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To,
Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Prithviraj Chavan,
Chief Minister's Office,
6th Floor, Mantralaya,
Madam Cama Road, Hutabma Rajguru Chowk,
Mumbai - 400 032.

A REQUEST FOR A DEDICATED BUS SHUTTLE FOR MUMBAI AIRPORT

MoneyLife Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation, has taken up the above issue to end the harassment of people who struggle to find transport from the Mumbai Airport. Mumbai is the only major city—not only in the world, but also within India—that does not have a dedicated shuttle service to and from the airport. Metros such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata have such a service successfully in place.

MoneyLife Foundation investigated the issue and worked with well-known experts on transport to highlight various aspects of the problem. Since a long time, passengers at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport complain that they are stranded in the absence of adequate public transport facility. Taxi- and auto-drivers refuse to ply short distances; there is an absence of prepaid radio cabs—and inadequate public transport only adds to passengers' woes. The situation is so grave that passengers are stuck at the terminals sometimes for as much as two hours.

Experts on transport unanimously support the idea to start a dedicated bus shuttle to Mumbai Airport as it is easy and a 'doable' project. This is mainly because the project would be of small size and the target audience is clearly identified. Considering the issue of traffic congestion and frequent strikes by auto rickshaw drivers, such a service would be efficient from the usability point of view. However, it is important to note that such a service shouldn't be started on a pilot basis or as a tokenism, as experts point out that it would be scrapped anytime citing it to be unviable. Instead, a full-fledged service should be introduced and it can be further replicated on a larger basis.

MoneyLife Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation based in Mumbai, involved in financial literacy and advocacy for savers and investors. We have over 6,500 members nationwide (please visit www.moneylifefoundation.in).

Enclosed is a memorandum comprising our findings and request you to take personal interest in starting such a bus shuttle service to the Mumbai Airport.

Thanking you,
For MoneyLife Foundation

Sucheta Dalal

Debashis Basu

Sudhir Badami

Ashok Datar

Trustees

Ashok Ravat

Nagesh Kini

Aksh Angre

S Sriraman

MEMORANDUM TO INTRODUCE DEDICATED AIR-CONDITIONED PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO MUMBAI AIRPORT

Chhatrapati Shivaji Mumbai International Airport (CSMIA) today handles nearly 30 million air passengers, about 9 million of which are international passengers and 21 million, domestic. Practically every air traveller carries luggage, and hence by and large, requires a car or taxi to take him to or from the terminal at Sahar, while majority of domestic passengers are light travellers who do not even have check-in baggage and many of them carry a briefcase with a laptop. Domestic passengers board or alight at the two terminals at Santacruz. It is estimated that in five years time, CSMIA will be handling about 50 million passengers, the very reason why the second airport is being mooted across the Thane creek.

For a city aspiring to be a world-class or global city, the movement to and away from the airport is of great significance. The quality and mode of travel reflects the attitudes of the city. It must reflect the global aspiration of reducing the growing carbon footprint on the one hand and on the other, the requirement of quick egress from the airport in comfortable and rapidly-moving mode of travel capable of permitting carrying luggage of inter-city travellers and as a corollary, approach to the airport too. In most cities the world over, there are good public transport options for air passengers in the form of A/C buses, monorail, Metro rail and intermediate public transport of quality taxis. Bengaluru has its 'Vayu Vajra' low-floor buses plying practically round the clock, to different destinations at a frequency of one every six minutes on an average. It is ironical that Mumbai, which prides itself of being foremost in public-transport commute, does not cater to the growing air passenger's pre-boarding or post-alighting travel needs through public transport.

If one considers an equal distribution of mode of travel among cars, taxis and bus services, the need of a bus to carry 30 air passengers in a single bus is one every three minutes and this need increases to one every two minutes in 5 years' time. Instead of equal distribution, if buses were to carry only 10% of air passengers, the frequency requirement is one every 10 minutes today and one every 6 minutes in 5 years' time. In either case, the need for such a service is very clear. The advantage of bus services is that these can be on different routes as against the high capacity Metro rail, taking passengers closer to their ultimate destinations at frequencies that the Metro trains would be running, but dropping them not very close to their ultimate destinations. Although Metro rail and the monorail have been planned for Mumbai, these will have limited coverage and will also take a long time for these projects to be implemented.

