

Transportation Problems of Dhaka City: Findings from an Opinion Survey

A. Introduction

Over the last few years the transportation problem of Dhaka City has visibly been deteriorating steadily. Citizens constantly complain about the unbearable twin problems of traffic jam and air pollution. Democracywatch decided to address this problem through an opinion poll covering around eight hundred households randomly selected from several purposively selected neighbourhoods of the city, representatives of middle and lower income areas.

The questions asked focused mainly on three issues: (a) the nature of the problem as perceived by the surveyed residents, (b) their understanding about the causes of these problems and (c) their recommendations on solutions to these perceived problems.

Some preliminary results from this survey were presented at a workshop, which was participated by persons associated with the formulation and implementation of traffic policies, rules and programmes. This Draft Final Report benefits from valuable discussion and comments received at the workshop.

The methodology of this survey is explained below in brief. It is easy to see that the study extended beyond a standard opinion poll and entered the arena of investigative research in seeking some explanations to perceptions as well as behaviour.

The findings are presented mainly in the form of self-explanatory tables with some introductory highlights and conclusions.

A further extension of the survey is currently being completed to cover the very poor and the rich categories of residents as was recommended by several participants at the workshop mentioned earlier.

B. Methodology

During the round of the opinion poll the main focus was on the middle and lower income population of Dhaka city. Therefore, the sample was drawn from 30 purposively selected neighbourhoods which are generally recognised as middle and lower income areas. In each of these areas a systematic random sample of about 26 households were selected, giving a total sample of 775 households. In the event of any household's refusal to give interview which happened on average in one in four cases, the nearest household willing to be interviewed was chosen. Usually the household head responded. In case of his absence any other responsible adult capable of responding to the questions was interviewed. Interviews were conducted on the basis of a pre-tested questionnaire. Each interview took about 20 minutes. Fourteen investigators were engaged. The reference period for the survey was 21-27 October, 2000. Data was edited, coded and computerised. Analysis was mostly done electronically by using FoxPro and SPSS. Some tables were done manually.

C. Selected Findings

I. Perceptions on major problems

- Altogether 37 problems were mentioned. They were given a score on a scale of 1-5 to indicate their perceived seriousness. Each of these problems was then ranked according to the total score given to it by the analytical group under consideration.
- Not surprisingly, traffic jam topped the list, followed by hijacking/terrorism as no. 2, load shedding as no. 3, environmental pollution as no. 4 and water crisis as no. 5.
- Surprisingly, hartals were way down among the bottom 5 (at no. 33), reflecting possibly both a shortness of public memory as well as a lack of concern or an acquired immunity at the mass level in respect of hartals.

- Changes in public perception about the seriousness of problems in civic life was also evidenced by the placement of load shedding at no. 3, which would undoubtedly have been put as the no. 1 problem about 2 years ago.
- Except for problems no. 1 and no. 2 there was variation in the rank order of the perceived problems based on income, occupation, education and gender. For example, environmental pollution was given more importance by the richer people compared to load shedding. Likewise, unemployment was more of a problem for the poorer categories.
- Interestingly, poor drainage was not mentioned in the list of 5 most important problems in the city. Clearly, for all the sampled respondents, there were far too many other problems to enter the list of 5.

II. Opinion about recent trend in the traffic situation in Dhaka city

- About 10 per cent of the respondents had no definite opinion.
- Of those with definite opinions, about a quarter (24 per cent) thought there was some improvement (reference period November 2000), while over three fourths (76 per cent) thought there was a definite deterioration over the last few years.
- All professionals and labourers surveyed had definite opinions. While among professionals the proportion believing in a drastic deterioration was the highest (46 per cent) and definite deterioration fairly high (39 per cent), among labourers the opinion was more polarised between drastic deterioration (44 per cent) and marginal improvement (33 per cent).

III. Frequency and Purpose of Trips

- On average a household reportedly made about two and a half trips on a normal working day. This figure is believed to have been underreported and the true figure is likely to be about 50 per cent higher.
- There is variation in the frequency of daily trips among the different neighbourhoods of Dhaka city. The residents of Farmgate-Tejgaon and Motijheel-Kamalapur areas seem to make more frequent trips per day (2.8 and 2.7) compared to the residents of Rampura-Badda area (2.0).
- The office is the main destination of daily trips (about a third of all trips) followed by the business place (about a fifth). The variation in the relative frequency of the destination conform to the well acknowledged predominance of office goers or business people in different areas of Dhaka city. For example, old Dhaka neighbourhoods like Nawabpur etc, are strongholds of business people, while areas like Azimpur, Mirpur etc are the 'ghettoes' of office goers.

