



NATIONAL TRANSPORT POLICY

L. Nimal introduced in the current status of the transport sector in Sri Lanka

National transport by its definition includes all the modes of transport including land, water and air transportation available and made use of by a government in providing accessibility and mobility to its inhabitants. However, national transport in Sri Lanka is presumed to be focused on land transportation only. The three modes of transport land, water and air are alienated from one another and are managed through different policy making bodies. Even transport infrastructure is disintegratively dealt by having a separate policy for national highways at draft level since 2000.

Out of the total passenger transportation over land, public transportation modal share of motorized trips is 73%, road based public transportation having the major share, accounts for nearly 68%. Share of the railway is at a very minimal level of only 5% overall. However, railways carry nearly 15-20% of the commuter traffic during peak periods. Omnibus services are the dominant mode in the road with government owned bus services share of 27% of the total and private operator share of 40% provided by small scale operators. Other para-bus transit modes such as three wheelers, trix services, hired vehicles and vehicles servicing different needs of the society have increased over the years. This sector is not regulated and is solely operated on owners will, even though they contribute to a substantial portion of travel.

Managing a 1412 km length of rail network with 323 stations radiating from Colombo and branching off at regular intervals, Sri Lanka railways which had a

very illustrious history has become a giant squander owing up government funds with very minimal modal share. Except for 118 km double-track lines around Colombo, the rest of the network is single-track line. Railway carries 150 million passengers per annum, majority of the passengers being daily commuters to work. Sri Lanka railway is operating on its own being the regulator as well as the operator. There is no coordinated effort made between road and rail transportation. Feeder services to railway stations are not effective or do not exist.

Freight transportation over land is mainly operated by private owners of vehicle fleets. Railway accounts for 2% of the goods transport and the rest is transported by road. A proper study has not been carried out to identify the barriers of this sector, hence, leaving the issues in the hand of private owners to solve. Wastage of perishable produce during transportation proves the inefficiency in freight movements.

Having nearly 200,000 km in length of total road divided into national, provincial and local roads, as per the international standard it is considered that Sri Lanka's road system is adequate to cater to the present conditions but is unlikely to mitigate rising transport demand. However the road density being 1.6 km per km² land and 5.5 km roads in length for 2000 population, is the highest among all South Asian countries. Recently under the Mahinda Chinthana - national infrastructure development programme, construction of flyovers, widening of urban roads and increase of traffic management measures have been implemented to support the

growth of urban city centres. Major highways and other rural development programmes are focusing on local roads rehabilitation. In addition, a number of Apart from that a number of major road rehabilitation programmes are in progress at national level. Initiatives have been taken to set up a Road Maintenance Trust Fund (RMTF) and a Road Sector Master Plan (RSMP) to develop a long term road maintenance plan. Similar conditions prevail in Railway transportation. Steps have been taken to improve the rail track conditions and extension of railway lines and establish new ones.

With the decrease of quality of public transport and increase living conditions of the general public, the demand pattern for transport has changed tremendously. People have shifted to private transport modes and para-transit modes. But still the public transport modal share is higher, showing signs that majority of the people still require a reasonable travel option at a lower cost.

Total accidents on roads have been rising for three decades starting from opening of the economy in 1977. The most worrying scenario is that an average of 4% of total accidents is more likely to cause deaths. Main reasons for high fatal incidents are overloading and high speed driving. Further, statistics shows that use of motorcycle is unsafe in the road transportation.

At present Sri Lanka has a set of regulations on environmental impact assessments on transport infrastructure. Vehicle fitness testing is regulated. Recently fuel emission testing was regulated but requirements on noise standards for all vehicles have not been regulated as yet.

2. Salient Features of the Transport Sector in Sri Lanka

The above analysis is summarised below by identifying the salient features of the present situation of the transport sector in Sri Lanka.

1. Disintegration of policies, regulations, and strategies pursued to achieve socio economic goals of Sri Lanka has negatively affected the transport sector, resulting in isolated policy attempts which do not provide room for an integrated approach to national transport policy development.

2. Existence of multiple agencies responsible for different sectors of the transport systems and poor coordination among them leading to disintegration of sub sectoral policies.

3. Decline of public transport modal share in the total motorized travel taking place within the country and the significant modal shift to private vehicle travel and other para-transit means.

