

NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2019

TRANSPORT



Urban Resource Centre

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BRTS & grief

THE green bus and orange Bus Rapid Transit Systems has become but a farfetched dream. More than four years have passed but there is no sign of completion. I fear, this too, has become a victim of corruption.

Last year the Sindh governor along with the mayor of Karachi laid the foundation of bridges and their extension at Saki Hassan, Five Star and KDA Chowrangi. More than seven months have passed but there is no end in sight. From the looks of things, these projects are going to suffer the same fate as the Lyari Expressway and Peshawar's BRTS.

Numaish Chowrangi, the main junction of all traffic, has been closed for a year. The traffic has been diverted towards the narrow lanes of Soldier Bazaar which is always blocked.

Billions have been wasted in making the BRTS and so far, it has not benefited us at all, just caused more grief.

God knows how long we have to suffer before something is done!

A.Hassan
Karachi
(From the Newspaper Dawn, 09, 02/07/2019)

Improving road safety: Wear a helmet or get off the road, police tell motorcyclists

The Karachi Police will no longer tolerate motorcyclists plying the roads without helmets. Those who dare to do so will be fined and their vehicle seized.

"We are past the time for an awareness campaign," said the Traffic Police DIG Javed Ali Maher. "Now a challan will registered against those without a helmet and their motorcycle will also be seized," said the DIG explaining the campaign being launched now. "The motorcycle will only be returned after the procurement of a helmet by the motorcyclist."

The special campaign against motorcyclists plying their vehicles without helmets kicked off across the city on Monday after several warnings were issued by the law enforcers through the mainstream media as well as awareness camps. The campaign was kicked off at an event attended by senior police officials near Hotel Metropole on Monday morning.

Briefing the media, DIG Maher said citizens had been informed of this campaign since May and banners were put up on various thoroughfares of the city. They were reminded again at an event 10 days earlier that the campaign would be launched from July 1. The traffic DIG remarked that the purpose of informing citizens of the campaign well in advance was to give them time to buy helmets and reduce the number of challans during the campaign.

Besides, the trader community has extended support for the campaign. Partnering with traffic police, they have set-up stalls selling helmets at discounted prices in 13 different areas of the city, including Sharae Faisal, to facilitate motorcyclists, said Maher. The helmets at these stalls are being sold at 15% less than the market price, and while there is no compulsion to purchase helmets from these stalls, seized motorcycles will only be returned after a helmet is bought by the reprimanded motorcyclists, apprised the DIG, adding that others who wish to sell helmets at reduced prices could also partner with the traffic police.

The idea

In case of road accidents, the largest number of fatalities is caused by injuries to the head. Motorcyclists are particularly vulnerable in such incidents as their vehicle leaves them exposed and susceptible to injuries even if there is a minor hit or slight collision.

Helmets are effective in lowering the probability of head injuries and their severity in case an accident occurs. Increasing helmet use has been part of improving road safety strategy in several countries across the globe and is encouraged by the World Health Organisation as well.

While wearing a helmet is advisable for anyone on a motorcycle, or any two-wheeler vehicle, the traffic police's campaign will specifically target the person driving the motorcycle and issue challans if they are without a helmet.

According to a report by WHO on 'Why are helmets needed,' wearing a helmet is the single most effective way of reducing head injuries and fatalities resulting in motorcycle and bicycle crashes. "Motorcyclists who do not wear helmets are at a much higher risk of sustaining head injuries and from dying from these injuries. In addition, riders who do not wear helmets place additional costs on hospitals, while the disability that results from these head injuries incurs costs at an individual, family (or carer) and societal level," reads the report. It states that wearing a helmet reduces the risk and severity of injuries by 72%. The likelihood of death is decreased by up to 39%.

According to the Edhi Foundation's report, as many as 797 people lost their lives while 16,980 people were injured in road accidents in Karachi in 2018 alone. Moreover, around 60 percent of these accidents involved motorcycles.

Similarly, a study conducted by the orthopaedics department at Jinnah Post Graduate Medical Centre from January 2017 to December 2017, found that head and neck injuries were the third most common in road accidents as most bikers don't use

helmets. "Wearing helmets prevents severe injuries," concluded the study. "Creating awareness among motorcyclists regarding helmet wear and protective clothing and strictly following traffic rule and laws, many accidents and subsequent injuries can be prevented," it reads.

Ensuring road safety

"The only objective behind initiating the campaign is to ensure safety of citizens on the road. It is part of the traffic police's duty to do so," said the DIG on Monday, while stressing it was highly dangerous to be on a motorcycle without a helmet.

According to data collected in 2018, 19 locations in Karachi were termed sensitive as more citizens had lost their lives or received critical injuries in road accidents in those areas. Statistically, not wearing helmets worsened casualties in such incidents. Reducing the death toll because of road accidents is another objective of the campaign.

Maher said that the traffic police will be especially active on Sharae Faisal since it is a major thoroughfare of the city. Two shifts of section officers will perform duties at Sharae Faisal and will also patrol the area. "Action will be taken against anyone on a motorcycle without a helmet."

Traffic police will also remain active in other areas and challans will be issued to people on motorcycles without helmets.
(By Sajid Rauf The Express Tribune, 04, 02/07/2019)

Over 7,000 motorbikes seized, 11,500 riders fined for not wearing helmets

With traffic management being a challenge for the authorities in the city, where hundreds of thousands of vehicles run on the roads, the traffic police appear to have become more aggressive than ever in spotting motorcyclists without helmets as the law enforcement agency penalised more than 11,500 riders and seized over 7,000 two-wheelers, officials said on Tuesday.

The ambitious campaign for awareness of the utility of helmets for the safety of motorcyclists, which was launched by the Karachi traffic police only on Monday, had seen the law enforcers in all districts of the metropolis actively spotting and penalising the violators in the last two days and the number is expected to swell in the days to come.

"A total of 11,530 motorcyclists were penalised or fined for not wearing helmets while riding," said a spokesman for the Karachi traffic police. "The traffic police also seized 7,368 motorbikes during the first two days of the campaign. The police on the spot impose a Rs150 fine on the riders violating the rules who despite having helmets do not wear them while riding. Similarly, motorbikes of those riders are seized who don't have helmets altogether. A fine was imposed on them as well but their bikes are confiscated until they bring the helmet and a copy of the paid challan."

He said the traffic police in two days had imposed a total fine of Rs1.729 million with most of the cases reported in district South, where 2,126 riders were spotted using bikes without helmets.

'In our society violation of traffic rules is seen as [an act of] pride or bravery, not as a crime'

"It is stated that the use of safety helmets by motorcycle riders is a statutory obligation under Section 89-A of the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1965. The traffic police are making every possible effort to enforce it through a regular action and special drives," said DIG Traffic Javed Ali Mahar. "However, it has been observed that despite regular drives by the traffic police against helmet violations, motorcyclists still ride without helmets, resulting in serious accidents and loss of life. The violation requires additional checks in addition to the action by the traffic police on helmet violation."

He said that the police launched the campaign more for awareness and if the people are penalised, they would realise the sensitivity of the issue. Unfortunately, he said, a mere warning did not work and the riders never took it seriously.

"The people should understand that the rules are for their own benefit and non-cooperation from their side will only put their own lives in danger," said Mr Mahar. "As we observe, riding without helmets and speeding have been a major cause of fatal accidents among the riders. Unfortunately, a majority of the riders are not ready to follow the rules on city roads. It's quite unfortunate that in our society violation of traffic rules is seen as [an act of] pride or bravery not as a crime."

(By I mran Ayub Dawn, 15, 03/07/2019)

Part of Green Line bus project to be built at grade, says Murad

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Thursday took a policy decision to construct the portion of the Green Line bus project from the Numaish intersection to Municipal Park at grade so that it could be completed soon as it had already taken too long to complete.

The chief minister, who was presiding over a meeting held to review the Karachi Mass Transit and BRT project-related issues here at CM House, said the construction of a tunnel on M.A. Jinnah Road up to Municipal Park not only increased the cost of the project manifold, but various other routes of buses such as from Lyari, Keamari, Hawkesbay, Fisheries and others areas to M.A. Jinnah Road would be difficult to connect. "The main issue will be of connectivity of different routes of BRTs in the main junctions, therefore, we have to make it at grade," he said.

Besides, he said, the construction work would also cause business activities going on at the markets operating along M.A. Jinnah Road to suffer as it would take a long time to complete the project. Therefore, construction of a two-kilometre-long tunnel was not feasible.

CM orders cancellation of contract of firms engaged for garbage lifting in the city

The meeting was attended by Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani, Transport Minister Awais Shah, Chief Secretary Mumtaz Ali Shah, P&D chairperson Naheed Shah, Local Government secretary Khalid Hyder Shah, Transport secretary Abbas Detho, the consultants and other officers concerned.

The chief secretary told the meeting that the federal government had given two options to the provincial government for the construction of the BRT Green Line infrastructure from Numaish to Municipal Park either at grade or underground. "The chief minister has to decide whether the project be made underground or at grade," he said.

The consultants told the chief minister that at grade there would be a four-lane track which would be reduced to three lanes at some portions. At this the chief minister urged the consultants to manage these issues through traffic engineering, otherwise this ongoing project of Green Line would never see the light of day.

CM annoyed with growing filth

The chief minister, while presiding over another meeting convened specially to discuss the city's cleanliness issues, was annoyed over the growing filth and garbage in the metropolis and directed the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board (SSWMB) to cancel the contract of the private firms engaged for cleaning and lifting garbage in the city. He also urged the local government department to remove reluctant, inefficient and lethargic municipal commissioners from the DMCs.

"This is unacceptable and I can't tolerate this reluctance and inefficiency on the part of officers concerned," he said, recalling that the roads, most of which had been reconstructed recently, gave a dirty look because they remained uncleaned or partially cleaned. "Our DMCs' officers have also failed to do their work," he remarked.

"Wherever I go I see garbage lying on the roads and no relevant officer, including officials of the MCs and DCs, bothers to take action," he said. The CM added that he "has also noticed that some standing trees have been chopped at Clifton bridge, the area of district South".

"If anybody dares to cut a tree, he must be booked; I want to see them behind bars," he said and directed all the DCs to protect trees in their areas and plant as many trees as they could.

Mr Shah told the SSWMB managing director that he was not happy with the performance of the firms engaged for cleanliness of district West. The performance of the private company hired to clean district South was also not up to the mark, he said, and constituted committees under deputy commissioners to monitor sweeping and cleaning work and lifting of garbage.

"I want this [to] be done at the sub-division level where assistant commissioners be assigned to keep their areas clean," he said and added that the municipal commissioners of DMCs would be responsible to their deputy commissioner as far as the cleanliness work was concerned.

Mr Shah also directed the Karachi commissioner to personally watch every move in respect of cleaning of the city and start lifting the backlog of garbage. "I would start surprise visits to the city from the beginning of next week and would take strict action if any negligence is found," he said.

Tree plantation directive

The chief minister also directed the Karachi commissioner, deputy commissioners and other local government officers to start tree plantation in their areas.

"The plantation of a tree is not enough but the planted sapling must be protected and grown with proper care," he said and added that Karachi needed vast tree plantation and greenery and everyone had to play their role.

