



Ahsan Manzil closely connected to the Buriganga riverbank area with ghats and terraces, flanked by public buildings.

## New visions for the city

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needs and experiences. Better quality of urban life in the nodes, with less travel time, will encourage decongestion in existing Dhaka.

Once the footprint of the expanded Dhaka is identified, nodes in the nexus and in-between areas could be carefully delineated so as not to affect more agricultural areas and wetlands. A rigorous balance should be established between Dhaka's urbanisation needs and ecological obligations.

Dhaka needs to spread out and yet remain connected for which transportation is critical. An organised, dispersed "city region" will have to rely on an efficient public transportation system that could be a combination of fast commuter train, light rail transit, extensive bus network, and riverway ferries and vehicles. Lessening travel time will be key for the performance of the nexus. In a fast north-south train corri-

new major train hubs: one at Gazipur-Joydebpur as the North Station, and another at Keraniganj as the South Station. From the North Station, passengers can take faster trains to travel to northern and eastern districts. From the South Station, proposed as a new development hub, passengers can travel south, south-west and south-east.

The third ring may connect Munshiganj, Mawa, Narsingdi, Kapasia, Kaliakoir, Manikganj, and other towns and settlements. Radial roads and train lines from key nodal towns will connect areas in various regions beyond Dhaka.

The creation of this organised network of nodes is also based on a clear demarcation of the boundary of each node as well as that of areas that lie between nodes. In-between areas mean smaller settlements, villages, agricultural lands, forest areas, wetlands, flood-plains, etc. While each node may

cars or by mobilising for mass transit. In this city of 15 million and more, only a small percentage drive around in cars, and yet that small number disproportionately rules the roads, and dictates the terms of transportation, and consequently the life of the city. No amount of road widening and elevated roadways will make a dent to the problem. The only reasonable and effective response to Dhaka's traffic crisis is mass transit.

We identify three crucial sectors—rail, road and river—where new transportation modes may be implemented rapidly without too much infrastructural and construction challenges.

Buses continue to be the accepted mode of popular travelling, and may be expanded and organised for mass transit movement. A revision would require the inauguration of eco-friendly articulated vehicles carrying large number of

line going around metropolitan Dhaka along the embankment system, which is also the basis of the first circle in our idea for Dhaka Nexus.

Supporting the metro rail system, we suggest feeder corridors that can be based on a light rail system, one that can be built quickly. One such important possibility with a huge impact is an elevated light rail system from Khilkhet to Dhanmondi via Gulshan, Kawran Bazar and Panthapath. In order to encourage people to take mass transit, the proposed light rail can be linked up with the MRT Line 5 now underway. It is possible that the light rail can be built on the median of the existing roads for the most part.

A city with a successful transportation system relies on a culture of walking. For any kind of mass transit system, people need a proper and generous network of pedestrian arteries. That requires the construction and maintenance of proper footpaths that hardly exist in Dhaka.

### New public spaces can make Dhaka a better city

It is simple: If Dhaka is to elevate itself as a decent city, it must reorganise the existing conditions of its civic and public spaces. The most crucial thing to do in this regard is to make Dhaka a walkable city.

The development of proper public places and civic spaces is central to Dhaka's transition to becoming a decent city, and the only way to erase the stigma of being unlivable. With a climate naturally suited to making a garden city, a bold design based on new imagination, and determined directives from two dynamic mayors of the city, Dhaka can again be a humane and positive place.

While open and public places define the civic realm of a city, sidewalks or footpaths are a key component of that system. The sidewalk, the most evident mark of the civility and humanity of a city, represents the culture of walking, strolling and promenading, and getting around without hindrance. This is particularly critical for Dhaka where more than 60 percent of the people walk. Such urban pedestrian systems as boulevards, promenades, riverwalks, or simple sidewalks that are the hallmark of all livable cities are for the most part non-existent in Dhaka. And if they do exist, they are in bits and pieces, and do not create a legible and defined network.

A proper walkable city is a civic right. The first crucial task is to revise our perception of sidewalks: A sidewalk is not the extension of a drain, nor is it a three feet wide cover over it; it is a space on its own, it is a public space. A sidewalk in Dhaka will continue to be used for multiple reasons especially for portable commerce and other improvisations. A guideline for sidewalk practices should be developed and maintained by proper regulations that embrace both the necessity of walking and the social interaction of commerce.