On the other hand, bus services could be commenced almost immediately given that there are about 200 A/C buses of BEST obtained under JNNURM, parked unutilised during night times and some have been lent to airlines to carry their passengers from a terminal to the aircraft. While these buses could be utilised to begin with, it is imperative that special buses with low flooring and doors on either side are used so that these buses can be used in BRTS (Bus Rapid Transport Service) lanes with bus-stops on the median in the future, when BRTS is introduced. In the larger picture of Mumbai's Transportation vision, these buses could then go to transportation hubs from where people would be able to change to buses reaching much closer to their destinations than some of these airport buses.

This is from the perspective of reaching far-flung places of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (4355 sq km) in the future as against regions of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (437 sq km). Even the bus stops—especially at the airport—should be well-detailed as one sees at Bengaluru airport.

A SPV under PPP (operating a stage carriage or contract carriage) could perhaps be formed with stakeholders being municipal transport undertakings such as BEST, TMT and NMMT etc., along with the MSRTC, private players such as GVK and private bus operators. This SPV could then get to work out details of operation. The fare structure should compete with fleet taxi fares, thus enable the SVP to make a profit and keep improving services by various means including fleet augmentation.

Annexure – Articles published on Moneylife website

You have landed at Mumbai. Where's the shuttle to go home?

September 19, 2011
Moneylife Digital Team

Taxis are not easily available to travellers arriving at the airport and public buses are inconvenient, underlining the case for a proper bus shuttle service

Transport experts in Mumbai agree that there is a desperate need to initiate action to end the harassment of passengers at the domestic and international airport.

This is the result of the regular refusals by taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers to ferry passengers without a fuss, the inadequate public transport and expensive-but-usually-unavailable pre-paid taxis, due to which many people are stranded at the airport terminals for as much as two hours.

The solution to this is a special bus shuttle with adequate luggage space from the Mumbai airport and transport experts are pushing hard for it.

Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport is one of the busiest air terminals in the world, but it doesn't have a dedicated bus shuttle service to various parts of the city, even today. While some major cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad have launched efficient, air-conditioned bus services, the country's commercial capital has none. Even Delhi airport now has a special train service-the Delhi Airport Express-that is a convenient facility for travellers. (Read, ['Delhi Airport Express is a brilliant train service which requires finishing touches'](#).)

With passengers at the mercy of errant taxi drivers who often refuse to ply and an inadequate number of public bus services to the airport, it is common to see many travellers cart their baggage to the main connecting highway a kilometre away. Most of them are professionals travelling on official work.

While many regular taxi drivers try to fleece passengers, the pre-paid taxi services (like Radio Taxi) are expensive and few. Even those who have cars, find parking charges and the long wait to get to their vehicles unaffordable.

Transport experts insist it is high time Mumbai had a special bus shuttle to and from the airport to eliminate this painful inconvenience.

Ashok Datar, an expert in transport, says, "This is absolutely correct. (This is) the least we can do in Mumbai, without fuss or investment and within a few months, without waiting for a bus lane, but by undertaking proper publicity at the bus stops on the frequency of service and appropriate signage (say aircraft) to identify these buses. At the bus stops, the service should get prime space at the airport terminals, with information easily available at various points, for the benefit of passengers as well as those who come to receive them or see them off. We must have at least three routes with a half an hour frequency throughout the night and day, and each should go to south Mumbai, the western suburbs and to Vashi /Thane."

Sudhir Badami, transport activist, estimates the frequency of buses at 3.5 minutes. "In fact, the whole concept of reducing carbon footprint has to come into arguments and we must provide for higher frequencies to attract almost every potential air passenger. These buses need not be restricted to air travellers; so long as other passengers are also willing to pay the fare might be higher on account of the fewer number of people using the service, as the luggage space will reduce seating. Also, these buses should not allow standees, from the point of view of safety of luggage."

Not very long ago, Indian Airlines provided a pick-up facility from certain points in the city to the airport. "In the Indian Airlines days, I used to board the airport bus from Shivaji Park. There was no need to discontinue it. Today, taxis don't come to Mahim, considering it is a short distance for a fare of Rs100. Taxi drivers are known to pay traffic police about Rs100 to get a slot in the queue. Since I always carry a handbag I prefer to come out of the airport and hop in to 'dropping cabs'. I entirely agree that this is urgently needed across Mumbai. I understand that with the phasing out of Fiats, Mumbai is short by 35,000 cabs," says Nagesh Kini, Mumbai-based social activist.