It was pointed out in the meeting that district Central was generating 2,200 tonnes of garbage, of which hardly 1,600 tonnes were taken to the landfill sites. Similarly, district West generates 2,500 tonnes of garbage and hardly 1,000 tonnes are lifted.

At this the chief minister expressed his serious displeasure and directed the DCs concerned to start lifting garbage as special assignments and procure services of some dumpers for removing the backlog.

He also ordered repair and painting of footpaths of newly constructed roads and beautification of important places. The Karachi commissioner would personally monitor beautification works.

(By Habib Khan Ghorani Dawn, 15, 05/07/2019)

'Numaish-Municipal Park at-grade work to cause traffic congestion'

The at-grade construction of the Bus Rapid Transit Green Line infrastructure from the Numaish traffic intersection to Municipal Park would reduce space for other road users and pedestrians, said a senior government official on Friday.

Karachi Infrastructure Development Company Limited (KIDCL) chief financial officer Zubair Channa told Dawn that the portion of the project had been in discussion between the company and the Sindh government for the past eight months.



Against the backdrop of the Sindh government's recent decision to construct the Numaish-Municipal Park patch of Green Line at-grade to ensure early completion of the venture, Mr Channa said: "The Sindh government is of the opinion that an elevated or underground passage would hinder future developments whereas technical experts suggest that at-grade construction would greatly reduce the road width and turn the four-lane thoroughfare into a two-lane road."

KIDCL official says despite reservations the project will be built according to Sindh govt's instructions

The step would cause a lot of public inconvenience as it was a very busy area and a feasible option could have been building an underground passage, he added.

He further argued that it was solely a matter of public convenience as underground construction would have required more funds. Also, a BRT project should be given a straight passage without traffic signals otherwise its utility and benefits would be reduced, he said.

"The at-grade construction of this passage would likely cost around Rs700 million to Rs800m but a tunnel would have cost around Rs3.5 billion, which is budgeted," he said.

"Having said that, we will go by the provincial government's decision. It's their domain and we will build the project according to their instructions," he said.

Mr Channa rejected reports of a delay in the project and said that the ongoing work at the Numaish intersection would complete by this December and an underground passage could have been built by the time procurement process for buses was completed.

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had recently held a meeting at the CM house to review the Karachi Mass Transit and BRT projects.

The meeting participants, including transport minister, chief secretary, planning and development chairperson, local government secretary, were of the view that the construction of a tunnel on M.A. Jinnah Road up to Municipal Park would not only increase the cost of the project manifold but would affect businesses along the passage and M.A. Jinnah Road's connectivity to other bus routes, such as from Lyari, Keamari and Hawkesbay.

(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 15, 06/07/2019)

Centre blamed for `denying` BRT projects to city

The Sindh government on Friday said the Centre was mainly responsible for the undesired delays in crucial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects in Karachi, which had been hindered on many occasions, denying the city modern modes of transport which it should have got years earlier.

"It is the federal government and only the federal government which is responsible for undesired delays in BRT projects, said Transport Minister Awais Shah while speaking to reporters at his office.

He said Islamabad had not included the Red Line and Blue Line BRT projects in the agenda of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC).

He said the Sindh government was grateful to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for approving loans for the BRT Red Line.

He added the ADB had approved \$235 million while the federation had been "ignoring" development in Sindh for reasons better known to Islamabad while the megacity of Karachi badly needed an efficient transport system.

"The Sindh government had to contact the ADB for these projects because the federal government had long been lending a deaf ear to our crucial mass transit projects," said the minister.

He said the BRT Red Line project would cater to 300,000 citizens of Karachi for convenient travel on certain busy routes.

He said some 29 bus stations would be established in accordance with the Red Line project.

"This is a huge project for the citizens of Karachi, which was overdue, yet, will ease out the increasing problems relating to absence of quality modes of travel.

He claimed that the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf-led central government had adopted "anti-Sindh" policies and was creating hurdles.

"The present federal government has adopted the tactics to punish people of Sindh, yet, that will not hinder our will to serve everyone living in the province, said Mr Shah.

He said the BRT Red Line project's groundbreaking would begin in December or January next year.

He blamed the PTI and its partners in the federal government, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, for hindering the development of Karachi.

The PTI and those decent people from Bahadurabad pose obstacles in the development of Karachi.
(By Our Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 06/07/2019)

Karachi transporters increase fares by up to 100pc

Transporters associations on Sunday increased fare of buses, coaches and minibuses by up to 100 per cent citing a manifold increase in prices of fuel, triggering anxiety in the city residents already suffering from inflation.

Amid heavy increases in CNG prices for the last 10 months, the transporters said, the Sindh government had not increased fares for the last eight years though during this period the Punjab government had increased fares five times. Thus it was not possible for them to run public transport under such circumstances, the transporters said.

A leader of the main transporters body of the city told *Dawn* that certain other associations had themselves increased fares, adding that the transporters would observe strike on July 10 in the city to pressurise the provincial government to increase fares.

According to passengers, the bus of route number 11-C has increased fare from Safoora Chowk to Saddar from Rs20 to Rs40, marking a 100pc increase.

The passengers told *Dawn* that when they asked the conductors to show a notification of fare hike by the provincial authorities, they did not have any such notification. Instead, the conductors showed a letter/notification purportedly issued by the Bus Owners Association of Karachi.

The conductors asked the passengers to disembark from the vehicles if they did not want to pay the increased fare. An exchange of hot words was witnessed among the bus conductors and the passengers who were seen cursing the transporters and the government officials also for not taking any action against the manifold increase in the fare.

Minibuses and coaches have also increased the fare on their own.

Mohammed Salman, an Edhi volunteer, told *Dawn* that the minibus of route W-11 had increased fare from Liaquatabad to Tower from Rs20 to Rs30.

The passengers also complained that the public transport owners had recently stopped plying their vehicles on full route to earn more money, putting an extra financial burden on the passengers.

Mohammed Azam, who travels from Gulshan-i-Hadeed to Saddar on a daily basis, told *Dawn* that Muslim coach's fare was Rs30 for travel between the two places, but it had recently stopped plying on full route. Instead, the coach drivers stop the vehicle at Quidabad from where another coach charges Rs20 for onward journey to Gulshan-i-Hadeed.

Strike call

Karachi Transporter Ittehad (KTI) president Irshad Bukhari told *Dawn* that they had not increased fare but instead they had given a strike call for July 10. However, he admitted that certain transporters' associations had themselves increased fares as it was increasingly difficult for them to run the business amid rising fuel prices.

(By Imtiaz Ali Dawn, 13, 08/07/2019)

Bus fare hike

According to press reports, a section of Karachi transporters increased bus fares by 100 per cent from July 8. There is nothing surprising about it. The transporters have announced the increase following the increase in prices of CNG and HSD. As it is usually witnessed, there were arguments between commuters and bus conductors over the increased fares — which ranged from 100 per cent to 50 per cent. When commuters asked conductors to show government notification about the fare hike, they did not have such notification. Instead, they showed a letter/notification purportedly issued by a bus owners' association. Bus conductors, as is their wont, rudely told commuters to leave the bus.

The Karachi Transport Ittehad president, however, told the press they had not increased fares but they had given a strike call for July 10 to press the government to allow for increase in fares. He admitted that some transporters' associations had increased fares on their own. He justified the increase saying it was becoming increasingly difficult for transporters to run their business due to the rising fuel prices.

On June 1, the prices of petrol and HSD were increased. On July 2, the price of CNG was increased by Rs20 per kilogramme in Sindh pushing the fuel price to Rs123 per kg. Buses, rickshaws and freight trucks use CNG, so if they increase their fares and charges, it should not come as a surprise. Further, transporters say that the Sindh government has increased the fee for vehicle registration and other taxes. The cost of imported spare parts has also increased because of the rising rupee-dollar parity. They say so far the government has not compensated them for these increases in their input cost.

If transporters go on strike on July 10, it will be an irony of sorts in a city where public buses have already become a rarity.
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 09/07/2019)

Club Road to be made one-way

Karachi Traffic Police, district administration and traffic engineering bureau have decided to change the two-way Club Road into a one-way road. The decision was made during a meeting, chaired by Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shalwani, on Friday.

Participants of the meeting were informed that initially the one-way route will be given a trial run and the decision to make it permanent will be taken later. During the trial run, traffic will only be allowed to move from Metropole Hotel to PIDC, Shaheen Complex and Chief Minister House. Traffic engineering bureau has been instructed to install traffic signs along the route to inform citizens about the direction of traffic flow.

During the meeting, District South traffic SSP presented a report about the implementation of the plan. After discussing all aspects of the plan included in the report, the meeting decided to make Club Road a one-way road. Participants of the meeting agreed that doing so will improve traffic flow and make the route safer for vehicles and pedestrians.

It was also decided in the meeting that the public will be informed of the decision prior to the implementation of the plan through print and electronic media. Traffic police department and traffic engineering bureau were particularly asked to take steps in this regard.

(By APP The Express Tribune, 05, 13/07/2019)

Club Road being made one-way

The city administration is deliberating upon a proposal to convert the two-way Club Road into a one-way road to ease traffic congestion at the PIDC traffic signal.

Official sources said that a meeting of the city administration presided over by Commissioner of Karachi Iftikhar Ali Shallwani decided on Friday to initially make Club Road one-way on an experimental basis and later on it would be converted into one-way on permanent basis if the trial proved successful.

They said that the decision to make Club Road one-way was taken after consultation with the traffic police and the traffic engineering bureau (TEB).

The officials said that the vehicular traffic would be allowed on the single-track Club Road from Metropole Hotel towards PIDC signal.

They said that the TEB would install traffic lights needed for guiding vehicular traffic.

The commissioner asked the traffic police to start the implementation of the decision to make Club Road one-way on trial bases as soon as possible.

They said that the SSP traffic (South) presented his report prepared on the directive of the commissioner with regards to the implementation plan.

The officials said that the participants in the meeting discussed at length all aspects of the proposed plan and decided to make one of the oldest roads of the city one-way in view of traffic problems being faced by the commuters.

They said that the participants agreed to the proposal.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 14/07/2019)

Juvenile driving: Minor stopped from driving truck, vehicle to be seized

The water tanker was expertly manoeuvred on the roads of Karachi. It seemed to be moving smoothly, and yet, the danger it posed to the life of its driver as well as to that of others on the road couldn't be ignored. The heavy vehicle was being driven by a minor.

A video that went viral on Saturday featured Bushra alias Khushi, an eight-year-old girl and a resident of Sher Shah, driving a water tanker. However, while the oddity of the happening awed many, whose wonderment blinded them to all that was wrong with the act, traffic police authorities were quick to point out the hazards it entailed.

What's wrong?

Having come across the video, Traffic Police DIG Javed Mehar made it clear that action, in accordance with laws pertaining to underage driving, will be taken against Bushra.

As per the traffic laws of Pakistan, those under the age of 24 cannot be issued licenses to drive heavy transport vehicles - the category under which water tankers fall. Hence, driving a truck at the juvenile age of eight years, Bushra is committing an unlawful act.