The pedestrian and the sidewalk is ultimately an indictment on the car, on its ultimate effect on the natural environment (through pollution, etc.), urban exchange (disintegration of the public realm), and social interaction

(segregation of classes). Wealth and automobiles do not have to go hand in hand. Hong Kong is a good example where an integrated planning approach has succeeded in maintaining low automobile dependency despite Hong Kong's high per capita income and population density. The success of Hong Kong's pedestrianisation was possible due to the integrated network of pathways that separate car and pedestrian, and allow those pathways and sidewalks to be spaces of their own. A successful pedestrian infrastructure means relying mostly on a set of public transportation such as railways, buses, vans, trams, ferries, and such public spaces as elevated and moving walkways, tunnels, footbridges and generous sidewalks.

It is often overlooked that the overall transportation system of any city is intimately linked to the network of walkability created by sidewalks and public hubs. This is particularly evident in the case of Dhaka. With mass transit being the only way to counter the traffic woes of a city like Dhaka, the coming of the metro rail is highly welcome. But the success of the metro will depend on a walkable system: One will leave home for work, walk to the station, and get off at another station to go to the workplace or school or college. On a holiday, a family will walk off to a station to get to a public space to attend an event. After a family meal at an eatery and a walk by the promenade, they will catch another train to head back home.

In imagining exemplary civic spaces, we present ideas for two areas, one from the older part of the city, Buriganga Riverbank, and another from the newer part of Gulshan:

**Buriganga riverbank promenade**  
Dhaka is a child of the Buriganga, and yet it turns its back to being part of the world's most dynamic hydrological system. A radical reclamation of Buriganga River and its banks on both sides is crucial for an economic, transport and cultural reinvigoration of the oldest part of Dhaka. The river can become a sustainable life-blood, and the riverfront a much more organised condition providing renewed recreational, civic, touristic, economic, and transport opportunities for the whole city. To create an active public promenade along the Buriganga connecting both banks, we propose:

*Framing the river's edge with a new language of development appropriate to riverside activities:* Riverbanks are encroached upon or abused because there are no exemplary models on how to use them. An appropriate riverside development will create a defined overlap between city and river, something that is now lacking.

*Connecting north and south riverbanks with a continuous public promenade:* For example, a promenade may link Sadarghat launch terminal to Badamtoli ghat, and via the bridge make a loop to the riverbank on Keraniganj. Walkways, ghats, terraces, gardens, floating islands, and pavilions – all part of a riverbank language – will form components of that riverside promenade.



New promenade made of ghats, terraces, steps, tree lined riverbank walks, pavilions for cafes, and water bus stations, as a boon for pedestrian life.

dor linking Dhaka and Mymensingh travel time can be reduced to two hours. It is possible that one could finish a day's work in Dhaka city, return to Mymensingh to an air and light filled residence, and enjoy a promenade along the Brahmaputra River in the evening.

We suggest three transportation rings around Dhaka that will be the organisational basis of the nexus. The first ring is located along the existing embankment roads of the city and may connect Tongi, Savar, and Keraniganj. The ring could be made up of an expressway, circular fast train line, and circular waterway. The circular road, river and rail system will connect stations along the lines. Radial roads and train lines from key nodal towns will connect towns and hubs in other rings.

The second ring may connect Narayanganj, Bhulta, Pubail, Gazipur, and Hemayetpur. Linking with the second ring, we propose creating two

be planned and defined by distinctive types of residences, commerce, industry, administration, education or other functions, the in-between areas should also be carefully planned for their particular use and potential through land use.

### Mass transit is the only traffic solution

Transportation is integral to everything critical to the life of a city: development incentives, land-use distribution, quality of civic life, environmental consequences, infrastructural arrangements, and economic betterment. While there are no instantaneous solutions to the complex issues of traffic and transport, we believe that by organising in an integrated way, and by genuinely understanding priorities, transportation investment can be the impetus for a new destiny for Dhaka.

Planners and policymakers need to consider whether Dhaka's transportation crisis can be solved by privileging

passengers on dedicated routes. Special bus stands will have to be constructed that facilitate faster loading and transfer.

Water-based transportation system for Dhaka, with water-buses and water-taxis, is a natural choice in a waterborne geography. Water transportation can become an instrument to manage and control the riverbanks, and create hubs of riverside development and growth with new economic and social potential. The way Dhaka has turned its back to its rivers may be reversed by implementing a strong riverine transit system. The water link need not only be a circular one along the rivers, but like a vascular system within the city that can connect different canals and water bodies.

We eagerly await the metro rail system for that is the only answer to the traffic nightmare. In addition to the proposed lines in the metro, we also suggest a circular rail, road and river