

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTS

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There are points in life when we must either ditch the luxury of our own transport or just learn to travel on our own without being escorted around. During these times, the streets of Dhaka suddenly appear more menacing and confusing. This basic guide can help you overcome your anxiety and prepare you for commuting on your own.

Know your options

What options are out there? Plenty, actually. Within Dhaka you can have your pick among CNGs, buses, trains, human haulers and rickshaws. It's important to remember that aside from CNGs and rickshaws (still not allowed on all roads), most of these transports will only take you to the rough location of your destination.



Know your routes

This applies even if you're taking a CNG. A fairly decent idea of the roads, and especially landmark locations, is your best friend when commuting alone. Buses, human haulers and trains all have specific routes through which they travel, and knowing whether your destination falls within or near the path taken always helps in making the choice on which transport to avail. If you're still facing trouble, you can also ask the conductor *mama* for help.

Choose your transport

Factors to consider when choosing your transport:

- The size of your wallet
- The amount of time you have on your hands
- The time of the day

CNGs are the easiest choice but also the most expensive. You're also going to be caged in. CNGs do, however, take you exactly where you need to go and is often the best option if

you're in a rush. I've never been on a train in Dhaka but I've heard that for certain routes, inter-city trains are the fastest and most reliable. The fact that traffic doesn't matter for a train plays a huge part in this but reliability of everything always remains in question here. If there's a train station nearby, go and see if the train will take you to your destination. Trains will only cost you a tiny fraction of your CNG fare.

Buses are often considered the safest because safety lies in number, right? Depending on the type of bus you're on,

your travel can actually be pretty fast and smooth, not to mention inexpensive. 'Sitting service' buses tend to be fast and comfortable. The local buses which are sometimes called 'murir tin' are more widely available. Either way, it's not impossible to find a bus that will take you to your destination, albeit you might need to change your bus for another one along the way.

Human hauler or *tempo* are for you if you are fine with extremely reckless driving. They're actually really fast and cost about the same as buses. Their routes are, however, extremely limited.

Good old rickshaws are unfortunately not allowed on all roads but if you're really determined on travelling by rickshaw only, you can ask the *mama* and scope out your route. You'll probably discover parts of Dhaka you never knew existed. Happens to me every time.

Time of the day

The time of the day plays a huge part in the availability of transports. If it's peak hour (early morning and around 5 pm) it's best to either head out early or just settle for a CNG. Otherwise, you'll find yourself stranded on the road looking for a transport for hours without any luck.

Now that you know the basics, go and explore a little. Experience is the game changer here. Happy commuting!

Nooha Sabanta Maula enjoys juggling many things at once and drinks her coffee cold. She can be reached at facebook.com/noohamaula

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