IV. Mode of travel

- More than half (54 per cent) the daily trips by sampled respondents were non-motorized, ie by walking, bicycling or on a rickshaw which was the single most used (46 per cent) mode of transport.
- Of the remaining 46 per cent trips, the dominant (25 per cent) mode was bus (public or office).
- The much polluting 2-stroke engined scooter/tempo accounted for 13 per cent of the total daily trips.
- There was not much gender variation in the choice of travel mode. Variation among the occupational categories was more distinct. For example, professionals seemed to travel by rickshaws and private cars, while completely avoiding scooter/tempo.
- Purpose-wise: office travel is least non-motorized (49 per cent) while non-grocery shopping is most so (63 per cent).
- Rickshaws are most preferred for school trips (52 per cent), shopping (47 per cent), and college trips (46 per cent).
- Office travel is still mainly on rickshaws (42 per cent), followed by buses (31 per cent) and scooter/tempo (14 per cent).

V. Time and cost of travel

- An average daily trip (one way) during the work-day reportedly took about 35 minutes., while an average daily trip over the week-end took around 41 minutes (subject to further verification).
- Variation in the time taken for an average trip was marginal between the income groups. The richer residents took longer (approx 39 minutes) compared to the poorer residents (approx 27

minutes). The average trip time for the professional women was reported to be the highest (approx 55 minutes).

- The reported expense incurred by an average household for daily travel was reported to be approx 22 takas. It was lower during the week-day (approx 19 takas) and significantly higher over the week-end (approx 35 takas), indicating more distant trips, possibly for leisure related activities.
- Differences in expenditure on daily travel exist. Higher costs are incurred by the professionals (30 takas approx) and the higher income households (28 takas approx).
- The recent oil price hike has had a direct impact on the cost of travel. The reported overall increase have been
 - approx 36 per cent on BRTC bus fares;
 - approx 23 per cent on private bus fares;
 - approx 36 per cent on taxi cab fares;
 - approx 32 per cent for other motorized vehicles.
- Overall, about 73 per cent of the respondents think another 15 per cent increase in oil prices would be unreasonable, while about 19 per cent thought it would be reasonable.

VI. Most severe problems while travelling

- The respondents identified, overwhelmingly, traffic jam as the # 1 problems (93 per cent) their daily travels. It was followed by pollution (62 per cent), higher fares (46 per cent), frequent accidents (26 per cent) and hijacking (26 per cent). Non-availability of enough vehicles was reported as a problem by only 16 per cent.

VII. Causes of traffic jam

- Narrow roads, broken roads and unplanned repairs appeared as the 3 main causes of traffic jam. This again is the result of asking the respondents to name only 3 main causes.
- When asked about the contribution of different road users to the traffic jam problem, the rickshaw wallahs were pointed out as a major culprit: 66 per cent thought they made very high contribution, while another 5 per cent thought they made moderate contribution.
- The truck drivers were next in line with about 50 per cent considering their contribution as moderate to very high.
- There were no significant variations in respect of the above findings between genders, incomes and occupations.

VIII. Recommended measures for solving traffic jams

- There were more recommendations on the software (i.e. legal framework, planning, management, etc) than on the hardware side (i.e. brick and mortar stuff).
- The single most recommended measure was one way roads (28 per cent). Interestingly, the richer and the professional households were less vocal about it, while the labourers did not mention it at all. The demand came mainly from the businessmen and lower income households.
- The next most recommended (22 per cent) measure was to improve and enforce the traffic law. If one adds to that the recommendation of establishment and enforcement of sound parking rules (11 per cent), legal reform and enforcement emerges as the most recommended (33 per cent) measure.
- There was broad unanimity in this regards between the genders, incomes and most occupations except the professionals for whom flyovers were the second most mentioned remedy.

IX. Comments of the sampled residents of Dhaka city on the traffic police and recommendations for their improvement

- Two fifths (40 per cent) of the surveyed residents thought the traffic police did not have enough authority over the control of traffic. There was variation on this among occupational and income categories. The professionals and the richer households on the hold thought the traffic police had enough authority.

- A large majority of the respondents (71 per cent) felt they had very little effectiveness in controlling the traffic. This view was comparatively stronger among the richer households, while it was universal among the professionals and the labourers.
- A larger majority of the respondents (78 per cent) felt the traffic police of Dhaka city were highly corrupt. This view was more pronounced among the professionals and the labourers.
- Most respondents (53 per cent) did not have any definite idea about how to improve the condition of the traffic police establishment as a whole; comparatively higher proportions of housewives and labourers fall into this category.
- Definite recommendations included improvement of administration and management (20 per cent), better training (13 per cent), increased salaries and facilities (8 per cent), increases in the number of traffic police (3 per cent) and better public awareness (1 per cent). A small minority (2 per cent) expressed complete exasperation (no hope). A smaller minority recommended the army to be brought in. Improved management was mentioned proportionately more often by the professionals.

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