

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 331

“At its best, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) can deliver the same quality of service, speed, and comfort as the best metro systems at a fraction of the cost, and can be implemented in a fraction of the time.” (Walter Hook, CEO, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), in Letter from the CEO, Sustainable Transport, January 2013). This article gives some examples of BRT systems published in the January 2013 edition.

Rio’s first world class BRT corridor, Ligeirão Transoeste, opened in June 2012, and as of October 2012 it covered 40 km. Running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it offers express and local services on comfortable, air-conditioned articulated buses, each with capacity for 140 people. The express service has cut the 40 km traditional journey from about two and a half hours to an average of 54 minutes. The 29 stations currently in operation are comfortable and weather protected. All stations are staffed by friendly attendants, security, and cleaning crews. One of the system’s most advantageous features is the off-board fare payment, which allows passengers to pay before boarding the bus and gain significant time savings for their journey. An integrated ticket fare of the equivalent of US\$1.30 allows the passenger to use up to two feeder buses and the BRT within a two-hour period, allowing them to use one ticket for the entire trip.

Over 65,000 Rio residents use the BRT system daily, and many have seen their commute time cut by more than half. As further stations are launched along the line and additional buses added to the fleet, an average of over 110,000 daily users is expected by the end of this year.

One of the most important features that allows a BRT system

to reach its full potential and provide urban mobility improvements is how well integrated the system is with other modes of transport.

Cleveland, Ohio’s eleven-km BRT corridor is one of the highest quality BRT corridors in the US. It is known as the Health Line was named for its route on Euclid Avenue from Cleveland’s central business district to several large institutions including Cleveland State University and St. Vincent’s Hospital. The BRT buses are all hybrid electric articulated buses.

Off-board fare collection, along with a team of inspectors, keeps the buses moving quickly and fare evasion to a minimum. There are four stations located along the central median in the downtown areas, which are shared by buses going in both directions. The system has reliable two-minute headways in the peak hour, five-minute headways off-peak, and operates all night. Stations and buses are very attractive and have a unifying look and branding.

Can something like this not be creatively applied to our urban places such as Ariapita Avenue in Port of Spain, in association with consideration for peripheral park-and-ride facilities?

Johannesburg, South Africa, is a city where the dominant form of public transport on all major corridors is the informal minibus-taxi, similar to our maxi-taxis. In 2006, the city political leaders approved BRT as the choice for future mass transit investments. Discussions with minibus-taxi industry leaders had some fundamental questions: (1) Can you get individual, informal minibus-taxi owners to switch to running a very modern bus company? (2) Would they be able to maintain the buses and keep the system running efficiently? (3) Would they make

the loan repayments for the bus financing?

With the help of technical advisors chosen by the minibus-taxi owners, and paid for by the city, these owners had formed taxi operator investment companies (TOICs), one for each of the nine minibus-taxi associations to which the owners belonged. Owners were entitled to buy one share in a TOIC for each taxi they took off the first phase routes and cancelling its operating licence. Each had to invest into the company equity, the equivalent to the amount of money government pays for the scrapping of old minibus-taxis.

The city set up the new company called PioTrans to reflect *“the pioneering steps of the taxi operators who have decided to transform and grow into the fully-fledged public transport operator as part of the public transport transformation process in the city and South Africa”*. Loan financing was arranged, and while the company was responsible for repaying the loans to the Brazilian Export Credit Agency, the City of Johannesburg was ultimately liable. The bus contract is performance-based, with a schedule of offences and penalties, which enables compliance and monitoring. The city sets the service schedule, and through its control room and GPS devices on the buses and in the system, monitor and ensure that services are operated as required. The city also has access to the company’s monthly management accounts and the agendas, minutes and documentation for meetings of the board of directors and shareholders.

Can something like this not be creatively applied to our current unmanaged, informal transit operations?

To be continued.

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