The monopoly by the taxi unions is the main reason for such inconvenience to travellers. Walter Vieira, marketing consultant, says, "Mumbai is like Goa airport, where the union of taxi drivers, in connivance with politicians, have successfully thwarted all attempts for a bus service. When Damania (Airlines) introduced a free bus service from the city office to/from the airport in Goa, the buses were attacked and the company was compelled to discontinue the service. The government did not intervene and just looked the other way as if nothing had happened. This is also one of the foremost reasons why foreign tourists dislike coming to Goa, for the first hurdle they are faced with on landing is the unreasonable demands of taxi drivers."

BEST will start a dedicated Mumbai Airport shuttle but it wants a dedicated lane

September 20, 2011
Moneylife Digital Team

BEST, the public transport service provider in Mumbai, will operate a bus shuttle from the airport to various parts of the city only if it gets a dedicated lane. But experts have criticised the BEST's pre-condition as unacceptable

Moneylife reported yesterday how the absence of a dedicated bus shuttle at the Mumbai airport is leaving passengers stranded at the airport terminal for as much as two hours sometimes. (Read, [You have landed at Mumbai. Where's the shuttle to go home? Part 1.](#)) The problem is the scarcity of pre-paid taxis which are also expensive and the refusal by regular auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers to ply over short distances.

Transport experts are unanimous that a special bus shuttle with adequate luggage space for passengers going to and coming from the airport is required urgently. It should be well-connected with South Mumbai and the central and western suburbs, on the lines of a similar service that is available in Bangalore and Hyderabad.

However, BEST, the public bus transport operator that has a monopoly in Mumbai, has a different take on this. When *Moneylife* asked BEST why Mumbai doesn't have a bus shuttle transport to the airport like that in Bangalore and other cities, the chief public relations officer replied, "We are ready to start a dedicated bus service to the airport only if we are provided with dedicated lanes by the government and MMRDA (Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority)."

This reply has surprised activists, who say that the demand is unviable, in view of the overall transport situation and the traffic congestion in Mumbai.

"I am surprised that BEST needs a bus lane for starting a bus service to cater to all persons and passengers going to or coming from the airport to various parts of the city," says Ashok Datar, transport expert. "Literally thousands of people visit the airport every day, the proportion of those using buses is negligible as the buses are away and apparently meant for the employees. There are no bright indicators on the availability of buses to various areas with enough info and publicity. This is the basic reform."

BEST, currently, has a bus service to the airport. But it is a regular service used mainly by the staff working at the airport. "The current service by BEST is a regular one. Even for that the frequency of buses is less, and worse, the bus stops are often not visible," says Mr Datar.

Sudhir Badami, another expert, believes that the BEST should focus on the viability of starting such a service. "Such a reply demanding a dedicated lane to provide a dedicated bus service to Mumbai airport is inappropriate. Instead, the BEST should focus on bargaining on the viability of the buses, the fares, which RTO wouldn't allow to hike, and overall economic viability of the service. If they don't consider such things, then even giving a dedicated lane would prove unviable."

Jagdeep Desai, architect and founder trustee of the Forum for Improving the Quality of Life in Mumbai Suburbs, says that the demand for a dedicated lane is only an excuse not to provide the service. "Looks like some excuse to not give a service. Incidentally, some of the BEST buses of the JNNURM King Longs (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) were leased to Air India to transport passengers to and from the aircraft to the airport. This means they have surplus buses. Besides, the auto and taxi unions, as well as the fleet taxis, would also have a strong say in resisting such convenient and comfortable services."

Activist lawyer Mohana Nair recalls one such bus service by the BEST to the airport. "BEST had started a bus service from the airport (Sahar) via Santa Cruz to Colaba. It was not air-conditioned, but it was one of their star buses with a place in the centre for luggage. I remember seeing it in Sahar and talking to the conductor who seemed very proud of what they were doing, but said most people did not even know such a service existed. This was maybe three years ago, and it was discontinued as they did not have enough people travelling on it," she told *Moneylife*.