Moreover, underage driving not only puts the driver's life at risk but also that of others. Elaborating further on this, Mehar remarked that a minor girl driving a truck can result in a disaster. "It increases the chances of an accident by a significant measure," he added.

Keeping in view the implications of underage driving, Mehar has ordered that Bushra's water tanker be immediately seized. He said that under no circumstances will Bushra be allowed to drive the tanker. However, citing Bushra's reasons behind taking to driving a water tanker, he said that compensation will be provided to support her family and for the treatment of her ailing father.

Bringing home the bacon

Besides featuring her driving skills, Bushra has also revealed in the video that she has been driving the tanker to supply water to customers and earn money for the treatment of her ailing father and to support her family.

During a press conference held at Karachi Press Club on Saturday, Bushra further revealed that her father, Israr Ahmed, is paralysed. She said that Ahmed suffered from a paralysis attack about a year ago and he has not been able to work since then.

Having no other means of survival than Ahmed's income, Bushra's family was left helpless after the misfortune afflicted them and they eventually had to give in to her demand to let her drive the water tanker and earn a living.

"My father was adamant that he will not let me drive the tanker until I told him that I will commit suicide if he does not give me permission to do so," said Bushra. "He was left with little choice after that but to teach me how to drive the tanker," she added. "He now sits beside me on the front seat while I drive the tanker."

Youngest among her siblings, she was a student of class three back then and taking up driving the tanker meant giving up her education.

Speaking to media representatives, Bushra said that she fills her tanker from the hydrant in Sher Shah and supplies water to customers in Rasheedabad, earning Rs150 on each trip. Bushra makes three to four trips from Sher Shah to Rasheedabad daily. It was during one such trip that a citizen named Minhaj recorded her video which went viral.

According to Bushra, she faces no trouble while driving the heavy vehicle except when her arm hurts as she steers the truck's wheel. But she knows she cannot stop to take rest- she has to keep the wheel turning in order to ensure the survival of her family.

Little choice

Ahmed, who accompanied Bushra to the press conference, expressed worry over the financial issues that have gripped his family after he had a paralysis attack.

Responding to a question, he said that he is aware of the dangers that entail Bushra driving the water tanker.

"I know it can lead to a disaster. She could have met an accident or caught by traffic police," he said. "I also made it clear to her that I didn't have money to pay for her bail in case she lands in trouble with the police," Ahmed added. "But what other option was I left with?"

Underage driving

All this while, Ahmed has been daunted by the realisation that possibilities of Bushra landing herself in trouble, while supplying water to customers, are endless, and yet, much to his relief, worst of his fears have not turned into reality.

Bushra has never met an accident and surprisingly, she was never stopped by a traffic police official.

This indicates the authorities' and citizens' negligence towards the issue of juvenile driving, which is a growing problem in the city. Minors riding motorcycles is a common sight in Karachi and the trend has resulted in numerous accidents.

According to Mehar, 177 motorcycle accidents have been from Karachi in the last six months and 82 people died in these accidents. These also included cases of juvenile driving.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 14/07/2019)

Green Line still caught up in Sindh, Centre row

The under-construction Green Line bus project has once again become a bone of contention between the Sindh and federal governments. The project has suffered numerous delays due to the failure to finalise the design for Phase II, extending from Taj Medical Complex to Jamia Cloth Market. Development work on this phase has still not started.

At this point, even if a design were immediately agreed upon, the completion of the construction work for Phase II would still take more than a year.

Construction work on the Green Line Bus Project began in December 2016 and was supposed to be completed by December 2017. However, due to the objections of the Sindh government, the Quaid-e-Azam Mazar Management Board (QMMB), and several other factors, the three-phase project is nowhere near completion. Only civil works from Surjani to Gurumandir in Phase

I-A have been completed, while work on stations is still under way. Work on the Phase I-B underpass at Numaish Chowrangi is also under way.

The design of the original plan has been changed twice, while a third change to the design of Phase II is under consideration.

The federal government presented two options to the Sindh government after it raised objections over the recommendation to build two underpasses on MA Jinnah Road. Sindh government, after rejecting the options, has insisted that the Centre instead construct underpasses on Aga Khan III Road and Daudpota Road intersections so that the red line and yellow line, including BRTS lines, can use it in future, and also so that traffic flow on MA Jinnah Road is not disrupted.

The plan

According to the plan proposed by the Sindh government, two underpasses on MA Jinnah Road's intersections with Aga Khan III Road and Daudpota Road will be built for traffic going to Saddar and the old city area. Moreover, the Capri Cinema intersection and Tibet Centre intersection will be made signal free. Traffic will continue to move from Capri Cinema intersection to Numaish and Tower, and left turns towards Empress Market will be allowed. However, the traffic flowing from Garden to Empress Market will be restricted.

Traffic will continue to flow from Tibet Centre intersection to Numaish to Tower, but this intersection will remain closed for traffic flowing into Numaish after a right turn from Regal Chowk and traffic flowing to Regal Chowk from the left turn. Two U-turns over the underpasses will be made to ensure smooth flow of traffic to Saddar and the old city area.

Karachi Infrastructure Development Company Limited (KIDCL) Chief Finance Officer Zubair Channa shared that the KIDCL Board of Governors had approved the designs of the underpasses to be constructed on Daudpota Road and Aga Khan III Road, but during detail designing of these underpasses, KIDCL consultants observed that the construction of underpasses on the two roads would create further traffic problems instead of addressing the existing ones.

Channa said that both the proposed underpasses will be constructed on crossing roads of MA Jinnah Road and Agha Khan Soyem Road and Daudpota road intersections.

There is a U-turn on Agha Khan III Road near IBA, while Daudpota Road connects Garden Road to Anklesaria Hospital Road. The underpasses, if built on both intersections, will cause severe traffic jams on Kiyani Shaheed Road, Garden Road, and Anklesaria Road due to the lack of space near the slope.

The federal government raised objections on the underpasses and gave two recommendations from its consultants to the Sindh government in January. According to the first option, the Sindh government should either allow the Green Line Bus Project to run at grade on MA Jinnah Road, while the second option entails approving the project for constructing an underground tunnel from Taj Medical Complex to Tibet Centre.

The recommendations

The Sindh government rejected both recommendations, saying that the first recommendation would go against the basic concept of a dedicated route for the Green Line, as Green Line Buses would have to run alongside regular buses and would have to stop at various traffic signals.

On the second recommendation, the Sindh government said only a dedicated route for the Green Line will be built. This recommendation would create an open underground tunnel, with three sections of MA Jinnah at Mansfield Street, Daudpota Road, and Aga Khan III Road covered, and with traffic signals remaining where they are, while the remaining part of the tunnel will remain open, through MA Jinnah Road will narrow into a single lane on either side.

Traffic jams will become routine and problems will also be caused on several other lines of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) in future, they argued.

According to Muhammad Athar, the managing director of Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA), the federal government is only dealing with the Green Line Bus Project while the Sindh Government is planning the transport management plan on MA Jinnah Road, based on which the Green Line, Red Line, Yellow Line, Blue Line, and several others will have to pass in the future. Moreover, an appropriate area for traffic is also to be provided.

He said that the Sindh government will have no objections if the federal government completely covers the tunnel and builds a n underpass stretching till Tibet Centre by further extending the Numaish Chowrangi underpass. "It will be useful for future plans of the Sindh government, but an open trench is unacceptable under any condition," he added.

Athar added that a solution to the objections of the federal government has been found. The U-turn near IBA has been demolished, while traffic flow on Garden Road and Anklesaria Hospital has been improved. The plan, after final approval from the technical committee of SMTA, will be sent to the federal government, he said.

Response awaited

Channa told The Express Tribune that the federal government is still waiting for the final reply of the Sindh government. "The objections and alternate options deemed better by our consultants have been submitted to the Sindh government," he said adding that the Sindh government is responsible for traffic management on MA Jinnah Road. "Hence, the federal government will be obliged to implement the plan approved by the Sindh Government."

Based on the final response obtained from the Sindh government, the tender process will begin. If permission to construct an underpass on Daudpota Road and Aga Khan III Road intersections is granted, it will take eight months to work on the project, while the underground tunnel from Taj Medical Complex to Tibet Centre could take a whole year, he said.

On the directives of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the procurement of buses for Green Line Bus Project, operational and implementation of the Integrated Intelligent Transport System will be done by the Centre instead of the Sindh government, said federal government officers working on the project.

Under the federal government's plan, the process of procuring 80 buses will be completed in eight months, during which construction work on Numaish Chowrangi will be completed. Hence, bus operations from Surjani to Numaish will begin soon after, while development work on Phase II will continue. Bus operations will be extended till Municipal Park after its completion.

The underlying issue

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a KIDCL officer affiliated with the project said the Sindh government's approval is mandatory for the design of Green Line Phase II as it is the custodian of MA Jinnah Road.

"KIDCL has informed both the Sindh government and the Sindh Mass Transit Authority of the decision reached in the KIDCL board meeting," said the officer. "In view of the decision taken in a meeting presided over by the chief minister, KIDCL has sought time from the Sindh planning department chairperson for a meeting so that we can discuss the department's reservations while presenting our stance," he added.

The officer further revealed that the Sindh government has not written any official letter regarding new decisions at the provincial government level. A formal letter issued by the Sindh government will be presented before the KIDCL Board of Directors, which will then decide on a course of action.

(By Syed Arshad Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 15/07/2019)

Karachi's sad tale of transport

How a mega city the size of Karachi survives and functions without a dependable public transport service is a riddle that baffles many. Besides the chaos and pain that people endure, the economic cost of insufficient and inefficient public transport is unsustainably high.

As per the World Bank, there should be a 100-seater bus for every 1,500 people. So considering Karachi's population of 14.91 million, there should be 20,448 35-seater minibuses and 5,566 50-seater buses. But the number of buses plying the roads is much less than that.

Most working class people can't afford private vehicles hence they rely on public transport services. However, it is the privately-owned vehicles that dominate the transport services as the Karachi Transport Ittehad is a coalition of privately owned buses, taxis and rickshaws.

Most use buses and mini buses since they are the least expensive mode, with fares now Rs15 for 5km and Rs30 for 10-20km. These are expected to rise further due to increases in fuel prices.

A major problem is that of the overloading of passengers (average of 45 passengers per bus). Over half of the passengers don't even get a place to sit, especially during rush hours (8am to 9:30am and 5pm to 7pm). They are forced to stand in the aisle, hang on the edge of the doors or sit on the roof. This problem is mostly because of the shortage of buses available to meet the massive demand.

Considering the city's population, there should be 20,448 35-seater minibuses and 5,566 50-seater buses, but the numbers available are much less than that

As can be seen from the table, there has been a 57 per cent reduction in the number of buses in 15 years, and it has been so due to either buses being scrapped, converted into loading trucks or having moved out of the city.

Of the original 403 planned bus routes, only 41pc (165) are operational. That's why most passengers have to take more than one bus to get to a certain destination or walk long distances from the bus stop to their main destination. As a result, people either get late for work or sacrifice their comfort to make up for the time they spend in changing buses.

