

## **THE CONCEPT OF BRTS, ITS FEATURES & CAUSES FOR FAILURE In Pune Municipal Corporation Area**

BRTS is actually a metro rail with buses instead of rail coaches, roads for rail tracks and is wholly over ground. Additionally, it has cycle tracks and footpaths on both sides. The seven basic features of a standard BRTS are the following:

1. Exclusive continuous busways utilised on a properly planned BRTS corridors. Vehicles operate on their dedicated bus lanes, thus maximizing speed and service. In Pune:
  - a. Exclusive busways are not continuous. Out of 118 km of Pilot, Phase I and CYG BRTS, 57 % (67 km) do not have dedicated busways while 43 % (51 km) are dedicated but not continuously.
  - b. There are no continuous footpaths and cycle tracks along the BRTS corridors.
  - c. Pune is the only city in the world where the concept of "mixed" BRTS is entertained. "Mixed" in PMC's parlance means that all types of vehicles are allowed to ply on "mixed" stretches. Presently all types of vehicles do ply on all roads not only in Pune but also in the whole country. Then why spend thousands of crores to make "mixed" BRTS?
2. Pre-board fare collection and fare verification is essential if the service is to be "rapid" as the name implies. Imagine issuance of tickets in the compartments in metro rail! Pre-board ticketing system does not exist in Pune.
3. Bus Stations with arrangements for parking nearby. Bus stations also accommodate digital display of BRTS bus timings, feeder and trunk connections etc. Bus stations can also be profitably used to display advertisements and earn revenue. Bus stations are a necessity for making arrangements for sale of tickets prior to boarding. Pune has only bus stops and not bus stations.
4. Frequent service and fare-free integration between feeder services and trunk-line services. As the number of buses is not adequate, the buses are infrequent and fare-free integration either with feeder services or with other trunk-line routes is absent. Also, Pune does not have the system of issuance of direct tickets to be used on feeder and other trunk-line services.

5. Clean, comfortable and efficient buses to minimize boarding times and to provide easier access for the differently-abled commuters. The buses should, therefore be low-floor with special arrangements inside the bus for wheel chairs or crutches.
6. BRTS should be planned logically, rationally and complying with industry practices and transportation systems. Even, traffic enforcement is part of BRTS planning. Unfortunately, PMC has yet to adopt the concept of detailed project report (DPR) as per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Urban Development. PMC has also no documents to show that it carried out pre-feasibility and feasibility studies prior to selection of BRTS corridors. **An obvious error is that the lengths of BRTS corridors are all less than the average passenger lead (average distance travelled by a commuter), which is more than 8.58 km in PMC area while for PCMC it is over 12 km.** For these passenger leads, the route length of corridors for mass transit systems whether BRT or conventional or rail based) needs be about 17 to 24 km. Our corridors do not cater for comfortable travel i.e. without transfers for majority of commuters.
7. Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) refer to a range of information technologies that provide more choices and better quality for the customer. Real-time information displays is one such example. ITS could also be used for transit security functions. It is essential in signal prioritisation to give preference to BRTS at intersections where the system must cross mixed traffic. Technology keeps track of vehicles, provides passengers with updated travel information and improves safety. The main attributes of an intelligent transport system are pre-board ticketing, real time information displays and ability to control traffic signals from a central location so as to make the bus system 'rapid'.

The authorities should be careful in planning a road system. As Penelosa, the originator of Bus Rapid Transit System says, "It is hard to do a bad quality rail system because the costs for entry are so high. But it is much easier to do a bad bus system because you can get away with cutting costs." (<http://www.modeldmedia.com/features/penalosa112.aspx>). Penelosa also said, "Public transportation is not a technical problem, it is political".

The Pune Pilot BRTS is known throughout the world as an example of how a BRTS should not be constructed. It is not too late to learn the lessons even now so

that the mistakes are not repeated in the remainder BRTS under construction. Regrettably, PMC is still not adhering to the seven basic features of BRTS. The seven reasons for failure of BRTS in Pune are as follows

1. The first seeds of failure were planted when PMC refused to plan BRTS scientifically following various guidelines. There was no pre-feasibility or feasibility study nor a proper DPR. Successive municipal commissioners have only protected the first commissioner who recklessly went ahead to construct BRTS without any planning as if JnNURM funds belong to him personally. This was in the face of constant prodding from **Nagrik Chetna Manch** to follow industry norms and MoUD guidelines.
2. PMC gave the task of designing and planning a portion of Pilot BRTS to IIT Delhi. There was, however, no planning. Even then, PMC entrusted the preparation of Phase I and CYG BRTS reports to IIT Delhi. PMC submitted these reports for obtaining financial approvals and not for technical implementation of the BRTS. The **Manch** has documents obtained under the RTI Act from MoUD, Delhi that clearly show that there has been no DPR for BRTS.
3. Pune BRTS does not have dedicated busways, cycle tracks and footpaths. Pilot BRTS does not even have BRTS planning for about 5 km of road through the Pune Cantonment Board limits.
4. The existing flyover at Seven Loves does not have BRTS over it. PMC then constructed a flyover at Magarpatta, which confounded the confusion at that traffic junction destroying that part of BRTS. PMC is now constructing flyovers at Swar Gate and Katraj to bury the last vestiges of the Pilot BRTS. Even the flyovers are not constructed as per the mandates of the Indian Roads Congress, thus becoming fully Non Motorised Transport-unfriendly. Basic mandates e.g. cost-benefit analysis have not been done for Swar Gate flyover nor footpaths or cycle tracks provided over these flyovers.
5. Even financial planning for the Pilot BRTS was pathetic. The planned ₹. 20 crores cost has escalated to about ₹. 130 crores. Without doubt, all ₹. 130 crores of public money has gone down the open stinking drains of the PMC.
6. PMC totally failed in its communication campaign for Pilot BRTS to prepare the public for this new concept of BRTS, which was the first in India. The NGOs consistently urged upon the municipal commissioners to prepare a plan

encompassing branding, marketing, education and an outreach Plan but to no avail. In fact, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the only campaign that became public was PMC's "innovation" of the concept of "mixed" BRTS, which became the laughing stock in the transportation fraternity the world over.

7. The PMC never made any mid-course corrections but went headlong making one blunder after another as can be seen by the description given above. This must have compelled the Maharashtra Assembly's Estimates Committee to take up the scrutiny of the Pilot BRTS resulting in a disastrous report. An extract from the Estimates Committee report fairly sums up the catastrophe known as Pune Pilot BRTS:

"...a number of citizens lost their lives due to traffic congestion. Some are disabled for life. ... low quality work ... faulty traffic signals... broken cables on the roads ... holes dug on roads etc. but mainly lack of safety measures ... there is increased irritation to the citizens ... Hence, there was tremendous public opposition to the project. .... There is no substance in the rosy and sweet picture painted by the Municipal Corporation administration of the work done on this pilot project, e.g. reduction in travel time and increase in the number of commuters, reduction in the number of accidents ... The possibility of occurrence of irregularities and illegalities cannot be ruled out considering the expenditure incurred on this project corresponding to the work carried out and its low standard. Hence, there should be a comprehensive inquiry at the government level to hold those responsible for the illegalities and to take action against them.

Need we stress any more that there is an urgent need to ensure that the BRTS now being constructed is not as calamitous?

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