



Urbanization and urban transport in india: the search for a policy

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Abstract

Urban population in India has increased significantly from 62 million in 1951 to 285 million in 2001 and is estimated to be around 540 million by the year 2021. In terms of percentage of total population, the urban population has gone up from 17% in 1951 to 29% in 2001 and is expected to increase up to around 37% by the year 2021. Consequently, the number and size of cities have also increased significantly. Although circumstances differ considerably across cities in India, certain basic trends which determine transport demand (such as substantial increase in urban population, household incomes, and industrial and commercial activities) are the same. These changes have placed heavy demands on urban transport systems, demand that many Indian cities have been unable to meet.

This paper attempts to highlight the need for a cogent urban transport policy without which there will be ad hoc interventions. Such interventions, apart from not adding up to a comprehensive approach, will result in greater confusion. Furthermore, it emphasizes that if there is no worthwhile public transport, it will still need to be reinvented to promote a better quality of life. The need of the hour is formulation of an urban transport strategy that is both pragmatic and holistic in its approach.

Keywords: Urbanization; Urban Transport Policy.

1. The present context

The making of transport policy is a tricky affair. Transport being essentially a derived activity its conceptualization and articulation depends upon a variety of social and economic issues and longer-term goals. India has however attempted twice to evolve a transport policy. The first in 1966 when the dreams of independence were still alive and the second in 1980 under the shadow of zooming oil prices. In a typically oriental fashion, on both the occasions, the policies were accepted in toto by the government and subsequently subjected to studied neglect. The silver lining however was the establishment of State Transport Undertakings (STUs) which in the 1960s and the 1970s did an enormous service in linking up towns and villages across the country, particularly

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