There are numerous behavioural issues observed inside buses. Despite the existence of a partition, sexual harassment takes place with incidents of intentional touching or men taking pictures of women without consent. Pick pockets are also common. Drivers sometimes play vulgar music, especially during the night, creating a sense of uneasiness for some passengers.

Buses don't follow basic safety standards as there are no formal maintenance checks. Many have broken windows, torn seats and missing doors. CNG cylinders are attached underneath front row seats creating hazardous conditions for those sitting there. Buses often race against each other, in the midst of traffic, simply to catch more passengers first. Not only does this cause discomfort to passengers, it also leads to accidents at times.

Alternatives to buses are cabs and rickshaws. While they are more comfortable, their fares are much higher, with an average rickshaw driver charging ten times more than a bus fare. In case of cab drivers, the difference is higher even though the fares can be bargained.

These modes are unaffordable for the lower income groups who on average earn Rs200-250 daily. Ride-hailing services such as Careem, Uber and Bykea are the most preferred option by middle-class travellers because of their superior facilities and reasonable fares, relative to the local rickshaws and cabs. They're successful because they fill the gaps that are present in the current transport setup but these services are also unaffordable for most of the labour class.

Types of vehicle	Number (1998)	Number (2013)
Mini buses	8,773	16,494
Buses	14,854	6,403
Taxis	13,613	47,049
Rickshaws	29,337	141,705

Karachi: The Transport Crisis, Urban Resource Centre, 2015

Karachi Metropolitan Corporation has announced the Transport Master Plan 2030 where six bus transit routes (BRT) have been promised. The routes will cover 95.1km and provide transport to about 350,000 people daily.

In 2017, the government had also announced the revival of the now defunct Karachi Circular Railway. A 50km track was promised to be built, covering all the industrial and urban areas of the city.

But there have been numerous delays in the progress of each of these projects due to conflicts between the federal and provincial governments.

The Sindh government announced Rs5.2 billion for the development of public transport in this year's budget, which includes financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank for the Red line and Yellow line projects respectively.

"We are well aware of the current problems of the public transport system and that is why we have announced the BRT projects in Karachi. We hope that this will be a positive step towards development" said the Sindh transport minister, Awais Shah Qadri.

"We hope that these upcoming BRT and railway projects are implemented with immediate effect and that they're maintained up to global standards. We expect that these projects would be corruption free, maintain safety standards and help to meet the mammoth demand of the increasing population," commented a student with interest in the urban transport scene.

(By Fahad Saleem Business & Finance Dawn, 03, 15/07/2019)

Manghopir Road project caught in KE-KIDCL row

The fate of the Manghopir Road project is in jeopardy due to the ongoing legal wrangling between K-Electric and the Karachi Infrastructure Development Company Limited (KIDCL), a federal entity responsible for the development work.

The project became a bone of contention between the Karachi-based power supply company and the federal body when the latter decided to remove and relocate power cables and other infrastructure without informing the supplier. The move caused power outages in the area. Subsequently, K-Electric filed a petition against KIDCL, bringing the project to a grinding halt.

Last year, under the Karachi package, the federal government initiated the reconstruction work of the dilapidated Manghopir Road at a whopping price tag of Rs. 2.4 billion. Out of the total allocated funds for the project, Rs.1.7 billion were reserved for the relocation of utility lines.

"K-Electric repeatedly requested concerned KIDCL authorities for details about the Manghopir Road project but information was not provided," spokesperson for the power supplier claimed. "We approached the Sindh High Court for a stay order when power supply was disrupted in the area due to the construction work," he claimed.

K-Electric is demanding Rs.50 million for the transfer of high tension lines, power cables and other infrastructure, a demand that KIDCL officials say is unreasonable.

"KIDCL is willing to fulfill K-Electric's demands if they are realistic," a KIDCL official said while speaking on the condition of anonymity. "We are spending 50% of the project funds on transfer of utility lines in the project route." "During the construction process, water, sewerage, gas pipelines and power cables have been affected," he admitted.

This is not the first time the power supplier and KIDCL have clashed over a construction project. The two were at odds over disrupted power supplies during work on the Green Line Bus Rapid Transit Project.

Commenting on the situation, KIDCL Chief Finance Officer Zubair Channa said efforts were being made to resolve the dispute. "We've paid Rs310 million to K-Electric for shifting the high tension lines and cables during the construction of the Green Line Bus Project," Channa claimed.

"If K-Electric makes a justifiable demand we are still willing to fulfill it," he added.
(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 17/07/2019)

Transporters increase bus fares yet again without official notification

The transport mafia in Karachi has raised bus fares by 50 per cent to 100 per cent for the second time since July 2018 despite there being no notification by the government in this regard.

Following the hike in the prices of high-speed diesel and CNG, operators of Shama Coach, F-11, Daata Coach, W-11, 17-J, S-2, W-21 and several other buses and coaches, are now charging an extra Rs10 to Rs20 per commuter.

According to the new fare structure, the maximum fare for every passenger in coaches is Rs50 as opposed to the earlier fare of Rs30. Similarly, minibuses are now charging Rs45 as their maximum fare which was Rs30 earlier. Besides, the minimum stop-to-stop fare is now set at Rs25 as compared to the earlier Rs15. When passengers, who include children and the elderly, ask bus conductors to show the government notification for the increased fare list or refuse to pay the extra amount, they are told to leave the bus.

Benefiting from the absence of the state's writ, most conductors of minibuses and coaches fleece passengers by waving fake fare lists before them.

Passengers claim that the government has failed to protect them and has left them at the mercy of the transport mafia which holds the metropolis hostage despite the supposed presence of transport departments, authorities.

"Since this mode of travel is used by low-income sections of society and in light of the poor state of public transport on urban and intercity routes, the government should not allow any increase in bus fares," said one female commuter who is a resident of Federal B Area and a frequent passenger of the Shama Coach from Sakhi Hassan to FTC bus stop. She added that transporters must be forced to increase the number of vehicles on the roads and improve the condition of their buses.
(By PPI The Express Tribune, 05, 17/07/2019)

Green Line bus project to be made operational by March 2020, Murad told

The Sindh government has ordered removal of all impediments in the completion of the much-awaited Green Line bus rapid transit project so that it can become operational by next year.

Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah issued such directives during a meeting held at the CM House to review the work on Green Line, which is being undertaken by the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (SIDCL), on Wednesday.

SIDCL chief Sualeh Farooqi briefed the meeting about the decision taken by the prime minister for making a formal agreement with the Sindh government regarding the operations of the Green Line.

Mr Farooqi told Dawn that the Green Line would be ready for operation by March 2020.

He termed today's meeting quite productive in which all necessary decisions were taken by the chief minister.

He said that CM directed the transport department to prepare a draft agreement and other required documents in consultation with all stakeholders including the Sindh Mass Transit Authority.

The federal govt will control the project for first three years after signing an agreement with the Sindh govt

He hoped that the agreement would be signed within next two weeks, paving the way for issuing an international tender to invite operators.

According to the decisions taken by the CM, the operation of the Green Line would be undertaken by SIDCL for first three years and a formal agreement would be signed between the Sindh government and the SIDCL.

The SIDCL will closely coordinate with the provincial government for transfer of the project upon its completion.

The chief minister directed the authorities concerned to expedite the completion of Green Line so that buses could start operation next year.

The meeting was attended by Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani, Transport Minister Awais Shah, Chief Secretary Mumtaz Shah, Planning and Development chairperson Naheed Shah, World Bank's acting country director Melinda Goods, principal secretary to CM Sajid Jamal Abro, SIDCL chairman Samar Ali Khan, Green Line project CEO Sualeh Farooqi, LG secretary Khalid Hyder Shah, transport secretary Abbas Detho and others.

CLICK project to be completed in five years

The CM also held a meeting with a two-member WB delegation, led by acting country director Ms Goods, to discuss the Rs33.6 billion WB-assisted Competitive and Liveable City of Karachi (CLICK) project.

The meeting was told that the Sindh government would start work on the project from next year and it would be completed within five years.

The meeting was informed that the project was aimed at supporting the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and all six district municipal corporations, district council Karachi and excise and taxation department. The provincial investment department would also be supported under the project for taking positive steps towards ease of doing business.

The chief minister directed the chief secretary to hold a joint meeting of the KMC, DMCs, District Council and Excise and Taxation department to chalk out a plan to formally devolve the collection of property tax.

"I am keen to financially strengthen the local bodies in the city so that they emerge as self-sufficient organisations," he said, adding that under the project capacity building of the local bodies concerned would also be made for collection of the property tax.

The project has three components — \$120m for performance-based block grants to Karachi urban local councils; \$50m for strategic infrastructure investment and capacity building in integrated storm-water drainage and solid waste management and \$30m for support for urban immovable property tax reform and institutional capacity building.

Its main coordinating agency would be the LG department. A project management unit (PMU) would be established to provide overall coordinating and necessary technical assistance to Karachi's local councils.

The project's executing agencies for specific interventions under this arrangement will be the KMC, DMCs, KWSB and excise and taxation department for their respective components.

Overhauling of KWSB

The chief minister said that the Karachi Water and Sewerage System Improvement Project (KWSSIP) was being launched with the assistance of the World Bank for \$1.6bn under which Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) would be overhauled over a period of 12 years.

The KWSSIP will be completed in three phases. The first phase is estimated at a cost of \$400m focusing on improving water and wastewater services and a defined set of institutional reforms to transform the KWSB into a financially viable utility.

P&D chairperson Naheed Shah told the meeting that the first phase of the scheme of overhauling KWSB had been approved for Rs14.7bn over a period of five years. The project had also been approved by the central development working party (CDWP).
(By Habib Khan Ghorani Dawn, 15, 18/07/2019)

Sindh govt shelves Blue Line bus project due to financial crunch

A comprehensive public transport system for the people of Karachi remains a distant dream as provincial authorities have shelved the Blue Line project, one of the two Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) schemes, due to financial constraints, a top official confirmed on Saturday.



The decision to put on hold the Blue Line was taken after consultation with officials concerned in a series of meetings, which led to a consensus to relaunch the scheme once the financial health of the province improved.

The authorities, however, argued that the decision would not affect launch of other schemes and progress on already under-construction projects.

The transport minister says a tender floated earlier stands cancelled

"The Blue Line project has now been put on hold and a tender which had been floated earlier stands cancelled," Sindh Transport Minister Syed Awais Qadir Shah told Dawn. "The reason is very simple. We are short of funds and carrying out work of already launched projects amid so [many] financial challenges. We have not done it willingly but in fact the circumstances led to such an unfortunate decision."

When asked about the impact of the current financial challenges of the Sindh government on other transport projects, he said the provincial authorities would ensure smooth progress on all other schemes being carried out to improve public transport for Karachiites.

"It's true that we have been managing the progress of projects like Orange Line [with difficulty], but it is our resolve to complete them within stipulated time. And we have commitment to initiate the process of Blue Line once we get the green-light in terms of the provincial government's financial health," he added.

According to the Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA), which was established under the SMTA Act 2016, Blue Line, which is a bus rapid transit project, was developed to evolve into an MRT scheme as ridership peaks. The project's initial planning suggests that the 9.6-kilometre-long project was designed to go from Al-Asif Square in Sohrab Goth to Gurumandir through Shahrah-i-Pakistan.

