

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON TRANSPORTATION: What the Experts Say

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Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank all the transport experts interviewed for their time, cooperation and valuable inputs without which this study would not have been possible.

Introduction

Transportation is one of the major sectors, which has been severely affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was conducted by the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPR) from June to July 2020, among experts from the transportation sector to understand their perception of the effects of the pandemic on the sector in India. A total of 15 experts consisting of academicians, practitioners, policy makers and researchers, from different parts of the country, who were closely working with the transportation sector were interviewed. As the country continues to live with the pandemic and an unforeseeable end to the crisis, many questions arise regarding the future of the passenger transportation sector in India.

- How long will the transportation sector be affected?
- How will the pandemic change the travel behaviour of commuters?
- What is the future of public transportation in our country?

The study tries to find answers to the above questions by evaluating the views and opinions of the experts who work closely with the transportation sector.

Objectives of the study

- To understand the impact of the nationwide lockdown on the transport sector from the opinions and perceptions of the experts closely associated with the transportation industry.
- To provide an insight to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders, on the various sub-sectors in the transportation industry that need focused investments in future.
- To determine the solutions that can be taken, to bring the transportation sector to its normal state post COVID-19.

Methodology

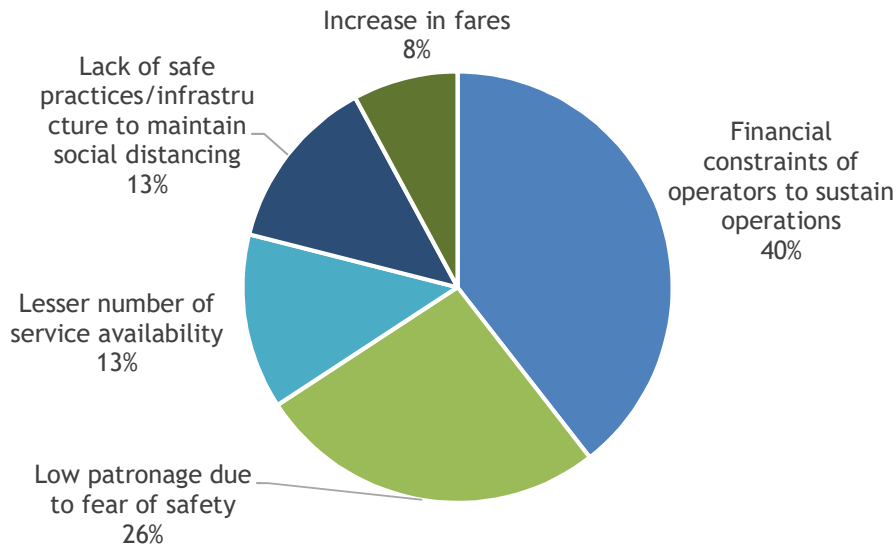
The data was collected using a questionnaire based survey method, created on Google Forms. This analysis used an online questionnaire, which took around 10-15 minutes per person to answer. The questionnaire was sent to the selected experts via e-mail. The responses of the experts were collected and compiled and a qualitative approach was used for the study by performing a comparative analysis of the responses.

Challenges and Changes Post Covid-19

There is consensus among the experts that the current pandemic will create new challenges for the transport sector, especially for public transport. Operators will face severe financial constraints in

the immediate future owing to the reduced travel demand for public transport. Experts suggest low patronage for public transport in future due to fear of safety and lack of practices/ infrastructure to maintain social distancing. This might even induce a reduction in the number of services available and therefore an increase in fares.

