

A PPP Model For Free Bus Service On SG Highway – Initiative By AUDA To Ease Traffic Congestion



Ahmedabad city is the seventh largest metropolis in India and is also the commercial capital of Gujarat. Since 1980s the city has grown from walled city area to far west end. The city was challenged to develop infrastructure to cater to the growing needs. Moreover, vehicular population in Gujarat is rising as the state economy has been continuously doing better. Sarkhej-Gandhinagar highway, which is commonly known as SG road is one of the main commercial hub of the western part. However, SG road being a part of the NH 8 has the maximum number of vehicles passing through it creating frequent traffic jams. Therefore, Ahmedabad

Urban Development Authority (AUDA) has introduced a free bus service on public-private partnership from High Court to Karnavati Club to ease traffic congestion. Separate bus shelters are constructed by AUDA and the buses are available at a frequency of 10-15 minutes. Moreover, the entire capital and O&M of running the bus services is borne by the partner and for AUDA it's a no profit-no loss service for its citizens. The main attraction for passengers to avail this service is the parking facility created at both the ends of the six km stretch.

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Situation Before The Initiative

The city of Ahmedabad was set up in 1411 AD as a walled city on the eastern bank of the river Sabarmati, and in 2007 it is the seventh largest metropolis in India and the largest in Gujarat. The population of the city has crossed the mark of more than 4.4 million. The peripheral areas of Ahmedabad have been expanding since 1980s and population growth in these areas has been more rapid than the areas within the city limits. This is partly due to the saturation of population within the city area and the consequent large-scale housing development in the peripheral areas. Whereas the eastern part of the city has industrial units and offices. Because of this, the traffic flow is very heavy from west to east in the mornings and vice-versa in the evening, which causes serious traffic congestion on the city roads.

The annual growth rate of the vehicular population of Gujarat is even higher than the national growth rate because the state economy has been

continuously doing better than many other states for the past many decades. The following table shows total number of vehicle registered and decadal vehicular growth pattern in India, Gujarat and Ahmedabad:

Year	India		Gujarat		Ahmedabad	
	Total	Decadal growth (%)	Total	Decadal growth (%)	Total	Decadal growth (%)
1961	665000		43230		NA	
1971	1865000	180	147967	242	62922	
1981	5391000	189	522451	253	165620	163
1991	21474000	298	2052391	292	538182	225
2001	54991000	156	5576040	172	1210278	125

Source: MoRTH, Gujarat (City Development Plan-Ahmedabad)

The Sarkhej-Gandhinagar Highway, commonly known as SG road being a part of the NH 8 has the maximum number of vehicles passing through it - goods carriages as well as passenger vehicles. Increasing number of shopping malls have only added to the existing traffic and parking problems, mainly during weekends. The six km stretch from High Court to Karnavati Club has almost 15 malls/multiplexes and shopping arcades. It causes heavy traffic flow, serious traffic congestion and frequent traffic jams on the city roads during peak hours, besides propelling the air pollution level. However, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has already introduced CNG buses to lessen air pollution. To regulate the air pollution levels in Ahmedabad, the Supreme Court of India had also set up Bhure Lal Committee for frequent monitoring.

Thus Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA) felt the need for an initiative to ease the traffic chaos and reduce air pollution. AUDA, in its continuous endeavor to provide better facilities to the people of Ahmedabad has introduced free bus services – one of its kind dedicated bus services on SG Road on a public-private partnership.

Implementation Strategies

AUDA has initiated a free bus service scheme on a no profit-no loss basis in the western part of the city to ease traffic congestion, especially during the peak hours as well as in weekends. The Sarkhej-Gandhinagar road being a part of NH8 is frequently used by innumerable number of vehicles heading to neighbouring states. Along with it, the SG road is also the connecting link for the newly developed residential as well as shopping malls.

The bus service has been started on a pilot basis in November 2007, with four special buses plying between High Court and Karnavati Club covering a stretch of 14 kms.