However, activists point out that the bus service should have enough luggage space, with a frequency of 15 minutes and the shuttle service should be easily identifiable.

Bangalore International Airport (BIAL) has a Volvo bus service, by the name of Vayu Vajra, that offers air-conditioned comfort to passengers and is available round the clock, providing connectivity between important areas of the city and the airport.

Similarly, in Hyderabad, the Aero Express bus service to the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport is a non-stop airport shuttle service from the airport connecting important destinations in the city. It is run by the GMR group. At Delhi airport, a recently started train service, the Delhi Airport Express, provides easy transport to passengers.

Mumbai Airport does not have a shuttle service while other metros have excellent connections from their airports to cities

September 21, 2011
Moneylife Digital Team

Mumbai Airport is the busiest and caters to the country's financial capital, but is the only one without a bus shuttle—Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata and New Delhi already have such an efficient service in place

Time and again, we are reminded that Mumbai is India's financial capital, home to India Inc and a major contributor to the national exchequer. But if you have just touched down after a harrowing flight, heaven forbid if you don't have a vehicle waiting for you.

Even as major cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata provide efficient and excellent airport shuttle services to passengers, the country's busiest airport Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport at Mumbai is the only one which lacks such a shuttle service.

Moneylife has written on the plight of Mumbai's airport: Please See: [You have landed at Mumbai. Where's the shuttle to go home?](#) on 19th September, and the second part on 20th September [BEST will start a dedicated Mumbai Airport shuttle but it wants a dedicated lane](#)).

Transport experts say that if all other major cities provide such efficient shuttle services, it is even more important to start a similar service, with enough luggage handling systems and capacity to handle the high frequency of flights at Mumbai airport, considering the woes of travellers and growing passenger demand.



Bangalore's Vayu Vajra

At the Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), which is located 45km away from the city, the shuttle service started by the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation connects well with important parts of the city such as Jeevan Bhima Nagar, HAL Airport, JP Nagar, MG Road, Koramangala, Hebbal and outskirts such as Whitefield, and Electronics City.

This air-conditioned Volvo service called 'Vayu Vajra', has gained popularity among commuters for its high frequency-one bus in every 10-15mns-and spacious luggage compartments. It also has easy en route pick-up points. The service is available 24x7, which is in sync with arrival and departure schedules of BIAL and the fare is affordable, ranging between Rs80-Rs200. There is also a non air-conditioned shuttle service to BIAL, known as 'Suvarna', which offers comfortable travel and affordable fares.

A similar successful service is available in Hyderabad. For the 22km distance between the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport and the main city, an efficient bus shuttle named 'Aero Express' provides comfortable travel for passengers. It also has enough luggage space along with facilities such as mobile plug-in chargers, television etc.



Aeroexpress airport shuttle service in Hyderabad

Aero Express is an air-conditioned, non-stop bus (Volvo) service, which reaches important points in the city such as the Secretariat, Mehdiapatnam, Kukatpally, Hitech City, LB Nagar, Begumpet, Tarnaka and also to twin city Secunderabad. The one-way fare is Rs180 and the to-and-fro airport fare is Rs300. The shuttle service is available round the clock with a frequency of 30 minutes.

Kolkata's Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport has a Volvo-based shuttle service in place. The West Bengal Surface Transport Corporation runs air-conditioned buses every 30 minutes from the centre of town-Esplanade, connecting it with the airport. Volvo City Bus Services is a public-private partnership between the state's transport department and Kaushik Logistics in the Airport-Tollygunge route.



Inside view of vovio bus to the Kolkata Airport (picture courtesy- Goutam Mitra, from www.virtualtourist.com)

At Delhi airport, a recently started train service, the Delhi Airport Express, provides easy transport to passengers.

But as we have reported, public bus transport provider BEST is reluctant to provide a dedicated shuttle service to Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport. It has demanded dedicated lanes to provide such a service. The absence of such a service is leaving passengers stranded at the airport terminals, for two hours at times, as cabbies often refuse to ply and there is a dearth of pre-paid taxis.

How long will passengers (not) are taken for a ride?

Why is the government of Maharashtra reluctant to address the Mumbai airport transport issue?

September 22, 2011

Sudhir Badami

Why is Mumbai lagging behind in providing an effective bus service to and from the airport, when Bengaluru, Delhi and Hyderabad have all got such services? Is it possible that such a bus service could expose the futility of building a metro rail or monorail?

