

Traffic Congestion and Mismanagement in Dhaka City

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Traffic congestion is one of many serious global problems in both developed and developing countries. Dhaka city, the capital of Bangladesh has an experience in population growth with severe traffic congestion and mismanagement of traffic. The intolerable traffic congestion of Dhaka City has become an everyday certainty and a nightmare for the city dwellers. It can be easily concluded that Dhaka has an over-populated, over-congested and over-polluted city. Years of negligence, mismanagement, haphazard and improper planning and political instability have led Dhaka to this present predicament. Dhaka is one of the top ten worst cities of the world. And traffic congestion and mismanagement are the prime reasons behind this ranking.

Several steps have been undertaken to reduce traffic congestion in Dhaka city, such as imposing restriction on the entrance of trucks in Dhaka during daytime, banning rickshaws indifferent roads, changing the time table of the trains, changing the lanes of public-private transport, construction of foot over bridges rather than zebra crossings, construction of flyovers, overpass and so on. In addition, a traffic signal system was introduced, investing a huge amount of money. Though buses, trucks, rickshaws, trains and pedestrians have all been blamed for the congestion in Dhaka, after imposing restrictions on them the congestion level did not reduce. In this regard it is important to understand the reasons for ongoing congestion and the mechanisms likely to reduce it.

It is very hard to tell about the causes of congestion in Dhaka as it does not follow any pattern. It is a common practice in Dhaka to blame rickshaws as the only reason for creating traffic congestion. But in reality there are several of reasons behind this traffic congestion problem. These are discussed as follows:

- a) Significant increase in population and also all types of vehicles.
- b) Simultaneous presence of motorized and non-motorized vehicles on the same street.

- c) Traffic mismanagement.
- d) Poor transportation and infrastructure planning.

a) Significant increase in population and also all types of vehicles:

Industries, Garments, Bank, Financial Institutes, NGOs, Corporate Offices; significant number of Export Promotion Zones, the head offices of almost all Multi National Companies, higher educational facilities and even the major International Airport of the country, all are located in or around the greater Dhaka city. All the civic and dwelling facilities are located in the Dhaka city. The city controls the economic development of the whole country. For these reasons, most of the rural-urban migration of Bangladesh is towards Dhaka City and it constitutes about 60% of Dhaka's increasing population. Dhaka, at present, is one of the top most populous cities of the world. At present the greater Dhaka has near about 1.8 million populations. The city's urbanization rate is one of the highest of the world. The increasing population obviously increases the demand for more vehicles on the streets. Also they can easily provide the necessary labor force, especially for the informal sector [rickshaw pulling]. The more the traffic, the more will be the congestion, as the city has very limited infrastructure. Unplanned, uncontrolled and centralized development causes these problems.

b) Simultaneous presence of motorized and non-motorized vehicles on the same street:

In Dhaka City, both motorized and non-motorized vehicles occupy the same streets at the same time. Their speed is different and that is why it creates congestion on that particular street. Most of the rickshaw "pullers," or drivers, do not have any training and they are not even aware of the traffic rules and regulations. Rickshaws have some positive points also. They are environment friendly vehicles. There are some cities like Paris, which have introduced rickshaws on their streets in the recent years because of its environment friendliness quality. Another positive point is, rickshaw is economically very suitable for the middle income people, who cannot afford to buy a car and also do not want to take a ride in a heavily congested bus.

c) Traffic Mismanagement

Insufficient number of traffic police and traffic signals, flaws in traffic markings, violation of traffic rules and regulations etc can also be cited as some of the main reasons for traffic congestion in this city. Following points are discussed here under traffic mismanagement system:

i) Violation of Traffic rules and regulations

There is a lack of education and consciousness among the pedestrians, passengers and drivers about the traffic rules. People who migrate to the city from villages for labor employment; rickshaw pulling becomes the most easily available job for them. They do not need any formal training to start this profession and most of the cases there are insufficient training center for informing traffic rules and regulation. Most of the time, the pedestrians cross the busy streets even if there is no crosswalk. People do not usually use the over bridges or underpasses, which are constructed in the important and busy intersections of the city. Even they don't use zebra-crossing for crosswalk. The buses do not stop at the bus stops, they stop just at the intersection points, and rickshaws always follow them. As a result, the intersections of the busy roads always remain crowded by the people and different types of vehicles.