PPP model for selection of partner

A method known as SWISS challenge approach was used by AUDA to select a private partner to run the bus facility. From the many proposals received, AUDA selected Vantage Pvt Ltd., a leading outdoor publicity firm to begin the service on a pilot basis. Prior to selection, equal opportunities were given to all the bidders to modify; hence the most competitive bidder was selected thereby.

What is SWISS Challenge Approach?

The Swiss Challenge approach refers to suo-motu proposals being received from the private participant by the government. The private sector thus provides all details regarding its technical, financial and managerial capabilities and its expectations of government support/concessions.

The government may examine the proposal and if the proposal belongs to the declared policy of priorities, then it may invite competing counter proposals from others with adequate notice. In the event of a better proposal being received, the original proponent is given the opportunity to modify the original proposal. Finally, the better of the two is awarded the project/program for execution.

Encouraging community to use free bus services

Before introducing the services, leading newspapers of Ahmedabad covered this unique initiative of AUDA. This helped to create awareness among the community towards using bus services, especially on weekends to reduce traffic congestion. Unique colour of the buses also helped to capture the attention of passersby. The three main purposes for introducing the free bus ride between High Court and Karnavati Club are as follows:



The three main purposes for introducing the free bus ride between High Court and Karnavati Club are as follows:

- To ease traffic flow on SG road, especially on High Court & Kanavati Club stretch
- To reduce air & noise pollution owing to the increasing number of two-wheelers & four-wheelers on this stretch due to newly developed residential areas as well as shopping malls
- Proper parking facilities for people on either sides of this stretch to encourage people to avail free bus services

Facilities for the people using free bus service

AUDA has come up with interesting services to promote this bus facility among public, which are as follows:

- *Absolute free bus ride:* AUDA has started this bus service as a public-private partnership initiative on a no profit-no loss basis. Therefore, the private partner Vantage Pvt. Ltd. takes care of all the O&M expenses related to running the bus service, which includes man power, gas etc. As the service is being operated on a pilot basis, the buses start from 9:00 am and continue till 8:30 pm as of now.
- *The route covers a stretch of 14 kms:* To & fro the bus covers a distance of 14 kms stretch that covers the busiest areas of the SG road. Depending on the response of passengers, AUDA also plans to scale-up the service to a longer route.



- *Dedicated bus shelters at shorter distance:* AUDA has constructed around 35 shelters at a distance of every 500 mts.
- *Air conditioned buses:* The four buses introduced by AUDA are air-conditioned and run on CNG, which in turn reduces pollution.
- *Radio connectivity:* The buses have radios with FM stations that provide throughout entertainment to the passengers.
- *Regular frequency:* The buses are available in every 10-15 minutes and AUDA also plans to extend the timings of the bus facility depending on passenger's response.
- *Refreshments:* Light refreshments are offered in the bus on payment of a token charge.
- *Bus route:* Shortly, details of bus route shall also be drawn on the buses as well as on the bus shelters too.

Results & Impacts

- People are encouraged to use free bus ride through the help of mass media/ word of mouth to control the flow of vehicles, especially during peak hours.
- CNG buses reduce level of air pollution in the long run.
- Systematic parking facilities are created at both the ends of the stretch to encourage people to park their vehicles before boarding the bus.
- Free-of-cost ride promotes travelers to use this service as it comes with the additional pleasure of sight-seeing with no hassles.
- The initiative has eased the pressures of traffic controllers.

Lessons Learnt

Every corner of the city is well connected through the bus services run by Municipal Corporation, but seldom is used by people belonging to higher income strata. However, AUDA's initiative is encouraging citizens to park their private vehicles to use the free bus ride service. This realization on people's part that traffic congestion and air pollution cause severe problems comes across as the success of the project.

Sustainability

Public-private partnership model helps in operating the service on a no profit-no loss basis. As the service is based on Build Operate and Transfer (BOT), the service is operated by the private partner and would sustain on advertising revenues. AUDA also plans to start double-decker buses with glass walls in the same way to promote tourism.

Replicability

This is an apt model for all the growing cities with traffic problems and it can be easily adapted according to specific needs.