

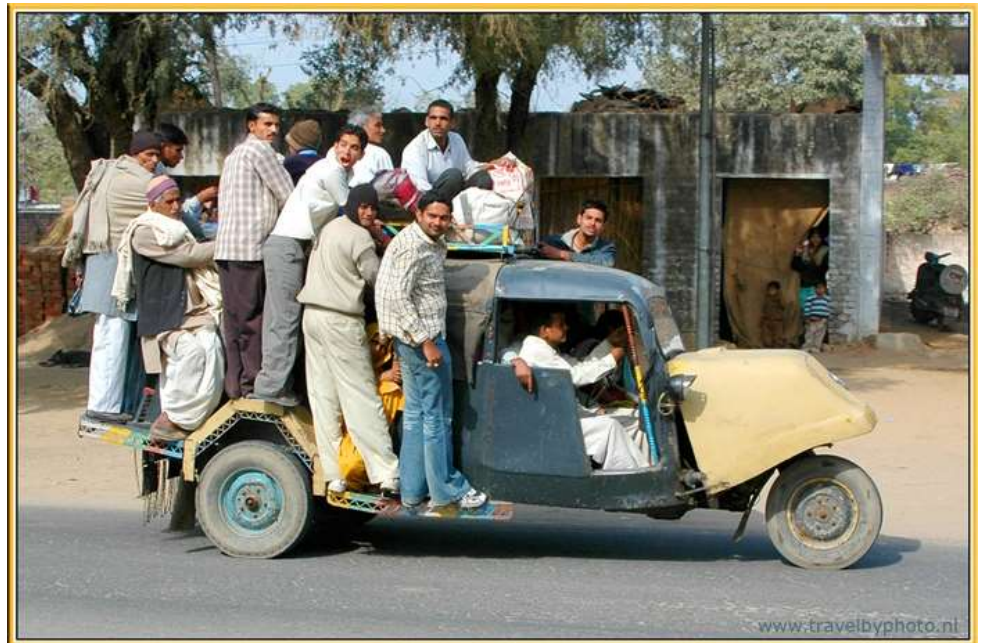
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Paving the way for the para-transit sector

By **Deepthi Susan Ponodath**On **Aug 29, 2018**

It is time that the Intermediate Public Transport sector in India is recognised, legalised and integrated into the public transportation policies of the country.

It seems impossible today to imagine India without cycle rickshaws, auto rickshaws, taxis and other para-transit systems that ply us from place to place, at our comfort and convenience, irrespective of the time of day. They support and complement the public transport system in our cities by offering the first and last-mile connectivity, while also meeting the transit demand wherever public transport falls short. Yet, they continue to be neglected by the authorities.



The Motor Vehicles Act (MVA), 1988, does not recognise the Intermediate Public Transport (IPT) sector or informal modes such as share autos, share cabs and shuttle services. The definitions for 'contract carriage' and 'stage carriage' remain unaltered since the introduction of the Act.

The National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP), 2006, lays down various guidelines for public transport in the cities and recognises the role played by IPTs in the transport system. NUTP could have guided the incorporation of feeder services into the overall transport system but

failed to do so. The lack of policies and provisions for the improvement of the IPT sector in India continues to remain the root cause of the problem.

“A major issue faced by the IPT sector is in obtaining permits. Most IPTs are registered as contract carriages under the MVA. This allows them to ply passengers on demand, while restricting their operations as a shared service catering to multiple passengers and stops, which is permitted only under stage carriage permit.”

The State Governments are hesitant in issuing stage carriage permits to IPTs lest they compete with the state transport system. In addition, many cities have capped the number of permits. The difficulty in obtaining permits has resulted in permits being sold at a premium to the operators at exorbitant rates. This has culminated in the rise of illegal auto rickshaw operations, permit mafias, black market and corruption.

It is often overlooked that the operators and drivers of IPTs mostly come from the poorer sections of society and the income from these operations is often their sole means of livelihood. The multitude of complications in attaining permits and other associated informal costs due to the inherent corruption that plagues the system often leaves them in a cycle of spiralling debt.

Lack of adequate infrastructure facilities such as designated stands and parking spaces in high demand areas has resulted in illegal parking, overcrowding and encroachment of roads. The fact that IPTs are individual, unorganised and unstable, has affected their ability to ensure a standard quality of service. The congestion on roads and the rise in vehicular population was blamed on the IPTs and the resultant disruptive regulations hindered their growth and stability. As a result of their inability to earn a decent living, they are often seen overcharging passengers and being hostile to them.

Coordination among various stakeholders is vital for policy implementation for IPTs. The institutional and regulatory framework for urban transport does not integrate IPT into decision-making and investments.

“The lack of any policy framework encouraging competition or innovations in the IPT sector is evident from the absence of any significant change in the design and model of IPT modes such as auto rickshaws over the past decades.”

This brings us to one of the major reasons for the amorphous growth pattern and absence of innovation in the IPT sector, which is the lack of focused initiatives, both legislative and policy wise, aimed at its development.



Being in the 'concurrent list', the central, state and local governments have functional roles and powers in decision-making with regard to the transportation sector, with the power mostly

concentrated at the centre and state levels. The MVA was introduced by the centre, whereas the state formulated the rules and regulations, while the local governments issued permits. This multiplicity in governing authorities gave way to a total lack of transparency, thereby further complicating the process. Each of these issues, though individually small, has a larger cumulative impact on the sector. The way forward is to have a collective approach towards addressing these issues.

The MVA can be amended to recognise IPT and modify the definitions for contract carriage and stage carriage to include shared services. The restrictions on issue of permits can be eased, permitting IPT as feeder services in routes where public transport is short or absent. Provision of adequate infrastructural outlay in the form of stands and parking areas around major public hotspots, or absorbing them in required numbers in high demand areas such as bus stands, metro and train stations, malls, corporate buildings, etc. will help organise them and bring accountability and stability to the IPT sector. This will ensure safety, comfort and convenience to the passengers, do away with the problems of congestion, overcrowding, illegal operations, overcharging, hostile attitude and infighting. It will also facilitate the overall integration of the transportation system at the city level.

The local government should be vested with the power to resolve issues and take decisions regarding transportation within its jurisdiction. Provisions in the law specifically designed for the IPT sector are required to enable them to grow, improve and innovate, thereby ensuring competition and the entry of new players in the sector.

“Legalising IPTs and integrating them with the formal transport system will ensure overall connectivity and convenience. It will also safeguard the interests of the poor operators, providing them with a legal and decent means

of income.”

There is a growing need to pave way for the IPT sector in India, starting with recognising, legalising and integrating it as a part of our transport system. This will enhance the first and last-mile connectivity and subsequently improve the ridership in the public transport system thereby providing an answer to urban India's transportation woes.

(This is the concluding part of a three-part series on Intermediate Para Transit.)



Deepthi Susan Ponodath

The writer is an urban planner by profession, and heads the Centre for Urban Studies at Centre for Public Policy Research, Koch, Kerala. She can be reached on twitter @DeepthiPonodath

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