4. Significant increase in modal share in deregulated informal/para transit sector.

5. Continuing losses in government owned public transport service providers; both Sri Lanka Transport Board and Sri Lanka Railway.

6. Deteriorating quality of public transport, both government and private service providers have resulted in leading increased distrust on public transport by the general public.

7. Inefficiencies in freight transport.

8. No attempt being made at promoting intermodalism in travel choice, at least between land transport modes.

9. Infrastructure development plans in the transport sector does not clearly indicate addressing the developmental needs of urban and rural sectors.

10. Insufficient national level measures to impose regulations on transport demand.

11. Increased levels of accidents and incidents related to transport safety.

12. Ineffectiveness of measures introduced to control the environmental impact of transport.

13. Lack of disaster resilience in transport infrastructure and preparedness in transport services.

assume that by 2020 Sri Lanka will have a few operational expressways, a new international airport in the Hambantota area with one or two more additions to general aviation aerodromes. Hambantota port will be in operation and other ports been developed especially the Colombo Port South Harbour. Extension of Coastal Railway line, operation of Northern railway and improvement in others (possible electrification) and an alternate dedicated public transport system (BRT/LRT/or MRT) in Colombo and suburbs may also be realities in the future.

With the above scenario, certain key features need to be encompassed in the vision for a sustainable transportation system in 2020. The transport sector should aim at becoming the facilitator of sustainable national development through an integrated transport system with increased accessibility and mobility by: providing efficient, economical, reliable, comfortable, and safe transportation solutions; developing and maintaining transport infrastructure.

Achievement of the above will need to be based on working towards developing a system with following elements in it.

1. Development of a quality public transport service for passenger transport with proper integration of urban and rural transport systems.

2. Increasing efficiency in freight transportation

3. Increase modal connectivity which encourage inter-modal transportation to provide economical travel solutions to passengers and movement of freight.

4. Effective maintenances of existing transport infrastructure and developing appropriate new transport infrastructure as required.

5. Achieving energy efficiency & environmental sustainability.

6. Improved levels of travel safety through continuous measures of education, regulation and provision of adequate infrastructure.

7. Effective regulation of transport services.

8. Enhance institutional capacities through integration of isolated stakeholders responsible for national transport.

9. Develop and maintain the supply of human resources to cater to the demands of achieving professionalism in transport sector decision

making and operations.

By 2020 government should ensure that the country has an integrated policy framework for all the sectors of the economy within which transport will become a sectoral policy integrated with land use and infrastructure development plans of the future. Transport sector in Sri Lanka need to be directed based on one policy and having sub sectoral plans for national and international transportation separately rather than having transport policies for different modes which results in disintegration of development strategies. National transport policy should encompass all modes of transport in purview of domestic travel giving due attention to urban and rural transport systems.

Giving priority to public transport should be promoted through inter-modal mechanism where different modes operate complementary to each other rather than competing with each other. Inter-modal complementary services should be maintained at least between the two main land transport modes; bus and rail. Within the framework of encouraging inter-modal services it is necessary to provide the room to regulate other para-transit services. Developing an integrated approach where modes are complementarily used is a key issue policy makers need to draw their attention to. Competition between different public transport modes should be minimized as much as possible. Large number of Individual operators of public transport services (especially buses) must be eliminated totally by 2020 promoting a policy to provide room for a market based approach which ensures best price for the user and operator both by way of optimizing the resource usage.

Transport Infrastructure provision should also be aimed at promoting the use of public transport and improve accessibility and mobility and minimal use of private vehicles. Transport infrastructure planning needs to be integrated with proper land use planning. Especially when new developmental projects are initiated in North and East areas of the country proper environmental impact assessments at strategic level and spatial planning need to be done to make sure that infrastructure is developed to cater to the future expanding needs. The expressways that may come into operation in the next five to ten years will develop a different travel pattern and transport requirements in the country. Changes in modal share and related consequences should be readily taken into consideration when planning for the future.

There will be a demand to establish institutions for human resource training and development for all the sectors of transport to ensure

3. Sri Lanka's transport sector 2020

It is reasonable to



capacity building of different stakeholder agencies of transport provision.

