

TRANSPORT SERVICE OF SRI LANKA - AN EVALUATION

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The transport service of Sri Lanka, like nature, is something that no one can control at will. However, it is also a fact that is not its only characteristic.

If that is so, it may be better put if we say that Sri Lanka's passengers have never benefitted so far and are unlikely to benefit in the future from transport services.

Passenger transport was earlier a 'service', but now it is a business, a source of self-employment.

The work stoppage of the private bus services in June this year revealed the state of the buses under Government control. The daily income jumped up from Rs 1.1 million to Rs 3.3 million but it may not have led to any improvement in the transport service in general.

The main reason was that the state sector does not have adequate facilities required for passenger transport today.

It cannot now be said that passenger transport is not a profitable venture. An inquiry into the private sector's intervention in the transport services will show what a money spinner it is.

(In this inquiry, the private bus service in the Western Province is being used as a case study).

If passenger transport is unprofitable, would the number of registered buses 5148 in 1990 to 5757 by 15.05.1991? Thus in one year the number of buses had increased by 645. (As many as 400 of them had obtained route licences on the basis of SMI bank loans).

Within the Western Provincial Council area limits there are three transport districts. They are:

1. Colombo district
2. Gampaha district
3. Kalutara district

There are three private bus societies in the Colombo district and two private bus societies in the Gampaha district.

These societies often act like rivals. A society wise breakdown of the buses is given below:

Colombo District:

Society No. 1	764 buses
Society No. 2	1552 buses
Society No. 3	567 buses
Total	2883 buses

Gampaha District:

Society No. 1	805 buses
Society No. 2	1139 buses
Total	1944 buses

Kalutara District:

The Kalutara District Society 930 buses

According to reports about 733 buses enter the stand at People's Park and about 388

buses enter the stand on Bastian Mawatha daily.

From the Bastian Mawatha bus stand, buses leave for places like Matugama, Kalutara, Pelawatte, Deniyaya, Galle, Matara, Kataragama, Kandy, Matale, Welimada and Nuwara Eliya.

About 238 buses go daily to Matara, Galle, Kataragama and Hambantota from Colombo and about 321 buses come to Colombo from these areas.

Statistics from the Kalutara District show that it is not only in the towns that the private sector is capable of operating a passenger transport service profitably.

There were 1041 buses which had obtained license for passenger transport in the Kalutara District, as at 18.10.1991.

Some of the routes in which the private sector, through the district transport society, runs its buses (including the routes neglected by the state transport service as uneconomical) are as given in Fig. 1.

In this connection it is worth taking note of the routes on which only one bus operates. They are given in Fig. 2. (Kalutara District)

In order to curtail frequent clashes between private bus drivers and conductors, the Director, Transport of the Western Provincial Council has often spelled out their duties and responsibilities (though it cannot be said that these are being adhered to, much). Some of these duties and responsibilities are:

Fig. 1

Route Number	Number of Buses	Starting Point	Destination
400	218	Kalutara	Colombo
100	119	Panadura	Pettah
400 /2	88	Negombo	Pettah
458	13	Matugama	Horana
420	25	Kalutara	Horana
285	23	Horana	Matugama
430	60	Matugama	Colombo
450	67	Panadura	Ratnapura
482	14	Matugama	Manana
435	10	Pelawatte	Matugama
120	25	Horana	Colombo
463	21	Panadura	Morontuduwa
441	23	Matugama	Alutgama
423	25	Kalutara	Neboda
125	12	Ingiriya	Colombo
449	09	Horana	Ingiriya
462	15	Panadura	Alutgama

Fig. 2

Routes on which only one bus operates			
Route No.	No. of Buses	Starting Point	Destination
456	01	Panadura	Diggala
831	01	Panadura	Nugegoda
282	01	Horana	Padukka
662	01	Panadura	Atulugama
413	01	Matugama	Malewala
162/1	01	Bandaragama	Piliyandala
966	01	Matugama	Kaluaggala
400/3	01	Bandaragama	Ingiriya
426	01	Kalutara	Koholama
24/1	01	Avittawa	Colombo

