



“The Dhaka Elevated Expressway introduces a unique feature with its ramps and main structure built adjacent to the road”

In conversation with Dr. Md. Shamsul Hoque, Professor at the Department of Civil Engineering, BUET.

Dhaka Elevated Expressway would be especially advantageous for commuters traveling between Motijheel and Uttara, as well as for trucks engaged in vital economic activities.

The Daily Star (TDS): How does the strategic vision behind the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project align with the broader goals of improving public transport and mitigating congestion in the city?

Shamsul Hoque (SH): When the government embarked on this initiative, it had a multidimensional and strategic purpose in mind. As part of the strategic transport plan recommended for Dhaka’s public transport system, three BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) and three Metro lines were planned for operation. The primary objective of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway was to divert traffic and alleviate congestion in these large-scale urban areas. Additionally, there was a concept that constructing a new roadway on available land, separate from our existing roads, could provide substantial relief. This roadway would be especially advantageous for commuters traveling between Motijheel and Uttara, as well as for trucks engaged in vital economic activities. Consequently, the plan was conceived to enable these trucks to bypass vertically rather than horizontally, ensuring that both the industrial sector and local passengers traveling from Motijheel to Uttara could do so effortlessly.

With the ongoing development of residential areas like Purbachal, Uttara, and Uttara 3rd phase in these specific zones, envisioning a scenario where passengers utilize the upper level of the road would create a win-win situation, facilitating smooth travel without the burden of traffic jams.

TDS: What were the strategic considerations that led the government to utilize railway lands for the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project?

SH: The underlying strategy of this plan was exceptionally strategic, as the government opted to utilize railway lands, given the limited scope for new road construction in Dhaka.



Consider the possibility of obtaining the right of way from the railways without disrupting their existing routes. Railways often lack the right of way in their areas. Therefore, if the Elevated Expressway could be constructed on two pillars in an area where railways have relinquished their right of way, it would secure a permanent claim to this land. This, in turn, would indirectly benefit the railway system.

The Dhaka Elevated Expressway project was meticulously designed to safeguard the railway’s land rights. However, the current reality differs for various reasons. Delays in project implementation have been substantial, making it untimely to assess the project’s impact at this juncture. While a partial opening is set to commence, the original plan aimed to create a vertical bypass for Dhaka. Initially, few would utilize it, and movement would primarily be local. Hence, it is premature to evaluate its effectiveness.

Suppose this Expressway can eventually connect from Kutubkhali to the Airport and ultimately to Ashulia. In that scenario, both passengers and trucks could leverage the Expressway, offering the potential for positive outcomes. If individuals receive services in exchange for a fee, they would undoubtedly explore this option, representing the potential of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway.

TDS: What factors contributed to the significant delays in completing this project?

SH: This project operated under the PPP (Public-Private Partnership) model, which was relatively new for us, lacking the necessary experience and mindset. Executing PPP projects involves a complex process that often requires foreign direct investment (FDI), along with the temperament and support from various levels of stakeholders, which we initially underestimated. PPP projects also come with strict time constraints since their

funding relies on banks. Time and finances are closely intertwined.

Regarding the Dhaka Elevated Expressway Project, it was anticipated that land issues would be free of encumbrances, as it was believed that the Railways solely owned the land. However, the presence of numerous ramps added complexity. Initially, the government had substantial interest in the project until 2013, ranking it as the second priority after the Padma Bridge. But changes occurred after the formation of a separate Railway ministry, which raised questions about the project’s use of railway land.

We were unaware of the stringent 42-month completion timeline, which was tied to bank equity. In contrast, Indonesia completed its 20 Km Expressway in 2013, featuring 5 km of underground sections, demonstrating the challenges of constructing underground infrastructure in a live traffic environment.

TDS: What distinguishable features does the Dhaka Elevated Expressway bring to the city’s infrastructure?

SH: The Dhaka Elevated Expressway introduces a unique feature with its ramps and main structure built adjacent to the road, a novel approach in design. While it embraces modern technology, it requires additional measures for ramp management. Our configurations have been well thought out, aiming to minimize disruption to existing roads. While the Expressway doesn’t physically encroach upon the streets, its operational conditions could attract more traffic, raising concerns about congestion and pedestrian safety.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the tolling system is critical. A digital tolling system is essential to prevent potential delays. Traditional toll collection methods are time-consuming and could lead to long vehicle queues at the toll collection points, potentially creating congestion hotspots on the Dhaka Elevated Expressway.

The interview was conducted by Priyam Paul.

“Managing ramp connections is pivotal to mitigate traffic congestion”

In conversation with Dr. Adil Mohammed Khan, Professor at Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Jahangirnagar University

The Daily Star (TDS): How will the introduction of the elevated expressway impact the urban living experience in Dhaka?

Adil Mohammed Khan (ADM): The Dhaka elevated expressway was primarily constructed to provide a route for larger vehicles to circumvent the city. However, there is also contemplation about its potential utilization within the city. Its integration within Dhaka could prove beneficial, as it enables faster travel for car owners. Nevertheless, it poses limitations for motorcycles and CNG vehicles, affecting the middle-class segment. Essentially, it adds a new layer to the existing road infrastructure, with vehicles using ramps to access or exit the expressway. Consequently, this could lead to increased congestion on the road beneath the expressway, impacting the middle-class population who may not have access to it.