The buses are air-conditioned. They are low floor and have space for baggage. They are attractive. And they even provide space for wheel-chair passengers, or to your bicycle along. There are 235 services from the airport daily. They operate every six minutes on an average, to different destinations in a city that does not have dedicated bus lanes, that has more vehicles and worse road congestion than Mumbai. It meets the estimated demand of the passengers coming by air. There is a help desk kiosk which is distinctly visible and actually helpful. This is Bengaluru's Vaayu Vajra service.



Vaayu Vajra has 11 routes serving different areas, reaching passengers to locations from where they can easily get a taxi, or an auto-rickshaw, or a personal car pickup for the last mile. This saves that many car trips and the city is already planning to introduce BRTS on certain Ring Road routes to begin with.

The annual air passenger traffic in 2010-11, according to the Airports Authority of India was 29.9 million in Delhi, 29.1 million in Mumbai, 12 million in Chennai, 11.6 million in Bengaluru, 9.6 million in Kolkata, 7.6 million in Hyderabad and 4.3 million in Kochi. Based on the assumption that a third of the air passengers travel in their personal cars, a third use intermediate public transport like taxis or autorickshaws and the rest use buses, on average two passengers travel per taxi, while 30 travel by each bus. The required frequency of buses for Bengaluru works out to about one every eight minutes, whereas there is actually one bus every six minutes. Adherence to schedule is sacrosanct, therefore an adequate number of buses have been deployed and the fare structure is suitably higher than the normal stage AC bus services called simply Vajra. A similar calculation for taxis reveals that about 115 taxis are required every hour.

Let us examine the scenario in Mumbai, by first checking the bus requirements and the frequency of taxis and autorickshaws, for a similar breakup of travel mode. The frequency of buses required in Mumbai is one every three minutes and about 285 taxis per hour.



What is required is a sincere desire to provide a proper service in Mumbai and for those visiting Mumbai, following the initiative in Bengaluru. In Mumbai the BEST operates services to areas that are socially relevant, but commercially unviable. It is necessary to provide these services, as otherwise economically backward people would not be able to travel to work, particularly if they are living far away from the workplace. But providing an airport bus service is beneficial, as it is not only socially relevant but also commercially viable.

We know that there are many air travellers who take a morning flight and return by night every now and then. The last thing they want is to have to wait for a taxi that does not come to the boarding point regularly. As mentioned, the hourly requirement of taxis at Mumbai airport is 285 (for domestic as well as international terminals). Then why are 600-plus taxis parked at the airport, as counted in a Google picture? In the absence of a bus service like that in Bengaluru, the need today is nearly 600 taxis per hour, combined for domestic and international flights together. The 600 count was from the international airport (as seen in the picture). For some reason, there is always a significant shortfall of taxis at the taxi boarding bays at the domestic terminal despite the fact that 600-plus taxis are parked at the international terminal at Sahar. We do not face this sort of problem at Delhi airport. There is a taxi with a number at a given parking number, where one can even take the trolley and board the taxi. Delhi also has bus bays and now the Airport metro.

The way to go about it in Mumbai is first, provide bus services every three minutes so as to enable a taxi driver to take his sweet time-to rest and have meals, which is a genuine need, but beyond the stipulated period of say two hours, the parking charges should be steep, compelling him to move out to the air passenger pickup point. This will mean that at no time an air passenger has to wait for a taxi at the same time he has an alternative to take a bus instead.

Bus fares for the airport bus services of Vaayu Vajra kind should be high enough to make it viable. The agency that provides the service need not be confined to the BEST; we have the NMMT, TMC, MSRTC, KDMC providing services catering to segments suitable to them. Therefore, for the airport service, a special vehicle should be set up which will specify the bus design and manage the operations while the BEST, NMMT, TMC, KDMC and MSRTC may provide buses and drivers and maintain to desired standards. Adherence to departure times from the airport should be sacrosanct. We know that the NMMT air-conditioned buses ply to Bandra and Dindoshi and are very good. Many prefer it to the BEST's King Long.

As for tampering of meters, the issue is different and not related to the pre- or post-flight travel. However, the drive from the parking lot to the pick-up spot could be used for testing or calibrating the meter.