At Gurumandir, it was advised that the project will link with the Green Line project, which is being funded by the federal government.

The Sindh transport minister's concerns regarding the financial constraints came against the backdrop of complaints by Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah who in recent month had raised the issue of cuts in federal transfers that would risk several public service schemes.

Recently, CM Shah had told the Sindh Assembly that his government had received Rs505 billion out of the federal government's revised promise for province's share of Rs631bn at the dying moments of the current fiscal year and the province had yet to receive Rs126bn from Islamabad.

A senior provincial government official said that the approval of a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for one of Karachi's key transport projects had emerged as a sigh of relief for the people of the metropolis.

"The ADB has recently approved a \$235 million loan for a Karachi BRT project called Red Line," he said. "The bank has announced that the loan would support a transport system with innovative energy and climate resilience features that will enhance access to quality public transport for people in Karachi. The Red Line project will deliver a 26.6-kilometre fast-track transport corridor and associated facilities from Model Colony to Numaish, benefiting around 1.5 million people."

(By Imran Ayub Dawn, 15, 21/07/2019)

President briefed on Karachi's Green Line project

The Green Line bus rapid transit project, which is expected to be completed by March 2020, would provide the much-needed transport facility to hundreds of thousands of people of Karachi initially with 65 diesel-hybrid buses, a senior official said on Monday.

The disclosure came during a briefing by officials of the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited (SIDCL) during a meeting presided over by President Dr Arif Alvi at the Governor House.

The briefing to the president covered details of federal government-funded under construction projects and those planned for the current fiscal year in Karachi and other parts of Sindh. Sindh Governor Imran Ismail was also present on the occasion.

According to a statement issued by the Governor House, SIDCL chief executive officer Sualah Farooqi informed the meeting that the company had completed phase-I of the 21km dedicated corridor of the Green Line bus project, along with OCC building and depot, saving an amount of around Rs1 billion. He said civil work on phase-II was under progress, which included construction of 1.1km underpass, 462-metre underground bus terminal and 1.5km common corridor from Guru Mandar to Municipal Park on M.A. Jinnah Road.

He said the Sindh government had recommended the construction of at-grade common corridor on M.A. Jinnah Road on a priority basis.

The president was informed that the federal government had allocated Rs2.5bn during the current financial year for the operation of Green Line. Mr Farooqi said the SIDCL was going to float request for proposal, enabling the management to start procurement of a fleet of 65 diesel-hybrid buses for Green Line service.

"President was subsequently briefed on the status of schemes under the Karachi package. He was informed that during the first quarter of current financial year, the SIDCL will complete three major schemes of infrastructure improvement which include 8.1km-long Manghopir Road from Jam Chakro to Banaras Chowk, 6.9km Manghopir Road from Banaras Chowk to Nishter Road and 6.4km Nishter Road from Teen Hatti to Napier Road," the statement said.

Construction of three flyovers, it added, along Shershah Suri Road at Sakhi Hassan, Five Star and KDA roundabouts was also under progress.

The SIDCL CEO informed the meeting that the company had approached the National Disaster Management Authority to avail Rs700 million grant through Risk Management Fund by earmarking matching grant of Rs300m. This would enable the SIDCL to utilise funds in drought-hit areas and strengthen local agencies with modern disaster recovery tools, he said.

(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 03, 23/07/2019)

Part of Karachi-Hyderabad motorway submerged by rainwater

Gushing rainwater entered a number of low-lying localities and villages located on the outskirts of the city as well as flooding a section of Karachi-Hyderabad Motorway, also called M9, causing its closure for around five hours on Tuesday.

While no government official was available for confirmation, there were reports that the flooding of M9 was caused by a breach in the Thaddo dam located in Gadap Town, as had happened in the past.

"We had to close one-and-a-half-kilometre section of the M9 after it got submerged around 11am. The traffic was diverted on the other track," said a spokesperson for the Motorway Police.

Karachi receives 164.9mm, or 6.4 inches, of rain in two days

According to him, the situation improved gradually when rain stopped after a few hours, reducing water pressure.

"The water found its way and slowly discharged into culverts," he said, adding that the portion was opened by 4pm.

To a question, he said he could not confirm but apparently the flooding was caused by a breach in a nearby dam.

A visit to the spot showed that apparently culverts were too small for a sudden rush of water, which led to the closure of the track. The specific road track, where flooding occurred, is located opposite a housing society, Saadi Town, which has experienced similar flooding quite a few times in the past.

One could see rainwater gushing out of the culverts into the housing society built on a low-lying area.

It also entered other low-lying societies and villages adjacent to the Northern Bypass as well as houses located along the Lyari River, which had swollen due to incessant rain for the past two days.

It is important to mention that flooding within the city and parts of its suburbs has become a regular feature whenever Karachi experiences heavy downpour.

Experts blame this situation mainly on the failure of the government to protect and preserve the city's natural drainage routes that had either been completely closed or blocked by unplanned development.

In addition, the city has not been able to develop a proper solid waste management system including periodic cleaning of existing drains within Karachi.

Speaking to Dawn, seasoned architect and urban planner Dr Noman Ahmed said: "Areas located in the north and north-east of the city's suburbs have a peculiar topography and that is the marked difference in the land's level."

For decades, some of these areas were reserved for livestock raising, while others located near a water body for agriculture, he said. This nature of topography was well protected till 1970s and culverts were built if the road/highway was built on a rain-catchment area.

"But, this [strategy] was changed later when projects like Scheme 33, Saadi Town, etc, came in violation to this topography. Under Scheme 33, only land was allocated and no provision was made for natural drains," he said.

The massive extraction of sand along rivers and drains, he pointed out, also greatly damaged the city's natural barriers, equally affected by newly built housing societies such as Bahria Town and DHA City.

On the design of M9, he said: "The current situation should serve as an eye-opener. The track should have been designed in a way that it could withstand all forms of weather. We should have learnt from the 2012 Saadi Town flooding that confined hundreds of people in their homes."

Asked about the breach in any dam that might have contributed to the track's flooding, he said it might be possible as there were several locally built reservoirs on the outskirts of the city, which might have overflowed and flooded low-lying areas.

Drizzle forecast

The Met department forecast cloudy weather with light rain/drizzle on Wednesday.

During the two-day rain spell, the Met office recorded maximum 164.9 millimetres, or 6.4 inches, of rain in Surjani Town followed by 149mm, or 5.8 inches, of rain in Saddar.

The met office recorded 78mm of rain in Gulshan-i-Hadeed, 88mm in North Karachi, 65mm in Nazimabad, 59 in Landhi, 62.3 in the old area (Airport), 79.4mm in Gulistan-i-Jauhar, 87mm in Faisal Base and 82mm in Masroor Base.
(By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 15, 31/07/2019)

Traffic police seeks Rs520m 'commission' for ticketing violators

The Karachi traffic police are seeking more than Rs500 million from the amount of fines they collected during the past five years from citizens of the metropolis on account of violation of traffic rules. The police want to reward their personnel and acquire modern gadgets, it emerged on Sunday.

Recently, in a vigorous campaign the traffic police had not only fined hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists for not wearing helmets but also impounded their two-wheelers for traffic rules' violations.

They said half of the 30pc amount was consumed for purchasing traffic equipment and the remaining was disbursed among traffic police personnel as reward for issuing challans against traffic rules violators.

With traffic management being a challenge for the authorities in the city, the traffic police appear to have become more aggressive than ever in only spotting motorcyclists without helmets, as they penalised more than 18,000 bike-riders and seized over 10,000 two-wheelers.

30pc 'commission' on fine income

They said that under the set rules 30 per cent of the total amount of the fines received through the ticketing system was meant to go to the traffic police. However, the amount has not been released since 2014.

"The amount pending since 2014 now stands at around Rs520 million," said an official. "Half of that amount, or Rs260 million, has to be disbursed among the traffic police officials entitled to earn commission on ticketing traffic violators."

The official said that it was a huge amount and recently the traffic police high-ups had approached the authorities concerned for release of the money. "The traffic police used to earn commissions by ticketing traffic violators and kept a small percentage of the fine. But for the last five years, they haven't seen a penny of this amount."

He said that whenever any campaign to reinforce traffic rules was launched people thought that they were penalised or challaned by the traffic personnel only to increase their share in the total amount of fine.

Terming it a "misconception", he said the traffic police were not being rewarded for more than five years. However, he agreed about a common practice among traffic police officials that they were seen issuing tickets to the people by defying set rules.

"It's true that under Section 116-A of the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1965, a police officer not below the rank of head constable is authorised to fine traffic rules violators. But here we see that even those who are not authorised are issuing challans to violators," he added. The ambitious helmet-awareness campaign for the safety of motorcyclists, which was launched by the Karachi traffic police earlier this month, had seen the law enforcers in all districts of the metropolis actively spotting and penalising the violators. (By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 05/08/2019)

Car tax

THERE are no marks for guessing who has the toughest job in Pakistan right now. Few would come close to competing with the person tasked with collecting Rs5.5tr in taxes during the present financial year. The job is well nigh impossible at a time when economic growth is projected to slow down to 2.4pc from over 5pc in the last fiscal year. So we can see why FBR chairman Shabbar Zaidi is desperately tapping every opportunity that comes his way to net revenues to achieve his target, which is around 35pc higher than the tax collected last year. Now, taking advantage of the lifetime token tax collection by Punjab, Sindh and Islamabad on the small cars with engine size of up to 1000cc, according to a report published in this newspaper, the tax authority has decided to also recover lifetime (advance or withholding) income tax from their owners. This means that the car owners on the active taxpayers' list who are already required to pay Rs10,000 as lifetime token tax will also have to deposit an equal amount to discharge their lifetime advance tax liability at the time of registration of their vehicles. (The advance tax liability will decrease at the time of renewal of registration according to the age of the car though.) Those who do not file their tax returns will have to make a further payment of Rs10,000. The decision is effective from July 1, 2019, and payment of advance tax will be mandatory, thus adding to the burden on the pockets of car buyers with limited, fixed incomes.

Desperate times require desperate measures. But will such revenue generation actions help the FBR achieve its ambitious target? Although the FBR was successful in collecting around 95pc of the tax revenue target for July, the first month of the present financial year, and increasing the number of tax return filers by 67pc to 2.5m last year, few believe that the board will be able to achieve or even come close to its target for the entire year in a shrinking economy. In reality, certain new tax measures and increased rates of indirect taxes will only further dampen the prevalent negative consumer and business confidence. Taxation should not be just about collection of higher revenues. It must also spur economic growth. Only by growing the economy can the government and the FBR achieve their revenue targets.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 11/08/2019)

Public transport and the women of Karachi

The other day, I, after a long, long time, decided to use public transport. There were multiple reasons for it, one of which was to observe how difficult or easy, in these times of confidence-damaging inflation, people of low-income groups are finding this particular mode of transportation.



It turned out to be an enriching socioeconomic experience. Karachiites who live on the sociological fringes of the city are a terribly, terribly resilient lot, and yes, that includes the womenfolk.