The expressway’s coverage is limited to specific parts of Dhaka and isn’t primarily designed to alleviate traffic congestion within the city. It may not see extensive use for short trips. Instead, its role as a bypass helps alleviate the burden of large vehicles on city roads, aligning with its primary objective. It’s possible that its integration within the city was considered to make toll collection feasible. This approach would allow vehicles traveling within Dhaka to use the expressway, albeit incurring toll charges. However, its construction over Dhaka’s existing rail network has introduced substantial complexities. For instance, plans for establishing a commuter rail on this network faced significant hurdles.

TDS: How does this elevated expressway influence Dhaka’s socio-economic landscape?

ADM: The introduction of the elevated expressway is unlikely to stimulate the emergence of major new businesses within Dhaka. However, the construction of ramps for this expressway could potentially create opportunities for small roadside businesses in proximity. Nevertheless, these changes are not expected to have a significant impact on the city’s overall economy.

Nonetheless, the use of this elevated expressway is anticipated to result in time savings for commuters. Reduced travel times could benefit existing businesses by potentially increasing their profits, as less time spent on transportation can translate into higher productivity. Furthermore, as a bypass road, the expressway has the potential to efficiently redirect vehicles from northern Bangladesh, allowing them to bypass Dhaka and reach their destinations more swiftly. This reduction in transportation time could have a positive ripple effect on the country’s overall economy.

However, concerns arise for ordinary middle-class individuals who heavily rely on public bus services. The extent to which these individuals will benefit from time savings remains uncertain, particularly if public buses do not utilize the expressway. Consider a scenario where a bus travels from Jatrabari to Tejgaon using the expressway. In this case, passengers may not have the opportunity to disembark at intermediate points along the route, as the expressway currently lacks provisions for passenger stops. Therefore, it remains unclear whether local buses will adopt this route or continue their existing operations.

TDS: Will the accessibility of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway (DEE) be equitable for individuals across various income levels, considering the varied tolls for different vehicle types?

ADM: The utilization of toll-based expressways can present a barrier, as not everyone is inclined to pay each time they use the road. Typically, toll roads are preferred for emergency situations, while most people favor toll-free roads or flyovers. Additionally, toll charges have the potential to elevate bus fares, which could burden the middle class. It’s crucial to acknowledge that our country’s income levels are significantly lower than those of developed nations that employ toll systems.

Prioritizing the enhancement of roads beneath flyovers and expressways should have taken precedence, rather than focusing solely on expressway construction. While large-scale projects like expressways and metros have their merits, greater investment in regular roads would benefit the general populace. The current expressway project, with its toll system, may inadvertently exclude many individuals, raising concerns about fairness. If the government had heavily invested in road improvements, fairness would not have been a contentious issue. The introduction of franchise bus services could offer a solution. The government should undertake both substantial projects and simpler initiatives that directly assist the common people.

TDS: Are all the ongoing projects in Dhaka, such as the Dhaka Elevated Expressway, the Metrorail, and the flyovers, effectively coordinated to alleviate traffic congestion and enhance urban development, or are these projects being pursued independently without sufficient consideration for their synergy?

ADM: In Bangladesh, a prominent challenge across various project types is the lack of effective coordination, and this issue extends to transportation projects. The government often initiates multiple projects through different agencies, resulting in a lack of harmony and inadequate monitoring or supervision.

Coordination, particularly in the realms of planning and implementation, is conspicuously absent in Dhaka’s transportation efforts. Effective coordination is essential for both project execution and alignment with land use. Economic hubs typically emerge around these projects, underlining the importance of coordination with land authorities. The deficiency in coordination, as exemplified by the elevated expressway project, can restrict the potential impact of other projects.

Presently, uncertainty looms over the circular railway in Dhaka due to conflicting projects, such as the elevated expressway being constructed on railway land. Furthermore, the lack of coordination in feasibility studies results in wasted resources. Insufficient communication, as seen in the case of the metro and subway projects, detrimentally affects Dhaka’s livability.

Moreover, the Transport Coordination Authority’s role appears weak, leading to conflicts with mayors and project stakeholders. Even the expressway project itself appears to suffer from inadequate communication with local mayors.

Ultimately, the full impact of these projects will only be realized upon their completion. Managing ramp connections is pivotal to mitigate traffic congestion. Striking a balance between large-scale projects and pragmatic solutions should be a central focus.

The interview was taken by Md Fozlay Rabby Ansary

Project Implemented By

First Dhaka Elevated Expressway Company Ltd.

Current Implementation Status

Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Tejgaon

> Main line length: 11.5 km

> Total ramps: 16

> Total length including ramps: 22.5 km

Ramps Locations

Location	Entry	Exit
Airport	1	1
Kuril	2	1
Banani	2	2
Moakhali	1	2
Bijaysarani	3	0
Tejgaon	0	1

Phase 1

Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Banani Rail Station
7.45 km

Phase 2

Banani Rail Station to Mogbazar level crossing
5.85 km

Phase 3

Mogbazar level crossing to Kutubkhali
6.43 km

Timeline

19 January 2011:

Agreement signing

April 2011:

First inauguration by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

15 December 2013:

Revised agreement signing

1 January 2020:

Formal Construction Commencement Date (CCD)

August 2023:

Soft launching

2 September 2023:

Official inauguration of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Tejgaon section

30 June 2024:

Expected date of completion:

