

Missing policy reforms in Bangladesh's transport sector

A paradigm shift is needed—mobility networks must be separate from existing roads. While current roads offer accessibility, they lack efficiency, requiring comprehensive planning reforms for future demands.

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We need not look far for successful models: India has already implemented a solution with its Golden Quadrilateral, a separate mobility network with full access control. This network allows for speeds of 120 to 130 km per hour and is designed to minimise accidents by eliminating sudden access points. In contrast, merely widening existing roads in Bangladesh damages infrastructure, displaces communities, and fails to deliver sustainable improvements. This approach cannot be considered a viable solution for an effective mobility network.

A paradigm shift is needed—mobility networks must be separate from existing roads. While current roads offer accessibility, they lack efficiency, requiring comprehensive planning reforms for future demands.

Beyond improving the road system, Dhaka should be developed as a model city. Despite being the capital, it lacks a coherent structure. To address this, road infrastructure and transport-related projects must be kept free from political influence. The backbone of Dhaka's transport system should be public transport. Rather than relying on bus route franchises, a government-owned bus company should be established to oversee



and manage operations effectively. This company would operate all buses, with the government responsible for purchasing and phasing out outdated vehicles. Existing private bus companies could become shareholders, with both public and private investment facilitating the introduction of new, modern buses. This approach would lead to a more sustainable mobility system. If we continue to rely on companies operating outdated buses, we risk perpetuating an inefficient and unsustainable transport model.

We have presented this proposal to Chief Adviser Dr Mohammad Yunus. While Dhaka has already established sufficient infrastructure, it is now crucial to create a new ecosystem for buses. This is not just about purchasing new buses and forming a company. All 4,000 existing buses in Dhaka should be upgraded, and a variety of new bus models should be introduced to enhance service quality. A unified transport company could be established to manage operations, ensuring better coordination

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Dhaka Metro Rail.
PHOTO: STAR

and efficiency. Shareholders would benefit financially, while the government would maintain overall control, leading to an improved and more sustainable system.

Despite the complexity of mass transport in Dhaka, we have yet to establish a government-enlisted company to manage the system, even though we rely on such entities for linear metro or major infrastructure projects. That is why we have created a metro rail company and a BRT company, which currently operates only one line from Dhaka to Gazipur. However, Dhaka's bus system remains fragmented and inefficient. A comprehensive reform is necessary, ensuring that all buses operate under a single company for better functionality.

We are fortunate to have excellent river connectivity, which, if properly integrated with utilities, could significantly enhance accessibility and streamline urban mobility. A coordinated planning approach is essential, as water transport offers a sustainable, comfortable, and safe alternative with minimal environmental

impact. However, development must not lead to further pollution or encroachment. While policies exist to prevent such damage, their strict implementation is necessary.

Dhaka's rail connectivity with other districts has long been discussed, particularly the commuter train system, yet little has been done to realise its potential. Kamalapur and the Airport should be developed as major railway hubs to strengthen connectivity and reduce pressure on roads. The railway sector must shift its focus from expansion to maintenance, ensuring that existing stations and services operate efficiently.

However, the most crucial reform needed is a shift in mindset. No country can achieve safe roads or resolve traffic congestion solely through infrastructure development—effective planning, policy implementation, and a change in public perception are equally essential.

This article was transcribed by Raisa Nanjiba.



Dhaka Elevated Expressway.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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