ii) Improper Implementation of Traffic Rules

People usually do not want to follow the traffic rules, as there is no proper implementation of these rules. Even though traffic police is usually present at every nodes or intersections, they do not do their duties properly. Traffic rules are also very flexible. One can easily avoid the fine by giving bribe to the police. The deployment of Military Police on Dhaka's road shows that if traffic rules are properly enforced, people must obey it. We had this experience experimentally more than three or four times in the recent years.

iii) Encroachment of roads and sidewalks

Street vendors, Hawkers and street front shop owners occupy above 60% of the 163-km footpaths of Dhaka City. The sidewalks are also filled up by construction materials, garbage or even temporary houses of homeless people or beggars. Very often pedestrians are forced to walk on the main roads instead of using the sidewalks because of these reasons.

iv) Unplanned Road design

Roads are not designed and constructed through proper planning and engineering survey. Many roads are wide enough in respect of its use but cannot use it properly due to proper planning and lack of coordination of engineering survey.

v) ***Lack of integration among regulatory authorities***

There are too many traffic regulatory authority and lack of integration among traffic regulatory authorities of Dhaka City are one of the major reasons of Traffic jam. Name of few regulatory authority are given below:

- DCC – Dhaka City Corporation
- RHD – Roads and High Ways,
- BRTA – Bangladesh Road Transportation Authority
- BRTC – Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation
- DTCA – Dhaka Transport Coordination Board
- DMP – Dhaka Metropolitan Police, etc.

d) **Poor Transportation and Infrastructure Planning**

i) ***Unplanned Growth of the City:***

Dhaka City had its first Master Plan when it was a province of Pakistan in 1959. But besides 3 or 4 exceptions, nothing was implemented from that master plan because of the political instability. Later after the independence, there were couples of Structure Plans, 2 year to 5-year plans. DAP (Detailed Area Plan) has been gazette in 2010. But it is a very common incident that people and also the authority do not follow those plans always. New developments are always taking place in Dhaka City without any coherent road system.

Lack of minimum required road structure and disproportionate road width comparing to the traffic load Dhaka City has very inadequate road networks, which are only 8 or 10 percent of the total city area, whereas the acceptable ratio is 25 percent. Greater Dhaka has a total road network of approximately 2230 km of which 25% are primary roads. The width of the roads varies from 6 to 40 m. The main roads are 15 to 25 m wide, newly built roads are 40 m wide while the roads in the older part of Dhaka are less than 6 m wide.

Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) has shown that the road hierarchy of Dhaka City is incomplete and in some major developed areas there is no road hierarchy. Old Dhaka and some other places of the city have major access problems and it will likely worsen as development intensifies.

ii) *Improper and inadequate Public Transport System*

One of the main problems of Dhaka City is its very limited Public Transport System. Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation [BRTC] is no more subsidized as it became private in 1993. Now, 90% of this corporation is in private sector and 10% in government sector.

They are doing profits, but there is no data on the amount of profit. There are now near about 3500 private buses (including BRTC bus) in Dhaka. But we need more than 6000 buses. BRTC wants to increase its no of buses, but neither the government nor the private companies are interested and come to invest in this sector. Required more public transport against reduce private transport to bring balance in transport system.

iii) *The presence of Road and Rail Line on the same ground level*

The existing “intercity rail line” passes through the important Central Business Districts and a number of important and busy roads of Dhaka City. When a train passes, lots of vehicles have to wait near the rail crossing, which causes serious traffic congestion at the interval of every 15 minutes as an average. Khilgaon Flyover, Mohakhanli Flyover, Banani Overpass and Kuril Interchanger are constructed for handling these sorts of traffic congestion, yet this traffic congestion shifted to surrounding area. Integrated transport plan are required to solve these problems.

iv) *Inadequate Parking Facilities*

Parking as a problem contributed to the city transport problem, particularly in the busy areas of the city. Most of the new shopping centers or commercial buildings do not have adequate parking facilities. People have to park on the roads, which ultimately narrow down the effective road width of the roads to a great extent. These on-streets parking system cause traffic congestion in that particular road and its impact goes to the surrounding roads and areas. Before the approval, many building projects show that they will provide parking facility in the basement. But after getting the authorization to construct a project, the builders / developers or owners usually do not follow the proposed plan properly. Even they change the usage of that particular parking floor to commercial use for achieving more profit.

Traffic congestion is a global as well as local problem. These problems are varies area to area, country to country in respect of causes and nature. In all over the world

the prime reason for traffic congestion is on street parking. In Bangladesh traffic congestion mainly occurred due to on street parking, pedestrian movement, lower capacity of road. These problems can be solved through undertaken infrastructure development, managerial project and required proper implementation.

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