4. The way forward:

overcoming issues and challenges on attaining the goals of the future

Infrastructure building and maintenance in Sri Lanka is mainly carried out by the government. Infrastructure in road sector is still considered as "public goods" and is administrated by a large number of road and non road authorities. However most of the transport infrastructure projects undertaken in Sri Lanka at present are foreign funded and privately contracted. Therefore it provides room for policy makers to look at these projects with a more transparent approach and open the doors for stakeholder partnership Initiatives, which are more market based infrastructure investment strategies.

The problems related to low volume roads are that they are inadequate, poorly designed or constructed to meet future requirement. This is particularly due to financial constraints and the lack of technical capability of the local government authorities. In order to attain an effective road development and management system the policy needs to give guidance to strengthen the provincial & local authorities and the RDA to include among its functions those of provision of new road, funding of their construction and management; -, strengthening road safety measures and instituting proper pricing and design standards.

In order to improve rail transport operation, the policy needs to emphasise on continuing efforts to make institutional changes to make it more efficient and commercially viable, safe and environmentally sustainable. Future expansion of the network has to be planned and should be implemented through encouraging foreign direct investments in the ways of stakeholder participation.

Improving the financial viability of omnibus operators to sustain and cater to the future need of modernised transport services is one of the major challenges. The major challenge faced here is the restructuring of ownership of existing transport operators. For such large scale modernised operations to be sustainable, developing and reorienting the existing human resource capital and establishing proper HRD practices is vital.

The challenge confronted with the government is how to establish an efficient rural transport system for the development of rural livelihood. Therefore it is mandatory to have policy options such as increasing investments in transport equipment; infrastructure and integrating

planning approaches; and encouraging community and private sector participation.

Urban congestion needs to be addressed by the policy by creating a stronger relationship between urban development and public transport network. Urban congestion will continue to grow and exert more pressure on society. Demand management policy directives need to be included to attract private vehicle users to public transport.

Public transport operation has to be economically efficient and productive in order for it to be sustainable in the long run but should be able to maximize social welfare from its operation point of view. However, under present economic circumstances, operation of heavily subsidized public transport services is no longer tolerable as the financial deficits of many of the public utilities are apparently expanding. Therefore, the state operators of public transport should seek to exploit opportunities by reviving the present operational structure to a structure which could absorb changing market conditions.

Measures to minimize energy usage for transport by means of encouraging non motorized transport options for selected activities, traffic management options that minimizes delays, use of energy efficient modes of transport and research on using renewable energy for transport have to be put into practice. Another challenge is to minimize the use of non renewable raw material for infrastructure development by means of recycle and reuse.

In order to achieve the competitive advantage in any business it is important to focus on improving the efficiency in freight transportation. Optimum use of road space and type of vehicles, use of state of the art operation strategies will be the main challenges in the future.

Integrating existing authorities responsible for transport infrastructure and service provision is needed to ensure an integrated approach to planning in the transport sector through dissemination of information to assist inter-organisational decision making. Establishing a governing body for all land transport operations and infrastructure provision is a challenge which should be overcome by 2020 to ensure an integrated transport system with the existing disintegrated authorities system.

The country has to rely on an efficient and effective transport network to support economic growth,

especially with the growth of GDP. To accommodate traffic and reduce congestion and accidents many countries have improved the infrastructure considerably. Commercializing the existing and future transport infrastructure need to be included in the current transport policy in order to sustain status and future infrastructure provision. The main policy directives can be as follows:

