

AVOIDING AN URBAN NIGHTMARE: TIME TO GET PLANNING RIGHT

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Construction of the elevated expressway in progress at Airport Road.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Towards a better, balanced metropolis

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inflow of people coming from all parts of the country over the years since liberation. The numbers keep growing, and a centralised development policy retained for many years has not helped the cause either. So Dhaka has always had to accommodate more than it could afford.

Today, a staggering 18 million people are crammed in a mere 306.4 square kilometre area. The consequent traffic gridlocks are not surprising when you consider the fact that these people make around 30 million daily trips in public and private transports. Dhaka was not designed to be under-capacity, but over the years it has become over-manned and over-vehicled.

To address the transport requirements of such a huge population, a superior Mass Rapid Transport system is of utmost importance. But as of now, there is no such system, and as a result the number of private vehicles has skyrocketed. The longer hours spent in traffic have reduced productivity and have adversely impacted the economic growth of the region, not to mention the alarming consumption of fossil fuels and resulting environmental pollution.

REVISED STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLAN

Back in 2005, a 20-year-long Strategic Transport Plan was formulated by Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority to alleviate Dhaka's traffic woes by putting into place an efficiently planned, seamlessly integrated and thoroughly executed mass transit system. The original STP was revised in August 29, 2016 which was approved by the Road Transport and Highways Division at the Cabinet Meeting. The Revised Strategic Transport Plan (2015-2035) has been formulated to adjust the previous STP to the prevailing transport needs. Under the revised STP (RSTP), five Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) lines and two Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines have been proposed to cater to the transport requirements of the residents of Dhaka city and its adjoining districts of Gazipur, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Narayanganj and Narsingdi.

Later, on September last year, the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that her government plans to construct 6 Expressways, 3-tier Elevated Ring Roads and 21 Transportation Hubs alongside enhanced traffic management and

increased traffic safety to ameliorate the existing traffic situation for Dhaka-dwellers.

The proposed MRTs under the broader domain of the RSTP are being implemented by Dhaka Mass Transit Company (DMTC). A dedicated agency called Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA) has been created to synchronise the efforts of all the government agencies that are working towards the endeavour to combat the traffic problems of Dhaka city.

MASS RAPID TRANSITS

Five MRTs have been proposed in the RSTP, namely MRT-1, MRT-2, MRT-4, MRT-5 and MRT-6, of which the construction of MRT-6 has already seen

25 percent progress with almost 300m viaduct visible in Diabari; land development of the depot of MRT-6 completed and construction work of the depot is expected to be completed by June this year.

MRT-1 at a glance: MRT-1 is proposed to have two lines: Airport Line and Purbachal Line. Of the two lines, Airport Line is going to be the first MRT of the country to have all of its 12 stations underground.

Length: Total 30.6 kilometres (underground 18.8 kilometres, elevated 11.8 kilometres); Airport Line (AL) Route: Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport – Airport Terminal 3 – Khilkhet – Jamuna Future Park – Notun Bazar –

Completion Date: July 2022; Expected Completion Date: 2026.

MRT-5 at a glance: MRT-5 is also proposed to have two lines: Northern Route (NR) and Southern Route (SR); Length: Total 41 kilometres; NR: 20 kilometres (underground 13.5, elevated 6.5); SR: 21 kilometres (elevated); Route (Proposed), NR: Hemayetpur – Baliapur – Modhumoti – Aminbazar – Gabtoli – Darussalam – Mirpur 1 – Mirpur 10 – Mirpur 14 – Kochukhet – Banani – Gulshan 2 – Notun Bazar – Vatara; SR: Gabtoli – Technical – Kalyanpur – Shyamoli – Asad Gate – Russel Square – Panthapath – Sonargaon – Hatirjheel – Rampura – Aftabnagar – Dasherbandi – Baralu

Dhaka Medical College – Golap Shah Mazar – Bangabhaban – Motijheel – Arambagh – Kamalapur – Mugda – Manda – Demra; Work Progress: In July 2018, the Bangladesh government made a proposal to the Japan government for technical assistance for undertaking the pre-feasibility study of MRT-2.