My route began from DHA Phase V with Gulistan-i-Jauhar as the final destination. I hopped onto a minibus from Saba Avenue at around 11am. There were a handful of passengers. The conductor, who hung from the door a la Shah Rukh Khan in the climax of the film *Dilwale Dulhania LeJaynge* was blasé about the goings-on because it

was Sunday morning. There was sweet lethargy in the air. When the bus turned left to enter Khayaban-i-Shahbaz, he came to me and asked where I wanted to go. I replied, Qayyumabad. He said Rs25. This left me bewildered. "Isn't Qayyumabad a couple of miles from here?" I inquired sheepishly. His response was: mehngai (inflation).

I coughed up the amount and started to peruse the vehicle. It was a rickety, creaky structure and its engine made sounds as if the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk had tummy issues. I wondered: with so much fuss about noise pollution, how passengers could put up with such sputtering and stuttering, especially when they're coming from or going to work. Don't they need a cosy mode of travel? The seats barely had legroom and could be a perfect punishment for a criminal who is a touch more than five feet nine inches tall with a bit of fat around their stomach. Apart from that, the bus was an eyesore.

It is totally unfair to compare our society with any of its Western counterparts. But for context, a measure of the latter's being civilised is the utmost importance that they attach to public transport. Anyone who has been to London would know that the quality of its public transport system — underground tubes and buses — is what makes it one of the most citizens'-friendly cities in the world.

From Qayyumabad I waited for another bus for almost 20 minutes which was supposed to take me to Gulistan-i-Jauhar. Nothing doing. Sundays are meant to be lazy. In the meantime a few Qingqi wallahs were imploring me to join them for what they suggested wouldn't be heavy on my pocket. So when the bus that I was looking for didn't arrive, I gave in ... and decided to opt for the Qingqi. The driver had already told me that he's going to take me to Nipa for Rs50 after which I could get another ride for not more than Rs20.



We (not you rich people) all know that the Qingqi is a six-seater rickshaw. This means half a dozen passengers can sit in the cabin behind the driver facing each other. But the driver allows two men (it can't be women) to sit next to him, basically flanking him, making it a nine-person ride which is utterly unsafe.

I sat in the back seat in the right corner with a thirty-something man who was carrying four or five heavy bundles of assorted stuff. Two young girls then came and sat in front of us. They exuded confidence and were constantly chatting to each other. They were heading for Tariq Road. Finally, two more men sat on each side of the driver, and off went the Qingqi.

The man with assorted items got off at a stop after 15 minutes, replaced by an old man. He was shabbily dressed, must be in his early sixties, with light stubble that indicated he hadn't shaved for a week or less. Some five or six minutes into the ride, the girl that was sitting right in front of me started to scream at the man.

"Old man, don't act smart with us. I've been noticing you ever since you came aboard. Look at your age and your behaviour. Trying to be cheeky with girls more than half your age? You have one foot in [your] grave. I can give you a slap right now, what would you do?"

The tirade carried on for a couple of minutes during which that old man kept silent with his head down, trying to evade eye contact with that girl. The rest of the passengers were stunned. What had happened, no one knew.

At Tariq Road, the two girls got off, paid the amount that was due to the driver and disappeared into a street giving a terrifying look to that man. When the journey resumed and one stop later that man got down from the rickshaw, the journalist in me couldn't help it and asked him what had caused the girl to hit the roof. He answered, during the ride when the Qingqi hit a speed-breaker, he lost balance and his hand inadvertently touched the knee of the girl sitting beside the one who had shouted at him.

Obviously, it wasn't an inadvertent mistake. He was lying. There was more to it that met the eye. Otherwise he wouldn't have stayed silent when the girl was unmasking him. Kudos to the young women for being brave! I felt so proud of them.

The entire episode got me thinking: what good our provincial and federal governments are if they can't provide the people who vote them into power with comfortable, inexpensive and safe public transport?

(By Peerzada Salman Dawn, 18, 18/08/2019)

Sindh vehicle owners

HAVING bought and registered a new car two years ago, I still drive with a temporary, stencilled, tin number plate. The Sindh excise and taxation department has failed to issue a regular number plate that ought to be provided with each new registration.

Needless to say that my civic reputation and my meagre financial resources have been hugely diluted in the process by the two unwarranted 'chalans' for the crime of carrying incorrect car number plates. Little do the police know that the real culprits reside in the Sindh excise and taxation department.

Thousands of other citizens suffer and have been suffering because of the same state-sponsored harassment for the last several years. Why should citizens be made victims because of the government's incompetence to perform an absolutely simple task of providing original number plates at the time of registration?

All it requires is keeping sufficient number plates in inventory and issuing them on day one of the car registration — a normal practice in most countries.

The Sindh excise and taxation department has also failed to facilitate car owners to use electronic or mobile money transfer system for yearly payment of motor vehicle tax. The desire to retain archaic and torturous processes in Sindh is simply incomprehensible.

Can we once again, for the hundredth time, ask the Sindh chief minister to push his sleepy excise and taxation department to eliminate these two chronic ailments?

Naeem Sadiq

Karachi

(From the Newspaper Dawn, 07, 19/08/2019)

Baba and Bhit islands: Where the streets have no wheels

When you think of Karachi, the first image that comes to your mind is of a bustling metropolis with all the necessities of urban life, readily available for its residents.

But not too far away – off the coast of the Keamari Harbour, are the twin islands of Baba and Bhit, where residents live a life free of the trappings of modernity.

Residents of these islands claim to have no temptations for the quintessential urban lifestyle, which is considered as a requirement just a boat ride away, in Karachi.



Home to a small community of fishermen, the constricted streets on the islands remain free of wheels and traffic congestion that so commonly haunt the residents of urban settlements.

“No, we don’t blame the government for not providing us with buses and cars here,” said Haji Qasim, a resident of the Bhit Island.

“There is no space for cars on these narrow roads,” he explained.



For many, who dwell on these islands, separated by 800 meters of deep seawater, the only source of income is fishing. Without fear, armed with fishing nets and other gear, these locals venture into deep waters, hoping to bring home enough to make ends meet for the day.

“All we need is our boats and the basic infrastructure. That is all we need to earn a living,” said one fisherman, who resides on the island.

Cosily ensconced 20 minutes away from Karachi, residents of the two islands have no desire for cars, trains, rickshaws the indispensable ingredients of modern transportation. For them, the winding, narrow streets closely weaved houses and pedestrian-only lifestyle means the world. And the only vehicles for transport are the makeshift boats docked all around the islands.

“This is our island. We are happy with the small streets and no traffic,” said one resident.

With a total population ranging between 30,000 and 40,000, of these localities, Baba Island, is also said to be the oldest inhabited place.

Offering no-frills to its residents, the twin islands, are a melting pot of many ethnic groups including Muhajirs, Sindhis, Punjabis, Pakhtuns and Balochis. Many inhabitants, who have lived long enough to witness the islands change, said the perils of mainland industrialization was taking a toll on the environment.

“The once pristine waters that surround the islands are now polluted,” said one islander.

Despite the limited resources and way of life, residents of Baba and Bhit Islands are living life one day at a time. “Who needs cars and wheels when you can walk to most places,” said one resident.

(By Shakir Sultan The Express Tribune, 05, 24/08/2019)

Karachi awaits 60 buses as minister (re)announces ‘Peoples Bus Service’

On May 11, 2019, provincial Transport Minister Awais Qadir Shah announced the launch of a new bus service. The intra-city bus service project was to have 1,000 buses for Karachi but a 100 days later, the project has yet to be initiated. Meanwhile, the transport minister has announced yet another bus project for all districts of Sindh.

In a statement issued on Friday, the minister claimed that the Sindh government has sought suggestions from the transport department regarding the launch of intra-city buses and van and coaster services in all districts of Sindh. “It has been decided that initially, 60 buses will be introduced in the metropolis in 60 days, during the first phase of the project. After two months, another 200 will be added to the fleet in the second phase of the project,” the minister had announced in May. According to the agreement signed in May, between the Sindh government and Daewoo, a Korean transport company, Karachi was to have 60 buses by July 11, and another 200 by September.

On Friday, Shah said that the Sindh government will provide route permits, bus depots and other facilities to transporters free of charge, and transporters with over 40 years of experience of driving coasters and buses can contact the provincial government. “The government of Sindh wants to gift the Peoples Bus Service to all districts of Sindh,” he said.

Empty promises

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has to its credit a long list of promises for bus services in Karachi during different tenures of its governments in Sindh. In 11 years of its rule in Sindh, its government has launched the pilot projects of ten buses in Karachi and 20 buses in Larkana, and one of these projects was shut down in around a year of being functional. The rhetoric, however, may have you believing otherwise.

In February this year, the transport minister had announced the launch of a bus service, during a question-answer session of the Sindh Assembly. During the session, he sought quotations from interested investors for a bus service consisting of 200 buses covering 10 routes in Karachi.

Previously, in 2017, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah had also approved a plan to introduce 600 inter-city buses in Karachi, as a part of the Sindh Government's five-year loan programme through the Sindh Modaraba Management Limited. The Sindh government had announced it will facilitate transporters in generating funds for new buses.

In the following year, another ten buses were introduced in the city, under the Peoples Bus Service project, launched by the then transport minister Nasir Hussain Shah. Buses run under this project were also owned and operated by Daewoo. This project was shut down just after a year in April 2019.

(By Vakeel Rao The Express Tribune, 05, 26/08/2019)

Sindh MPA's unregistered vehicle sparks debate in assembly

The Excise and Taxation (E&T) Department has been running a campaign against unregistered vehicles plying on the roads for the past several months. On Monday, however, the issue hit home when a vehicle belonging to a lawmaker, parked inside the Sindh Assembly premises sparked a debate in the House.

The issue was raised by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf MPA Arsalan Taj during the question and answer session, when the E&T minister, Mukesh Kumar Chawla, was making promises of taking action against vehicle owners who were driving without the official registration plates. Taj drew the minister's attention towards a vehicle that was parked in the assembly's parking lot. "First of all, you should take action against the vehicle that is now parked in the assembly premises. Does any law permit someone to use such vehicles? If there is no law, why is this vehicle parked in our parking area?" questioned Taj. "I request the excise and taxation minister to summon officers and impound the vehicle from the assembly premises."

At this, Chawla grew hyperactive and remarked, "It's true. I have seen such vehicles with fancy number plates. He requested the speaker, Agha Siraj Durrani, who was chairing the session, to order the staff to close the assembly's gates so that they could take immediate action.

Some members from the Opposition bench suggested deferring the action for a day, but the E&T minister insisted on clamping down there and then. "They will not bring the vehicles without number plates tomorrow. This must be done today," he demanded. The speaker, however, ignored his plea, diverting attention towards another question.

Rusting away

Earlier, Chawla informed the house that around 71,000 number plates were ready in Karachi, but the vehicle owners hadn't come to collect them. "People are raising a hue and cry that we create problems in issuing number plates. I appeal vehicle owners to please collect these number plates so we can clear space for storage," he said.

PTI MPA Sidra Imran, in her supplementary question, said that of the 71,000 number plates, 7,000 are owned by various Sindh government departments and 8,000 plates belonged to the police. "Why are the police and government departments not collecting their number plates?" she questioned. The minister said that the CM has also taken notice of the issue and directed the respective departments to collect the plates.