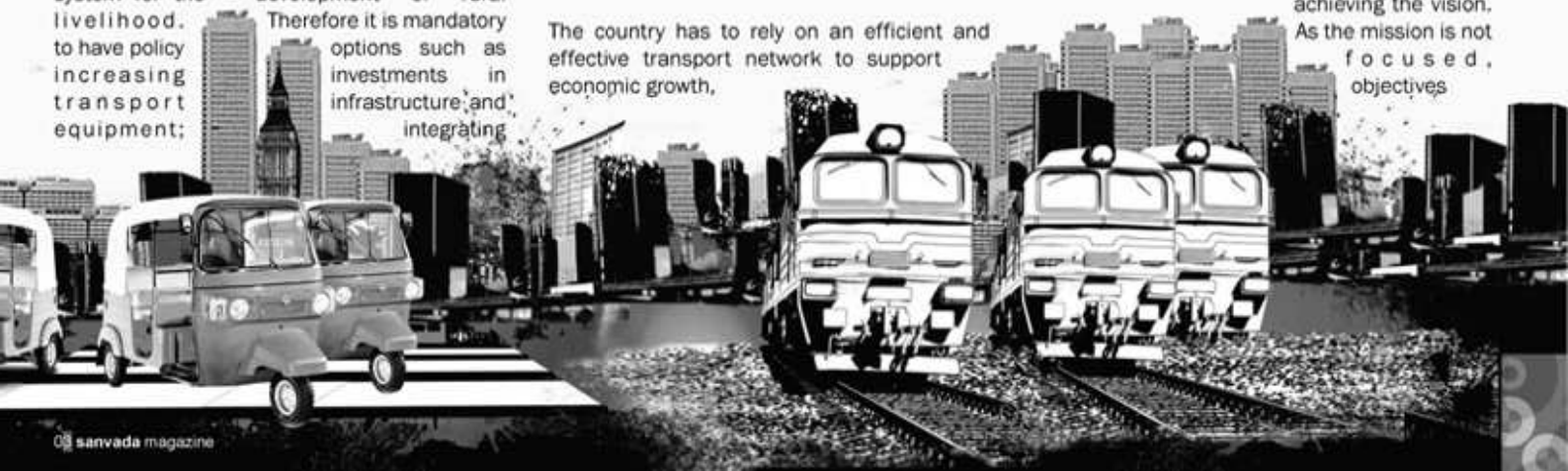
- * Separation of the planning and construction of transport infrastructure from the operation and the management of the same.
- * Establishing a more independent road agency which are more independent

5. Facilitating the way forward: improvements to the policy document

A transport policy at national level lays down the basic principles to guide decisions of all stakeholder agencies involved in transport operations at national and local level and should be essentially integrated with other national level policies in the country. The draft policy focuses more on providing recommendations to the present burning issues in the transport sector in Sri Lanka rather than providing the visionary guiding light for decision makers to focus their attention on the future of transport.

By defining functions of agencies involved in transport provision, the policy does not call for a sectoral reform which is essential if Sri Lanka wants to promote an integrated transport system in the future. The draft policy does not take into consideration the need for integration of transport infrastructure provision with service provision. The policy does not attempt to pave the way for an integrated system in the future, and rather is aimed at solving problems within a traditional set up which does not facilitate the vision it is dreaming of.

The Vision statement can be improved by focusing on the long term social welfare and sustainability as the ultimate outcome of the provision of a safe, reliable, efficient, and economical transport solution to the movement of passenger and freight with integrated transport systems. The Mission of the policy needs to address the issues of how the vision is achieved. It needs to be re-written encompassing the dream of an integrated transport system with safe, reliable, efficient, and economical transport solution. Objectives of the draft policy do not reflect the targets for achieving the vision. As the mission is not focused, objectives





seem to be standing alone from the intended vision. As stated in the documents the objectives of the policy is to explicitly set out the government's intervention.

Economic principles should reflect the market and pricing principles that the policy is based on. Although the policy mentions a road pricing system, there is no confirmation on as to how the revenue generated from this scheme will be utilized. In an urban environment a road pricing system will be effective only if it could result a modal shift or time shift of travel. If private vehicle users are proposed to pay some road space thereby internalizing the cost, it will exert external cost to the other parties and to the society. Hence the policy must should guide how the generated revenue should be used to achieve the desired end comes.

The draft policy is more inclined towards omnibus transport as compared to other areas. The draft has gone in to too much detail in omnibus operation and regulation. Though much attention has given to regulation of public

transport operation it lacks any policy directive to attract non public transport users or to retain existing users. It is more important to address the user requirements prior to the operator or regulator requirements.

The general public expects the same level of service from any of the public transport operator; hence it is not necessary to come up with separate policies for the government and private operators in the bus industry. It is important to accept the need of the existence of government and private service providers to eliminate any monopoly that will negatively affect the users.

Human resource development and qualification requirement has focused more towards professionals at management level. It appears that the state sector has been separated from the private sector creating an unnecessary differentiation. Policy does not adequately cover the provision for human resource development in transport and related sectors.

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