Biggest Challenges for Public Transport post-COVID-19

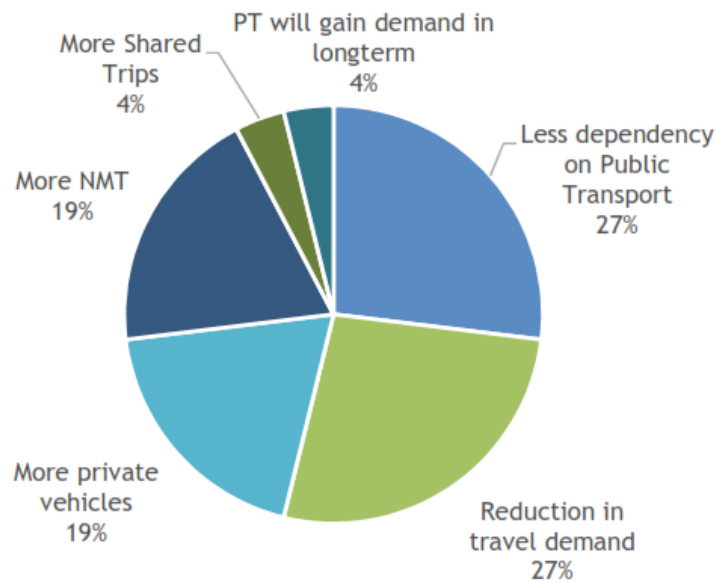


"An increase in Work from Home culture may reduce travel demand. Also, people will gradually shift back to public transport, once the trust is restored but this may take a little longer time"

*Mr. Shirish Mahendru
Technical Expert, GIZ GmBH*

The overall travel behaviour of the people is also expected to change drastically with respect to both demand and the mode of commute. According to a citizen’s survey conducted by CPPR (Annexure 1), majority of respondents preferred private transportation over public transportation post-lockdown. Most of the experts are also of the opinion that there will be a huge reduction in travel demand triggered by changes like reduced job opportunities and work from home practices. The choice of mode will be greatly influenced by safety concerns, and the experts opine that there would be an increased preference for private vehicles, non-motorised transport (NMT) and shared mobility services with reduced dependency on public transport. Experts unanimously predict a change in the share of major modes of transport with two-wheelers increasing its share significantly while that of the Metro services reducing sharply. Non-motorized transport like Cycling and Walking will also be increasingly preferred. Buses and Auto-rickshaws will compete for a share of the pie and will be driven by fares/ pricing. A few of the experts feel that these changes might be short-term and that we will return to pre-Covid patterns once the virus is tamed.

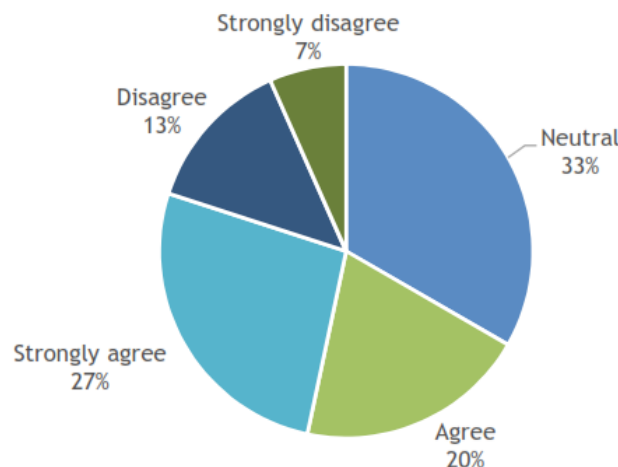
Overall change in travel behaviour of people post-Covid-19



Policy Changes for Future

A major suggestion given by all experts was to improve the infrastructure for Non-motorized transport and electric vehicles. The government should prioritize investments in these two areas when compared to the other sectors in transportation. The National Urban Transport Policy, 2006 recommended the formation of a Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA), in cities with a million plus population, to facilitate coordinated planning and implementation of urban transport programmes and to manage integrated urban transport systems.¹ Till date only few cities or States have taken slow paced steps to implement this Authority. Some of the experts think that the pandemic will speed up the implementation of UMTA which will ensure better coordination between multiple stakeholder departments in urban transport planning. On the contrary, some feel that the pandemic will have no effect on the pace at which UMTA will get implemented.

Do you think the pandemic can result in speedy implementation of UMTA?



1. Operations Document For Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA). Operational Guidelines, Urban Transport, New Delhi: Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, 2016.



"Public Transport is an essential service, should not be treated as a business."

Prof. Geetam Tiwari

Professor for Transport Planning, IIT-Delhi

Since financial constraints will increase for the public transport sector, an increase in fares might be a plausible policy route. Experts have a divided opinion here. Most of them do not consider an increase in fare as a justifiable strategy as it is not equitable. Public transport is increasingly used by the poorer sections of the society and an increase in fare might make it unaffordable to them since they are already facing the economic impact of the pandemic in the form of reduced incomes, and loss of job opportunities. A different perspective is shared by some experts who recommend a fare increase which is much needed for the sustenance and survival of public transport as the current fares are much below the affordability threshold of patrons. In the short run, this might reduce the demand which can help in ensuring social distancing practices being effectively implemented.