When his attention was diverted towards excise officials who don't issue number plates, Chawla said, "We normally award the contract to a company for number plates. The contract has expired and we have to award a new one. The process is ongoing and will be finalised soon."

Motorcycle tax

Referring to the federal government's directives to the provincial excise and taxation department, Chawla said that the Federal Board of Revenue was repeatedly asking his department to collect the withholding tax from motorcycle owners. "They are asking us to charge Rs10,000 as withholding tax from filers and Rs20,000 from non-filers," he revealed. "These directives are issued only to the Sindh government," he said. "It does not apply to the other provinces," he added. "On our failure to impose such taxes, the FBR has deducted Rs7 billion from our account. We protest and will not impose such taxes on motorcyclists," he lamented.

Earlier in the session, PTI MPA Khurram Sher Zaman raised the issue of the rise in the incidence of various diseases in the wake of monsoon rains. "Many people have lost their lives to the Congo virus and Naegleria. The CM is not in the house. Who will brief us about the government's efforts to mitigate the crisis?" he questioned.

Health Minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho said that she will brief the house on the issue in a day or two after which the session was adjourned till today [Tuesday].

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 04, 27/08/2019)

Green Line delays force change in Karachi's Ashura plans

August has come and gone, and with it, another deadline, but phase one of the federal government's much-vaunted Green Line Bus Rapid Transit project predictably lingers on.

Authorities had promised to partially finish the Numaish Chowrangi Underpass – the centerpiece of the Green Line development scheme – by August and open part of it to the public by the end of the month. But they have not been able to meet any of those promises and have now announced a mid-October target date.



In addition to prolonging the misery of Karachi commuters, the latest development has had a more immediate effect on plans for this year's Ashura, which falls next week. Due to ongoing work on Numaish Chowrangi, city authorities have been forced to alter the route for Muharram procession, officials and other sources told The Express Tribune.

Already the first phase of the federal government's grand transport scheme has been delayed by almost a year. According to sources, this is mostly on account of a design dispute between the centre and Sindh authorities, which has held up work on the ramp of the underpass.

The delays, among other things, authorities were forced to alter routes for the Youm-e-Ali processions held on 21st Ramazan. While convincing Youm-e-Ali procession organisers to take the new route, the federal government-run Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (SIDCL), which is overseeing work on the Green Line, promised it would finish work and open Numaish Chowrangi by August, far ahead of Ashura in the second week of September, the sources said. The entire phase, SIDCL officials assured, would be completed by December.

For various reasons, however, the federal government was unable to meet that deadline and has been forced to change the project schedule. Under the new schedule, the upper part of the underpass will be open to the public by October 15 after work on the roof and sides are complete, and the entire phase is to be finished by May next year, they added.

In the meantime, authorities have been left with no choice but to change the route for Ashura processions. The main procession will now make its way from Nishtar Park, through Gurumandir, Peoples Chowrangi, Saddar, Preedy Street, Regal Chowk, Tiber Centre, and M A Jinnah Road, to Kharadar, confirmed Deputy Commissioner Karachi East Ahmed Ali Siddiqui.

"We have already held talks with Muharram procession organisers and senior officials of the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (SIDCL), and have finalised a new route for the processions after taking all stakeholders on board," he said.

"Due to the closure of certain transit points, we agreed to change the route for the main Muharram procession in a meeting presided by Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shalwani," said procession organiser Syed Shabbar Raza.

"However, we stressed that development works should be complete as soon as possible so that Chehlum processions are not inconvenienced like the Youm-e-Ali and upcoming Ashura processions," he added. "We were assured by the Green Line administration that Numaish Chowrangi will be opened by October 15."

Speaking to The Express Tribune, SIDCL engineers said authorities' inability to finalise the design of Green Line Phase Two was the main cause of Numaish Chowrangi delays. They said the Sindh government last year requested that phase two developments be built on ground level rather than as elevated structures, as laid out in the original plan. It also asked the federal government to construct underpasses on Agha Khan Soyem and Dr Daudpota intersections of M A Jinnah Road. The Sindh government even had its consultants draft an initial design in this regard.

Initially, the centre approved the design drafted by the Sindh government, the engineers said. However, it turned down Sindh's propositions after its own consultants highlighted serious flaws in the plan. Instead, the federal government sought permission to build an underground tunnel connecting Numaish Chowrangi to Tibet Centre.

The Sindh government, in turn, did not agree with the centre's counter-proposals and in subsequent meetings, tried to persuade federal government engineers to follow its plan instead of the latter's. Both the centre and Sindh authorities have continued to debate the merits of their designs and demerits of each other's proposals for 10 months, the engineers added.

In the meantime, the federal government has continued work on the Numaish Chowrangi Underpass, they said. The roof of the underpass has been laid down and only finishing work on the sides is left. The federal government, however, did not begin work on the ramp to be built next to Taj Medical Complex, according to the engineers. The centre, they said, is holding out for the off chance that Sindh government approves its proposal to construct the tunnel to Tibet Centre.

Two months ago, the Sindh chief minister rejected the centre's design in favour of the Sindh government one and directed SIDCL to begin Green Line Phase Two construction from Taj Medical Complex to Municipal Park. Work on the ramp began 15 days ago, after being held up on account of bureaucratic procedures and the monsoon rains.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 02/09/2019)

Mayor Orders Road Repairs

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation On Tuesday Started Filling And Repairing Of Roads With De-Watering Work At Night In Different Parts Of The City.

City Mayor Wasim Akhtar Told Dawn That He Had Directed The City Municipal Administration's Staff To Expedite The Filling Of Trenches And Repairing Of Roads Damaged By Recent Spells Of Monsoon Rains.

He Said That The KMC Staff Carried Out Repair And Filling Work At Sharea Faisal, Korangi 12000 Road, Nipa University Road And In Front Of Urdu University And In UC-28 Where Change Of Sewerage Line Was Initiated On Emergency Basis So That People Could Be Facilitated.

The Mayor Said That He Had Directed The Officers Concerned To Carry Out Small Works Of Sewerage At Such Locations Where Residents Were Facing Problems Due To Sewerage In Their Streets And Localities.

"These Works Should Be Done On Priority Basis To Provide Relief To People", He Added.

Meanwhile, The KMC Also Carried Out Correction Of Sewerage System With Its Own Resources.
(By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 04/09/2019)

Bill on use of CNG kits in school vans, public buses drafted, SHC told

A provincial law officer on Thursday informed the Sindh High Court that a proposed bill of the Sindh CNG kit & cylinder fitness authority act had been drafted and that it would be placed before the provincial assembly for further proceedings soon.

The bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that the situation would be slightly different or improved if proper law was legislated, adding that the provincial government was not giving any propriety to this crucial issue.

It observed that the Supreme Court in a human rights case had already given certain directions with regard to CNG cylinders and public service vehicles and a detailed mechanism had been laid down, but unfortunately it had not been implemented in letter and spirit.

The bench was hearing a number of petitions about use of substandard CNG kits and cylinders in commercial vehicles and as school vans.

AAG asked to call relevant officials on next hearing

At the outset, an additional advocate general (AAG) submitted a copy of the proposed bill and contended that it would be very soon presented in the Sindh Assembly.

The AAG further contended that a rule (73-A) had been added to Motor Vehicles Rules, 1969 to deal with CNG issues in the school vans and public service vehicles.

However, the lawyers for petitioners pointed out Section 44 of the Motor Vehicles Ordinance and submitted that school vans were exempted under this provision.

The bench observed that the AAG would also assist on this point with regard to the inconsistency and repugnancy apparently visible in rule 73-A vis-à-vis Section 44.

A DSP, appearing on the behalf of the DIG traffic, suggested that school vans be treated as commercial vehicles and a provision may be made for granting them a fitness certificate so that at the time of issuing such a certificate their CNG cylinders be examined.

The bench directed the AAG to call the additional secretaries, college education & school education, additional secretary law and secretary board of university at the next hearing.

The court also put the chief inspector (explosives) on notice and asked the officials, who were present during Thursday's proceedings, to be in attendance for finalising the issue on Sept 19.

Advocates Muzammil Mumtaz and Tariq Mansoor, and others had moved the SHC and contended that a rickshaw driver was forced to commit suicide as money was extorted from him at least three times and alleged that it was a routine in Karachi that traffic police were engaged in demanding bribes from rickshaw drivers and motorbike riders on main roads, and on refusal they imposed undue fines on them.

The petitioners maintained that the substandard CNG cylinders were being used in the public transport as well as in school vans in contravention of the directions of the court and no action was being taken against such vehicles. Impleading the home secretary, transport secretary, DIG traffic, Ogra and others as respondents, they asked the court to direct the respondents to take action against traffic policemen demanding bribes and to restrain public transport vehicles and school vans from using substandard CNG cylinders and overloading.

(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 15, 06/09/2019)

Sharae Faisal partially closed for traffic

Hundreds of motorists faced difficulty on Thursday as one track of Sharae Faisal, leading from Hotel Metropole to the airport was closed for maintenance work on the underground sewerage lines in front of Hotel Mehran. The worst traffic jam was witnessed during rush hour at around 1 pm, when different schools and colleges closed for the day, and then again after 5 pm. Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) officials said that the repair work could take up to 24 hours to be completed.



With the city's main artery choked, the traffic congestion spilt on to other adjoining streets and localities such as Zainab Market, Saddar, Lucky Star, Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, Gora Qabristan and Cantt Station.

South Zone Traffic SSP Akhtar Asad told The Express Tribune that depression had formed on Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road, which connects Sharae Faisal to Atrium Mall, due to an underground sewerage line during the recent rainfall.

KWSB officials had informed the traffic police on Wednesday that they would be repairing the sewerage line and that one track of the major thoroughfare would have to be closed for traffic.

The SSP said that they hadn't received any complaints regarding traffic jams anywhere, but traffic police personnel were present at the site at all times. Though the traffic flow will be heavier than usual in areas such as JPMC, Gora Qabristan, Zainab Market, Lucky Star and Hotel Metropole till the repair work is completed, he said that the police would ensure there are no bottlenecks. SSP Asad estimated that it would take 24 to 36 hours for the KWSB officials to complete the repair work.

Traffic police claimed to have mapped out alternative routes for citizens. They requested citizens to cooperate with the traffic police to avoid taking the route and to contact the traffic police helpline 1915 in case of any difficulty. They can also get details from the traffic police's social media pages, including Facebook at www.facebook.com/karachittrafficpolice, their WhatsApp number – 03059266907 or FM radio 88.6.

Meanwhile, KWSB's Assistant Executive Engineer Arshad Javed said that the repair work on the sewerage line was started at 2 am on Thursday and would be completed within 24 hours, after which the track will be opened for traffic. He said that the underground sewerage line was laid in 1964. "The sewerage line had sunken inside the land which caused a depression in the road," he added.

