they are yet to find the most befitting and acceptable way to introduce it in the capital city.

"Electronic ticketing systems have been well-established in many foreign countries. I doubt the commuters out there would even imagine of getting back to using paper-tickets," said a spokesperson for the private transportation company.

"However, considering the situation in our country, we cannot just bring in a new technology. We have to study its feasibility -- whether it would be appropriate, and how our passengers would greet the technology," he said.

According to Giasuddin Chowdhury, director (operations) and a spokesperson for Trans Silva Transport Bangladesh Limited, they are looking forward to making the proposed system a reality.

"Almost all the major cities in the world, including the ones in our neighbouring countries have electronic fare collection systems, so why not in Dhaka," he said.

"We have already discussed the matter with the BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) officials, and if things go smoothly, they will assist the 53 bus companies to adopt the

new system," said Chowdhury.

However, BRTA officials believe the new scheme, despite its potential, should be put on hold until an elected government takes charge of the country.

Officials at Trans Silva Transport said the company has signed a contract with Sony Corporation who would supply and install the technology required for the new system.

"We have been considering two methods. One is based on coins, where passengers would have to insert coins in the coin receiver. We have requested approval from the Bangladesh Bank for this system," said Giasuddin Chowdhury.

The other method, Chowdhury said, is what they call the electronic IC (integrated circuit) card ticketing system.

This is how the system will work: Passengers will buy electronic fare cards from the office of the transportation company. The fare cards will be magnetically coded to indicate the amount of money that a passenger has fed into the machine or paid to a token clerk.

Passengers will swipe the fare card across an electronic reader on the bus while getting in and once again at the time of getting off the bus. The reader will monitor the distance the passenger has travelled and deduct the price of the fare from the card.

Chowdhury said the new scheme is intended to bring more efficiency in the ticketing system. It will also help stop the fare evasion.

Officials at other bus operators also believe that the new system would drastically reduce fare evasion, which has been on the dramatic rise over the past

years. It will also allow transit companies to offer discounts to passengers like students and women, and others who travel during the off-peak hours or who use the subways and buses frequently.

"If implemented properly, this system has the potential to revolutionise the public transportation in the city," said Farhad Hossain, an official from Kolmitila Paribahan, "with it, we can virtually eliminate fare evasion and offer discounts that will attract more commuters."

Transportation employees said the new system may also open the possibility of integrating the city's mass-transit systems, allowing passengers to transfer freely or enjoy discount between the city's buses by using the same card.

Despite the benefits, electronic ticketing systems are not without problems, especially during the initial start-up. Officials at the BRTA said the use of such advanced technology during the first months of operation might cause frequent confusion among passengers and transit employees alike.

"While we expect some initial disliking from passengers who have used tokens all their lives, they will eventually become accustomed to fare cards, just like the people using bank cards today," he said.

Each of the card reading devices will cost around 1.5 lakh. "While the money seems quite outrageous, it will be beneficial in the long term as it will help slash fare evasion," said Chowdhury, "we have urged Sony to keep the price of the devices as low as possible."



Banknote vendors at Gulistan. New 1000-taka bills are now a hot item.

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