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Social Objectives of Public Transport Undertakings

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The general public who use the Public Transport expect that the service should be convenient, cheap and fast. On the other hand these transport undertakings also have their operational problems. The main aim of this article is to define briefly and clearly the social objectives, and evaluation tools for the same.

Transport service is essential next to water and electricity. Over-crowding, centralisation of industries and other such situations in cities lead to untold problems both to the Government and to the general public. To solve these problems and to provide cheap and efficient transport services to the travelling public, public transport undertakings become necessary and inevitable. In India, public transport undertakings are being operated by various State Governments, municipal undertakings and other Government bodies. Now-days public transport undertakings occupy 40.4% of the total transport service, operated by 67 different nationalised transport undertakings with a fleet of about 87,000 vehicles catering to the needs of 5.12 crores of passengers everyday¹. The image of State Transport Undertakings depend largely on the comforts they provide to the travelling public. STUs should provide safe, comfortable and reliable service. They should inculcate among their crew a sense of discipline and the attitude to be courteous and helpful to the passengers².

Objectives of the Public Transport Undertakings

The objectives of the various transport undertakings as laid down in the Road Transport Corporations Act, 1950 are to provide

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efficient, economic, coordinated and adequate transport service to the travelling public... these specified objectives could be divided into two parts viz., (a) social objectives (b) commercial objectives³. The objectives of Transport Undertakings are both social and commercial or economic... the social objectives are related to the provision of area wide service facilities, better service to the public, service with amenities, punctual service etc...⁴

The social objectives of public transport undertakings may be related with quality of service or factors which attract potential riders or passenger requirements.

Quality of Service

Quality of service is one of the vital factors to achieve passenger satisfaction. It is related with safety, reliability, punctuality and regularity of operation⁵. It includes qualitative elements of service such as convenience and simplicity of using of the system, riding comfort, cleanliness and behaviour towards the passenger⁶. In other words the quality of service may be accessibility, speed, safety, reliability and frequency of movements...⁷

Factors that attract potential riders

In 1970, The CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) which transports about 1.2 million people daily with 24 hours a day of service, carried out a study to determine what factors would attract potential riders to mass transit. Under this study the following factors were identified:

- a) more frequent, faster, dependable service
- b) more comfort
- c) more parking
- d) employee courtesy
- e) greater promotion - public relations⁸

Passenger requirements

The following are the passenger's requirements from public transport undertakings.

- a) Availability
- b) Punctuality
- c) Speed
- d) User cost
- e) comfort
- f) Convenience
- g) Safety⁹

While determining social objectives of the corporation, the above mentioned aspects are not only very important to consider but also unavoidable. Hence the social objectives of public transport undertakings should mainly cover the following aspects.

Achievement of social objectives or efficiency of corporation with regard to its social objectives can be measured from the point view of users, passengers, operator and Government. Moreover, the efficiency of the corporation can be measured purely with the help of personal observation. Therefore, the following aspects can also be used as tools to measure efficiency of corporation with regard to its social objectives.

1. Speed of buses
2. Frequency of buses
3. Punctuality of buses
4. Comforts & convenience of buses
5. Behaviour of bus crew
6. Bus fare

1. Speed of buses

It is defined as the time rate of movement of two points. The total travel time is composed of four parts: access, waiting, travel

and departure times. Travel time may differ due to the road conditions and traffic problems. Speed time can be fixed after carefully considering all the factors. The statutory speed limitation for stage carriage in our country is 60 km. per hour (See Eighth schedule to the Motor Vehicles Act as amended by Act 56 of 1969). Practically, it is possible to have an average speed of 50 k.m. for express passenger service as it has less number of stops, and a 30 k.m. for ordinary passenger service as it has to pick up passengers and it has more stops, traffic problems etc.,¹⁰

Frequency of buses

Frequency of service is defined as the number of transit unit departures per hour on a particular route. More frequency of service is needed in the routes where higher demand of transport exists.

Punctuality of buses

Punctuality is defined as schedule adherence. Non-adherence to schedule may result from traffic delay, vehicles breakdowns and accidents, weather condition, vehicles conditions etc. Of all the reasons, traffic delays, over which no transport undertaking has any control, is a greater cause and the most significant one. However, a delay of 5 minutes from schedule time is considered reasonable for all time.

Comfort and convenience of buses

Comfort

The ultimate aim of the public transport undertaking is to make the passenger happy. This can be done mainly by ensuring comfort of service. It is very difficult to define the term 'comfort' exactly as it encompasses many qualitative factors such as physical comfort of the seat, quick and reliable ticketing, vehicles with good and adequate ventilation, less jerk and noise during travel, smooth driving, crowdless travel etc.,

Convenience

Convenience refers to the overall system while comfort is related to the vehicle. By nature, evaluation of convenience is also predominantly qualitative. Good off-peak service, clear information system, well designed and protected waiting facilities, sufficiently close parking, wayside shelters, provision of drinking water, canteens and sanitary toilet facilities at bus stations, convenience such as refreshment rooms, postal and telephone facilities, clock rooms, book stalls, fruit stalls, wall-clocks, weighing machines, good porter facilities, advance booking and reservation counters, inquiries and police outposts are also essential. Now-a-days facilities such as well cushioned comfortable reclining seats, cool air conditioning, channel music, cinema shows in running buses etc., are considered desirable. Magazines and dailies for reading during journey should be provided in the buses. Clear information system like time-table boards made up in the regional languages should be installed in all bus stations. The changes in the bus service schedule should be shown promptly to the users.

Behaviour of bus crew

It refers the conduct, mode of acting and treatment of passenger by the bus crew. The image of public transport undertakings is admittedly dependent on the behaviour of the conductor as well as the driver. The passenger may feel unhappy due to behaviour such as smoking in the buses, refusal to stop at schedule place, stopping the buses at unscheduled place to get in or out the passengers, careless driving etc.

Bus fare

It is the authorised payment for a ride on a bus whether cash, token, transfer or pass. The price of transportation may be fixed after considering various factors such as nature and level of income, galloping inflation, the paying capacity of the society at large, cost of transport service etc. This principle should be strictly considered in countries like India where 77% of people are living in rural areas