Through these measures, I believe that all relevant issues would have been addressed. Then why is providing bus services such a difficult task? If the bus services are provided and it amply demonstrates that problems have been satisfactorily addressed, perhaps the futility of implementing big-ticket projects like the Metro and Monorail would become apparent and may get dropped-that may be the only reason. Looks like air travellers will have to be little more vocal about this while waiting at the taxi stand queue.

[Sudhir Badami is a civil engineer and transportation analyst. He is on the Government of Maharashtra's Steering Committee on Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) for Mumbai and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority's (MMRDA) technical advisory committee on BRTS for Mumbai. He is also member of the Research & MIS Committee of Unified Mumbai Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMMTA). He was a member of the Bombay High Court-appointed erstwhile Road Monitoring Committee (2006-07). He has been an active campaigner against noise pollution for over a decade and he is a strong believer in a functioning democracy. He can be contacted on email at sudhirbadami@gmail.com.]

For Mumbai Airport is a private bus shuttle the only solution?

September 23, 2011
Moneylife Digital Team

Transport experts say that a private or public-private partnership for a shuttle service connecting Mumbai with the airport would be an ideal option

We have been reporting over the past few days (please scroll down for details) on how Mumbai Airport, the country's busiest and situated in the financial capital, is surprisingly without any dedicated shuttle service. Passengers are left stranded at the arrival terminals due to scarcity of prepaid taxis and constant refusals by regular cabbies and auto-rickshaws to ply to the metropolis.

Again, BEST, the public bus transport provider, having a monopoly in the city, demands dedicated lanes to provide a shuttle service. The state government is completely silent on this issue.

Considering these factors, should private players be allowed to start a shuttle service to the airport?

Transport experts are in near consensus on privatising the airport bus shuttle, considering its economic viability. In terms of providing overall road transport, private services in the past have proved to be efficient.

"A special purpose vehicle (SPV) should be formed which should be a public-private partnership (PPP), between public transport agencies and private companies, with the objective of providing an efficient shuttle service. It will have an element of profitability and competition; therefore the service would be viable," said Sudhir Badami, a transportation expert.

One such example is a private bus service from Pune which picks passengers from the terminal of the international airport and drops each of them at their doorstep. Often, international flights land in the wee hours of the morning, and such a bus shuttle is gaining popularity, because it provides adequate luggage space, along with safety.

Nagesh Kini, a Mumbai-based social activist, agrees that privatisation of the airport shuttle would be a good option. "When ONGC (the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) can have a private bus fleet between Panvel (Navi Mumbai) and Bandra (western Mumbai) and schools use private operators, then why can't private operators be utilised for city-airport shuttles?"

Ashok Datar, a transport expert, told *Moneylife*, "Let BEST have the first option to provide the shuttle service. If it is not ready, then it can't come in the way of private operators (who might offer an airport shuttle service)."

Experts also point out that there could be possible opposition from the taxi unions for allowing private players to operate. For instance, when prepaid taxi service Meru was introduced, it saw stiff opposition from taxi unions. In fact, Meru still does not operate from the international airport. Similarly, when Damania Airlines introduced a free bus service between its city office and the Goa airport, these buses were attacked and the company was forced to discontinue the service.

"To prevent private buses from being pelted with stones, the system has to be an SPV or PPP with the BEST (for local services) and the MSRTC (Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation) for a Pune-Mumbai airport shuttle. This arrangement can include all airline companies and the Airports Authority of India," added Mr Kini.

Mr Badami said, "I am bound to oppose anything which directly affects my earning. So there is a need to have a possible dialogue with these (taxi) unions to address the issue of their employability. One way of doing so is to ascertain the income of these drivers earned from airport fares. If it is minuscule compared to their income from other fares, then their opposition is not justified. Overall, the objective of the government should be to provide efficient public transport."

Mumbai Airport bus service: How will the logistics and economics work out?

For a dedicated Mumbai Airport bus shuttle, here are a few approaches that can be considered to make it an economically-viable success

October 03, 2011

Ashok Datar

Mumbai is a remarkable city in many ways. It has an airport which is almost in the centre of the city. It has one of the highest usage rates of public transport for commuting. It has one of the lowest available areas of road space per 1,000 persons/vehicle. Buses and trains together account for more than a crore trips/day and public transport share is perhaps the highest in absolute numbers and percentage of total trips in any city in the world. Travelling by bus is not considered *infra dig* by most in Mumbai.