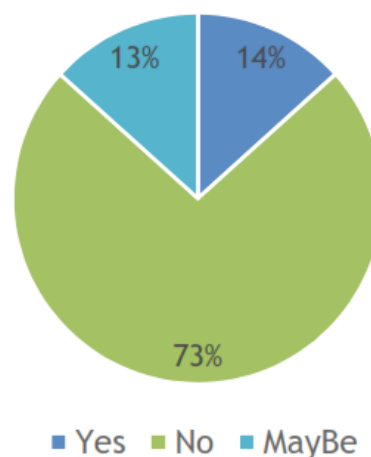


"Public transport fares in India are already less than affordability threshold of users"

Mr. Ravi Gadepalli

Transport Consultant, UITP India

Do you think increasing the fare in public transport is a justifiable strategy adopted by the government?



Relief Measures for the Sector

Experts feel that it will take at least a year or two for the transport sector to bounce back to normalcy. This calls for some relief measures and support from the government during this time, that can usher a speedy recovery for the sector.

Private operators will be taking a huge hit on their revenue due to subdued demand for travel

because of lockdown restrictions and safety concerns. The financial constraints and obligations can drive many of them out of business which will lead to reduced service availability. Experts recommend government support by ensuring credit availability through cheap loans and moratoriums. Tax exemptions on fuel, vehicles, etc., and exemptions on toll and parking charges could be helpful for the sector to stay afloat, according to the experts.



"Create an urban transport fund to compensate for financial losses."

-Mr. O.P. Agarwal

CEO, WRI India

Increased public spending (through Urban Transport Fund) for transport infrastructure development and improving the efficiency of public transport will boost the sector according to the experts. Technological advancements on ticketing and scheduling can improve safety and help build public confidence in the sector. Most of the experts highly recommend increased investments in building NMT infrastructure which will aid the emergence of new opportunities within the sector in future.

Key Findings

- Transport operators will face severe financial constraints in the immediate future due to reduced travel demand.
- The choice of mode will be influenced by safety concerns. Hence public transport would be a less preferred mode by the people.
- The government should prioritize investing in improving the infrastructure for Non-motorised Transport (NMT) and electric vehicles in the transport sector.
- Seven out of 15 experts are of the opinion that the pandemic will result in speedy implementation of Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA) in different cities.
- 11 out of 15 experts disagree with the strategy adopted by the government on increasing the fare of public transport during the ongoing pandemic.
- The transport sector will take atleast one or two years to get back to normalcy.
- The experts recommended that the government should support private operators in the transport sector, as they would be adversely affected by the pandemic which could result in a discontinuation of operations.
- There is a need to create an Urban Transport Fund for dedicated investment in the transport sector.

Annexures

Annexure 1

A COVID-19 Impact survey was conducted by the Centre for Public Policy Research among 500 respondents across India from 16th to 30th of June during the period when Unlock Phase 1 was underway. The Survey spotlighted the COVID-19 related perceptions, precautionary behaviours, and government responses in an attempt to discern the level of preparedness among the masses and their outlook on the government's management of the crisis. The study also looked into travel patterns in the pre-lockdown and during the lockdown phase and assessed the change in people's perception of public transport.

All the respondents were Indian nationals above 18 years of age who have been residing in India continuously since February 2020. Geographically the respondents were spread over 22 states and 2 Union Territories and 41% of the respondents were from Kerala.

Key finding of the survey regarding modes of transport are listed here:

- COVID & the ensuing lockdown has seen a clear shift to a private mode of transport over public modes.
- The situation before COVID-19 suggests that NMT modes like walking and cycling were preferred by respondents for shorter distances (below 10 kms). For larger distances these modes are mainly replaced by cars and app-based shared cabs (Uber and Ola).
- There is a consistent increase in the percentage of app-based shared cab users as the distance travelled increases. This is specific to pre COVID-19 scenario.
- Four out of ten respondents who are currently working from home stated that their probability of continuing work from home after the lockdown was high. In that case, the work trips of these respondents will surely decrease.
- Before COVID-19, six out of ten respondents were using private transport, whereas post lockdown nine out of ten respondents preferred private transport. This implies that the share of public transport users will decrease from four to one (out of ten) post lockdown.
- Six out of ten respondents are of the opinion that public transport is not safe to travel after lockdown.
- During the pandemic the perception of safety regarding public transport usage increases with age.
- Two out of ten respondents are planning to buy a new vehicle post lockdown. And 65% of the newly bought vehicles would be cars. Hence, there will be a 13% increase in the number of cars post lockdown.
- Public Transport shall face huge setbacks in terms of the number of users as many of them would opt for private modes of travel post lockdown.