Fig. 3

Routes on which a maximum of three (3) buses operate			
Route No.	No. of Buses	Starting point	Destination
142/2	03	Panadura	Moratuwa
419	03	Kalutara	Kethena
365	03	Alutgama	Kotakanatta
388/2	03	Alutgama	Ambalangoda
400/4	02	Kalutara	Alutgama
280	03	Horana	Maharagama
388	02	Alutgama	Galle
158/1	02	Paratte	Moratuwa
101	02	Panadura	Fort
465	03	Panadura	Gonapola
142/1	03	Panadura	Moratuwa

1. You must remember that the success of the operation of buses will depend on your co-operation, the manner in which you do your work and the manner in which you follow the rules and regulations issued to you. You must do everything in your power to prevent discontent among the people involved in the venture. This will be possible only if you act with an understanding of your responsibilities to the institution and to the passengers.
2. You must always remember that you are doing not only a job but also a public service.
3. Please note that punctuality, cleanliness, pride in your appearance and your uniform will help you in your work. (A uniform had been proposed for the drivers and conductors of private buses).
4. You must be courteous and helpful to the passengers, the officers and the fellow-employees.
5. You must always be quick, careful and efficient in doing your work.

The instructions go further and are listed

under titles like 'How to run the vehicle to ensure its long life', 'Careless driving', 'How you must drive your vehicle in a manner that will ensure your safety and that of the passengers and the pedestrians'.

It is a matter for shame that the private sector has shown surprisingly good economic results on the routes where the S.L.T.B. has been an utter failure inspite of adequate legal support and the Government's backing.

Although it is true that failure was due to lack of proper management, another factor that seems to have contributed is that an atmosphere free from political pressure and corruption conducive to proper management had not been created. The result was that the SLTB became insolvent.

The State transport service is trying hard to survive. According to a letter addressed to Chairman / Secretary, Sri Lanka Transport Board, the State transport sector sought an alternative source of income by displaying advertisements on buses, because expenditure of maintaining the buses and the buildings is very high.

While it is apparent that the aim of providing a public service has now become almost non-existent for the state transport sectors, the private sector has been able to operate a bus every 02 minutes on some routes. Because the fares are now equal in both the sectors, the private sector can hope for more business and therefore a better income.

Routes where there is a bus every 02 minutes:

Narahenpita - Fort

Routes where there is a bus every 05 minutes:

Colombo - Negombo

Fort - Battaramulla

Mattakkuliya - Mount Lavinia

Mattakkuliya - Fort

Kotahena - Rawatawatte

Kotahena - Maharagama

Kotahena - Nugegoda

Hettiyawatte - Karagampitiya

Colombo - Kottawa

Colombo - Kadawata

Colombo - Maharagama

Colombo - Homagama

Routes where there is a bus every 15 minutes:

Colombo - Katunayake Airport

Colombo - Kelaniya

Colombo - Weliveriya

Colombo - Pugoda

Colombo - Godagama

Narahenpita - Wellawatte

Fort - Malabe

Colombo - Kuliyaipitiya

Colombo - Minuwangoda

Colombo - Kandy

Fort - Talawatugoda

Fort - Angoda

Fort - Aturugiriya

Colombo - Ratnapura

Colombo - Kegalle

Colombo - Kurunegala

It must also be mentioned that there are certain areas which are not served either by the State transport service or by the private transport service.

The condition of the people living in areas which have an acute shortage of bus services is made worse by the fact that there are no railway services functioning in those areas either.

Lack of a large enough population, lack of suitable roads and buses are among the major obstacles to the solving of problems in the transport service.

Due to all these factors, there is only one bus a day from Colombo to some areas. Some of such areas are: Batticaloa, Kalmunai,

(Cont. on 18)

Transport Services of Sri Lanka.....

(Cont. from 16)

Nawalapitiya, Teldeniya, Inginimitiye, Medawachchiya, Eppawela, Kahatagasdigiya, Kekirawa, Bulnewa, Bakamuna, Witechchiya, Rajangane, Galnewa, and Rismehera.

Practically there are about 1,500 passengers a day boarding a private bus. This number of passengers and the income received help to make the business profitable and, if there is good management, there will be enough opportunities to double and treble that profit.