There is every reason for Mumbaikars to use a bus to go and return from the airport. Such bus services are available in cities such as London, New York, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Singapore and also in cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Hyderabad in India too.

Mumbai airport—like the city—is perhaps the most congested airport in India. This is one more reason why we must have a proper bus service to and from the airport to various parts of the city. Today, about 60,000 passengers travel to international destinations every day whereas travellers to Indian destinations amount to over 1,00,000 per day. Typically, most international flights operate during the night and domestic destinations are served from early morning at 5.30am to 11pm in the night. I have been writing to MIAL (Mumbai International Airport Ltd) and BEST for the past three years about a bus service to the airport but there has been a very indifferent response.

MoneyLife should be complimented for giving a thrust to this demand (please scroll below for related articles). It is very strange that BEST should have shown a lack of interest in such a service, demanding that unless an exclusive bus lane is provided, it cannot start such a service. This is an absurd position. An airport service will serve as a precursor for dedicated bus lanes in a variety of forms for Mumbai. BEST (together with NMMT, or Navi Mumbai Municipal Transport, and TMT, or Thane Municipal Transport) should have the first option to provide such a service and if these entities are not willing, the option should be offered to private operators to provide such a service. BEST has now over 300 A/C buses and it can't deploy them in an efficient and profitable manner. The current A/C buses which ply shorter distances, carry fewer passengers and don't earn more revenue than ordinary buses per day—when the fares for A/C buses and the investment in an A/C bus are quite high as compared to an ordinary bus.

Today ordinary buses do operate via airports, but not from/to the airports. They are not very easily accessible for passengers with bags and not at the arrival/departure areas which are accessible only for cars and taxis. Prepaid taxis are expensive and the quality of service leaves much to be desired. It is also not easy to get fleet taxis operated by Meru, Mega and other brands. While the new management at the airport is making it easier for people to board cars (provided they have drivers!), there is no thought given to a bus as an option.

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In the past—about 30 years back, there used to be a private bus service—first operated by Indian Airlines and then the Ex-Servicemen’s Co-op Society. But now there is no visible bus service while the number of passengers is rising very rapidly—over 12% annually! Today the airport handles more passengers than CST and Mumbai Central railway stations taken together. A bus service has to evolve over a period of time. But to begin with, we can run three routes from both terminals of the airport to south Mumbai up to Colaba, to the east up to Thane/Vashi and to the northeast up to Borivali (West). All these routes would have a length of about 40km to 50km from the airport. During the night, the round trip should be between 3 hours to 4 hours include stoppage time at both ends—this schedule can be maintained during the night. During the day, the trip time would increase by about 30% due to traffic congestion. I believe that taxis or cars won’t run much faster—these vehicles would save perhaps about 15 to 20 minutes. They provide point-to-point services and that is difficult for buses to achieve. But still there is a large segment of passengers and other visitors who will utilise this bus service if we provide last-mile connectivity such as availability of taxis and autos at the stops of such a service, which is not difficult, especially during the night when parking would not be an issue. Taxi fares for final destinations like Vashi (Navi Mumbai) or Colaba (south Mumbai) or Borivali are as high as Rs500 (and more) for prepaid services in non-A/C taxis. The airport management has reduced the time between landing and exit to about 30/40 minutes. But it takes 10/15 minutes to get a taxi. The fare is only a part of the rationale for the bus service. Offering safe, reliable transportation for single persons is another.

Information, promotion and advertising are key ingredients –

For a service like this to be useful and a very good alternative to unreliable taxis, we need to provide not only a number of good A/C buses but also a lot of information at the airport, on the stops and on the bus. There should be a route map and timetable for the service. We should also provide a GPS (Global Positioning System) which should tell the prospective passengers—especially at the intermediate stops—as to when the next bus would arrive. This is neither very expensive nor difficult. It should be first introduced at the airport bus service and then extended to all A/C and corridor-bus routes. This can be done both at the stops and via mobile phones through appropriate software. This service should be provided by BEST, TMT and NMMT services through an SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) or a proper arrangement can be put in place for sharing common infrastructure, and these services can operate on the commonly agreed routes.