The full report can be accessed here: <https://www.cppr.in/reports-and-papers/covid-19-impact-survey-covid-19-related-perceptions-precautionary-behaviour-and-response>

Annexure 2: List of Transport Experts interviewed

S.No.	Name of the Expert	Designation	Organisation/Institution affiliated
1	O.P. Agarwal	CEO	WRI India
2	Antony B.J.	Rtd. Senior Deputy Transport Commissioner	Motor Vehicle Department, Kerala
3	Dennis Jose	Urban Transport Expert	Urban Mass Transit Company Limited
4	Edsley Neoson Daniel R	Transport Expert, City Advisor	C40 Cities
5	Geetam Tiwari	TRIPP Chair, Professor for Transport Planning	IIT Delhi
6	Mayank Dubey	Assistant Professor	Dept. of Transport Planning, SPA Bhopal
7	Naseer M A	Professor (spcl. In Transport Planning)	N I T CALICUT
8	Paulose NK	Assistant Professor (spcl. In Transport Planning)	Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning, SPA Bhopal
9	Ravi Gadepalli	Transport Consultant	UITP India
10	Samradh Singh Chauhan	Senior Project Scientist	TRIPP IIT Delhi
11	Shirish Mahendru	Technical Expert, SMART SUT(Sustainable Urban Transport) Project	GIZ GmbH
12	E M Sooraj	Project Officer-Urban	ICLEI South Asia
13	Spurthi Ravuri	Research Analyst - Transport	CSTEP

- Two experts chose not to reveal their identity.
- The list is according to alphabetical order.

Annexure 3: Survey Format

COVID-19 SURVEY FORM FOR TRANSPORT SECTOR EXPERTS

To understand the effects of COVID19 on the transportation sector from the perspective of the sector experts, CPPR has initiated this survey. As an expert in the field of transportation, your response will definitely help us in contributing to a significant study. Please spare a few minutes to fill this quick survey.

***Required**

1. (A) Name of the expert *

2. (B) Organisation/Institution affiliated *

3. 1. What do you think are the biggest challenges concerning the public transport post covid ? *

Tick all that apply.

- Low patronage due to fear of safety
 Lesser number of service availability
 Financial constraints of operators to sustain operations
 Lack of safe practices/infrastructure to maintain social distancing
 Increase in fares
 No new challenges. The transportation sector will get back to the same situation as before (pre-covid)

Other: _____

4. 2. Do you think there will be an overall change in travel behavior of people in the future (Post-covid) ? *

Mark only one oval.

- No
 Yes
 Maybe

5. 2 a. If yes please specify how ? *

Tick all that apply.

- More private vehicles
- More NMT
- Less dependency on Public Transport
- Reduction in travel demand

Other: _____

6. 3. Do you think there will be a change in mode share data ? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

7. 3 a. If yes, what will be the predominant mode in Indian cities post covid ?
(arrange in ascending order 1- most predominant 6- least predominant) *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
Two wheeler	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cycling & walking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Buses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Metro	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Auto-rickshaws	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. 4. In future the transport sector in India should prioritize investments on what kind of infrastructure ? (1- high priority 3-least priority) *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1	2	3
infrastructure for non motorized vehicles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Infrastructure for electric vehicles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Infrastructure for motorised vehicles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. 5. Do you think pandemic can result in speedy implementation of UMTA and can help to coordinate transport sector activities in the city efficiently ? *

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. 6. How long do you think it would take for the transport sector to be normal ? *

Mark only one oval.

- 6 months
- 1 year
- 2 years
- More than 2 years
- More than 5 years

11. 7. Do you think increasing the fare in public transport is a justifiable strategy adopted by the Government ?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

12. 7 a. Please specify reason for the same ? *

13. 8. In your opinion what could be an efficient strategy to ease the financial constraints of the private operators ? *

14. 9. In your opinion what could be the three major proactive measures that could be taken to reduce the negative impacts in the transport sector ? *

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