MRT-4 at a glance: Length: Total 16 kilometres (underground); Route (Proposed): Kamalapur – Narayanganj (along the Dhaka–Narayanganj railway track); Although these five MRTs are going to have tangible benefits as they will partially mitigate the existing traffic chaos of the capital, they need to be supplemented by other transport modes as well to provide commuters of Dhaka a holistic solution.

BUS RAPID TRANSITS

As part of the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport (GDSUT) Project, a BRT line is in the process of being implemented from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Gazipur (Known as BRT-3). The total estimated cost for BRT-3 is Tk 2039.84 crore. After the completion of BRT-3, around 25,000 passengers per hour will be able to travel in both directions, which will significantly reduce the long hours stuck in traffic on the Dhaka–Mymensingh N3 Highway. As of December 2018, an overall progress of one percent has been made on this BRT line including joint survey, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and a substantial part of the sub-soil investigation. ItalThai Group, an Italian and Thai joint venture, has been awarded the construction contract for BRT-3.

BRTs are considered to be affordable, comfortable and environment-friendly traffic solutions that can supplement MRTs by facilitating urban commuters to travel safely and fast within the city. BRTs are mostly designed to occupy two central lanes—6.5 metres wide and cordoned off—of existing roads and intended for dedicated, disciplined and reliable bus service.

Unfortunately, the progress of the Airport–Keraniganj BRT Line has been impeded time and time again by a lack of coordination between the various development authorities. As of 2018, the initially proposed 22-kilometre stretch from Airport to Keraniganj has been reduced to less than half for a 10-kilometre stretch of Airport–Mohakhali. The original design for which the feasibility study was conducted would



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

significant progress.

MRT-6 at a glance: Length: 20 kilometres; Route: Uttara North – Uttara Center – Uttara South – Pallabi – Mirpur 11 – Mirpur 10 – Kajipara – Shewrapara – Agargaon – Bijoy Sarani – Farmgate – Karwan Bazar – Shahbag – Dhaka University – Secretariat – Motijheel; No. of Stations: 16; Travel Time: 35 minutes from Uttara North – Motijheel; Passenger Capacity: 60,000 per hour in both directions; No. of Trains: 14 trains every 3 minutes; Project Cost: Tk 22,000 crore; Expected Completion Date: December 2020; Work Progress: As of October 2018, the first phase (12 kilometres of MRT-6 from Uttara North to Agargaon) has

Uttar Badda – Badda – Hatirjheel – Rampura – Malibagh – Rajarbagh – Kamalapur; Purbachal Line (PL) Route: Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport – Airport Terminal 3 – Khilkhet – Bashundhara – POHS – Mastul – Purbachal West – Purbachal Center – Purbachal Sector 7 – Purbachal Terminal; No. of Stations: 19; AL: 12 (all underground), PL: 7; Travel Time: AL – 24 minutes 40 seconds, PL – 36 minutes 10 seconds; Project Cost: Tk 50,000 crore; Work Progress: Feasibility study completed in 2018; Concerned Consultants: Seven Japanese and Indian companies and one Bangladeshi company led by Nippon Koei Company Limited; Expected Design

Bazar – Ganganagar – Bhulta; No. of Stations, NR: 14 (9 underground, 5 elevated), SR: 15; Travel Time, NR: 30 minutes 30 seconds, SR: Still undetermined; Expected Completion Date: Northern Route by 2027, Southern Route by 2030; Work Progress: Preparation of a draft project document is underway for Northern Route and consultants are being considered to be hired for feasibility study. A pre-feasibility study for the Southern Route began in May 2018.

MRT-2 at a glance: Length: Total 24 kilometres; Route (Proposed): Gabtoli – Basila – Mohammadpur – Satmasjid Road – Jhigatola – Science Laboratory – New Market – Azimpur – Palashi –

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