The state government should take a lead and ensure that we don’t waste time in turf battles. Expenses on information infrastructure, provision of GPS, advertising and promotion must be treated as considered common infrastructure (just like providing roads) and should not be charged to the bus operator (whether it is BEST or MIAL). Similarly, all the information that is to be provided inside the airport must be the responsibility of MIAL as public transport must be considered as common public infrastructure.

Promotion, information on buses, stops, airport terminal billboards and media advertising are all very critical and must be given great importance and should not be ignored at all. This is the core issue, without which this will not achieve the kind of success it deserves, and this bus service has to usher in a virtuous cycle in the city—and hence it is all the more important.

(Ashok Datar is a Mumbai-based Transport activist).

Comments of readers-

Adi Daruwala

The airport at Bengaluru has a Volvo based bus service, Vayu Vajra that touches major points in Bengaluru city. The passes can be pre purchased after landing or on the bus. A similar project can be replicated at Mumbai and other Metros and Tier II cities to start with. For Mumbai the touch points can be, from Airport to Borivali, Bandra, Dadar via (Eastern express & Western express), CSMVS, (Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya), Chembur, Ghatkopar, Mulund, Thane & Vashi with limited stops, connecting with taxi and rickshaw stands for convenience.

IF a SPV for a PPP is to be designed for Mumbai Airport then the jumbo buses are not required. What you then need is the Tempo Traveller or Mini Vans with 9 - 13 seating capacity and luggage space and 2000 of them (approx) for the Mumbai Metro to be serviced properly. There cannot be a home drop possibility but to gateway connecting points with taxi and rickshaw services from those points. If there are home drops there will fights amongst passengers and create more administrative problems. The next option is to have mini shuttles 4 -5 passengers with home drops. In this way full families can be accommodated or people staying in the same region. Even here if it is 4 -5 individuals there will be problems.

A V Moorthi

In Hyderabad the Airport is some 35km from Secunderabad Railway station and the builders of the Airport GMR run an A/C Volvo bus on either direction over 40 trips each round the clock for flat rate of Rs 180/- are so they drop and pick passengers from about 8 points en route and cover the distance in about 75 minutes. So if the Airport builders GVK want definitely they can offer a service with out depending on BEST. BEST should made to run this sort of a service because as a Public transport provider they are bound to offer such charges with special tariffs and specific stops.

Nagesh Kini

I've travelled in the Vaju Vajra a number of times. It is par excellence. It's time the BEST wakes up. Or lets some one else like independent school bus transporters to take over. The dedicated lane is the Traffic Police to manage and painting yellow lines is MCGM's job. If they have the will it is not at all difficult to put in place.

D Sukumar

It is true that BEST had introduced a bus service from the International airport via the domestic airport to south of Mumbai via Dadar, plying every half hour. The staff manning the bus was so enthusiastic that they used to call out for passengers at the airport, but for some strange reasons the bus service was discontinued, probably due to lack of clientele. I had myself availed the service a few times and it was very convenient. It is a shame that a city like Mumbai which boasts of the best public transport in the country does not have an affordable service from and to the airports from different parts of the city.

Manish Kamdar

As a frequent flier, I only use the Vayu Vajra bus in Bangalore. I land at 2240 normally and am at the hotel by 0015 or so thanks to the 2300 bus. The service is amazing and some of the buses even have a small screen in front of your seat so you can surf the net etc. (Have done that once and it worked then) In Delhi, the metro is brilliant and the Airport Express is just mind blowing. I use the latter even to travel if I am not even flying that day. Saves so much time when you have to be in Gurgaon. And since I normally fly the low cost airlines which land at T1, I cannot make use of the Airport Express (from T3). Last week I found that they have started a free inter terminal shuttle so next time I am there, I will use that and thus the Airport Express which is an enormous time saver, believe me. Mumbai airport there is an unholy nexus between the cabbies and powers-that-be. A black and yellow cab costs 270 without luggage day or night from Airport to King's Circle. If I get into an Air Conditioned Meru the fare is between 200 and 220 depending on what you tip. Fleet cabs are going up day by day and raking in the moolah too so it is not that Quadros and gang are alone party to the crime. If there were an air-conditioned bus service which would ply somewhere near, I would not venture near the cabs seriously.