The sewerage system at Sarwar Shaheed Road, Raja Ghazanfar Ali Road, JPMC and various areas of Saddar is badly affected due to the same sewerage line.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 06/09/2019)

Whose job is it anyway? As authorities bicker, Shaneira sounds alarm at Sea View again

No one knows where the medical waste at the Sea View beach came from. Or even how it ended up at the site. The Sindh government is pointing fingers at the Centre and its various agencies. The federal government, for its part, remains mum on the issue. Stuck in the middle are the thousands of picnickers and revellers who throng the shore every week.

The issue came to light on Monday, when Shaneira Akram, the wife of former Pakistan cricket star, Wasim Akram, posted a number of photos and a video of hospital waste dumped at various points along the beach.

Hours later, the strip was buzzing with activity, as officials of the provincial government, as well as the Cantonment Board Clifton (CBC), stepped up efforts to remove the waste. But that was not the end of it. Akram visited the beach again on Thursday and raised the alarm once more. "Now I want you [government] to treat the people of Karachi exactly like your family and do the right thing and issue a public service warning across all media until we [people] know the beach is safe," she tweeted.

In a subsequent tweet, she asked the authorities to cordon off the beach for the public until it was cleared of the medical waste lying around on the shore. "If appropriate authorities do not issue a warning to hundreds and thousands of users for this weekend, it will be complete negligence towards the health and safety of the public. The TV channels have done their job. Now is the time you [government] do yours. Show the people of Karachi that you care," she demanded.

The blame game

According to the provincial government, the federal government's agencies have yet to comply with formal 'requests' made by provincial agencies in accordance with the recommendation of the Water Commission.

Following the instructions of the Supreme Court-mandated Judicial Commission on Water and Sanitation, the Environment, Climate Change and Coastal Development Department (ECCCDD) had written letters to various provincial and federal agencies and departments for compliance, but it failed to receive any response. The ECCCDD even sent a reminder to all the departments, including Port Qasim, Karachi Port Trust, Local Government Secretary, all cantonment boards, Karachi Metropolitan Corporation and others on Wednesday, seeking details on solid waste collection and disposal.

"We will summon them to the tribunal court if they don't obey our orders," said ECCCDD Secretary Khan Mohammad Mahar. "The federal government's indifferent attitude has compelled us to take action against them according to the law."

Asked why his department couldn't keep a check on the waste being dumped at the shore, Mahar said they have very limited resources. "We don't actually clean or sweep the garbage but ask relevant offices to dump the waste according to the law."

For their part, the Cantonment Board Clifton's spokesperson, Amir Arab, told The Express Tribune that they have vigilance teams patrolling the area round the clock and that no one could have brought the waste and dumped it there. "The medical waste must have come to the beach via one of the sewerage lines that open onto the shore," he speculated.

An environmental concern

Meanwhile, environmentalists and health experts have jumped the bandwagon in demanding that the government take action and clear the beach of all waste. "It is an alarming situation for the public," commented environmentalist and journalist, Afia Salam. "The authorities must ensure its [medical waste] removal immediately," she added.

Echoing Akram's concerns, Salaam said that the government should penalise those dumping medical waste at the beach. "Who has dumped the hazardous waste?" she questioned. "The government must trace the source and take strict action."

On Monday, the authorities, including the CBC, Sindh government and police personnel instantly responded to Akram's tweets and cleaned the beach from the Village Hotel to McDonald's.

Sindh Chief Minister's Adviser on Environment Barrister Murtaza Wahab, who reached the beach along with his team, pledged that his department would write letters to all hospitals, as well as federal and provincial departments to closely coordinate with his department. He added that the federal government, especially the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Syed Ali Haider Zaidi was not cooperating with the provincial government.

When The Express Tribune tried to approach Zaidi for comment, his phone was attended by a subordinate, who repeatedly said that 'Sahib' was in a meeting.

Meanwhile, the Sindh government has District South Deputy Commissioner Salahuddin Ahmed to investigate the matter and present a report within seven days.

(By Sameer Mandhro The Express Tribune, 04, 06/09/2019)

Over 15,000 govt cars plying without official plates in Sindh

Over 15,000 vehicles owned by the federal and provincial governments and their various agencies are plying the roads without the official registration plates as they have yet to collect them from the Excise and Taxation (E&T) Department.

At the top of the list among these departments is the Sindh Police, which is currently using 8,000 vehicles without the official registration plates in various districts of the province.

According to the E&T's records, the vehicles in question have been registered over four years, between 2015 and 2018, but the various government departments and agencies haven't bothered to collect the plates from the E&T Department.

Sindh Minister for Excise and Taxation Mukesh Kumar Chawla has even announced on the floor of the Sindh Assembly that government agencies and civilians should collect the official registration plates for their cars but no one seems to have taken heed.

According to the records, the official registration plates of the cars in the use of the Sindh Police Department, comprising the series of SPH, SPG, SPF, SPE, SPD, SPC, SPB and SPA, haven't been collected from Excise and Taxation Department as yet. Meanwhile, vehicles in the use of Pakistan Standard Quality Control Authority, Ministry of Railways and Aviation Division are also plying the roads with temporary number plates.

Meanwhile, the Sindh government's own agencies include the Education and Literacy Department, Department of College Education, local government, Culture Department, Health Department, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Programme, Anti-Corruption Establishment, Law department, Sindh Labour Department, Services and General Administration and others. The vehicles bearing temporary number plates instead of official registration plates are in the use of senior bureaucrats and other officials.

The cars registered in the names of provincial and federal departments include the registration numbers from the series – GSF, GSE, GSD, GSC, GSB, GSA and GPA.

According to Chawla, the department has more than 70,000 such number plates whose owners haven't reached out to the department to collect them. Using unofficial number plates is a violation of the law. However, the E&T Department seems reluctant to take any action against the federal and provincial agencies for plying vehicles without official number plates.

(By Vakeel Rao The Express Tribune, 04, 13/09/2019)

CS summoned to explain delay in land allocation for intercity bus terminal

The Sindh High Court on Tuesday summoned the chief secretary for Oct 24 as the issue of 100 acres of land for a proposed bus terminal near Superhighway remained unsolved.

A two-judge SHC bench headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar observed that in case the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) was facing a financial crunch, it would be the responsibility of the provincial government to construct different bus terminals in compliance with the orders of the superior judiciary.

In the last hearing, the bench asked the chief secretary to appear in court as a KMC official submitted that demarcation of the land for proposed terminal at Superhighway had not been made yet.

The SHC asks provincial govt to appoint new prosecutor in Daniel Pearl murder case

The court was hearing a set of petitions about the issues of heavy vehicles and deteriorating traffic situation in the provincial metropolis on Tuesday when a focal person requested for exemption of the chief secretary's appearance on the ground that he was presiding over a meeting on Karachi's infrastructure.

The transport secretary submitted a compliance report along with a summary sent to the chief minister on Sept 16 for construction of 100-acre intercity bus terminal. The court also directed him to come up with a progress report about the summary on the next hearing.

The bench observed that the issue of the land, which was required to be handed over by the Sindh government to KMC, was still unresolved.

The senior member of the Board of Revenue informed the bench that as per the terms and conditions, the land was to be handed over but on payment by the KMC.

On the contrary, the KMC representative submitted that they had no funds to even pay pension and salaries of their employees and pensioners due to a financial crunch and said that the KMC could not bear the expenses.

However, some associations of transporters offered that if the land was handed over to KMC, they will develop the terminal on a build-operate-transfer basis.

The court observed that this issue cannot be resolved without the appearance of the chief secretary as in case of a financial crunch faced by KMC, there must be some modalities to hand over the land to it for construction of a terminal.

It is otherwise the responsibility of the Sindh government to construct different terminals in compliance with the order passed by this court and the Supreme Court, it added.

The bench directed the chief secretary to be in attendance on Oct 24 without fail.

The joint secretary of the All Pakistan Bus & Van Owners Welfare Association had earlier offered 30 acres of land for the terminal, but the transport secretary said that the documents in this regard had been sent for verification but no confirmation had been received so far.

The court directed the joint secretary of the association to submit the set of title documents to the commissioner office for verification and also asked the commissioner to verify these documents before the next hearing.

Hearing adjourned in Pearl murder case

Another two-judge SHC bench on Tuesday directed the law secretary to inform it about appointment of another prosecutor to plead the appeals filed by convicts in the US journalist Daniel Pearl's abduction and murder case as the previous prosecutor had passed away.

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and other convicts had moved the SHC in 2002 challenging their convictions handed down by an antiterrorism court in Hyderabad in the Pearl murder case.

The trial court had sentenced Omar Sheikh to death while co-accused Fahad Naseem, Salman Saqib and Sheikh Adil were handed down life term for helping the main convict in the abduction of the slain journalist.

The Wall Street Journal correspondent was researching a story on religious extremists when he was kidnapped in Karachi in January 2002.

The appeals were fixed for hearing on Tuesday before a division bench headed by Justice K.K. Agha when a deputy prosecutor general informed the bench that Raja Qureshi, who was appointed as special public prosecutor in the case by the law secretary, had passed away.

The court directed the law secretary to inform it on Nov 20 about the appointment of a new prosecutor.
(By Ishaq Tanoli Dawn, 15, 18/09/2019)

RTA approves 14 bus routes for 200 new buses in Karachi

The Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Board has approved route permits for 200 new buses that would ply along 14 routes across the city.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the RTA board, headed by Karachi Commissioner Iftikhar Shallwani on Wednesday.

The commissioner was informed by the RTA officials that there are 200 new buses that the Daewoo Pakistan group was going to ply on the roads of Karachi under its agreement with the provincial government.

The routes the buses will travel on will be from Landhi (Babar Market) to Baldia, Surjani to Korangi, Landhi (Quaidabad) to Surjani Town, Gulshan-e-Maymar to Tower, Landhi to Lea Market, Gulshan-e-Hadeed to Lucky Star, Landhi (Bhains Colony) to Saddar, Malir Cantt to Tower, Malir Khokhrapar to Tower, North Karachi 7D to Tower, Shah Faisal Colony to fisheries, LERP Colony to Dockyard, Taiser Town to fisheries and Dawood Chowrangi to Tower.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 19/09/2019)

Slow mass transit

The chief characteristic of the biggest metropolis of Pakistan is that its population is increasing at a rapid pace but public services in the city go on shrinking. Karachi's population has increased to 16.6 million in 2016 from 9.8 million in 1998. These are national census figures. This is evident from gutter overflows in most parts of the city and roads that are full of potholes, big craters and ditches. This also shows up in the fast-disappearing public buses from the city roads. Once again the Sindh government has announced a few days ago that 200 new buses will be run on 14 different routes of the city. These buses will start running in the next few months. The provincial government has signed an agreement with a private transport company under which 1,000 new air-conditioned buses will ply the city roads.

One can only take the government's promise with a pinch of salt considering numerous such unmet promises made in the recent past. The government had made a similar announcement more than six months ago. Also, there is the Karachi Greenline rapid mass transit project. The project estimated to cost more than Rs26 billion was launched in 2016 and it was to be completed in early 2018. It remains abandoned. Many roads were dug up to make way for the public transport project. They remain in that way adding to the problems of commuters. The long-persisting state of affairs with regard to the condition of roads and the ever-shrinking number of buses has made it very difficult for the people to believe the government's promises.

Now only few rickety buses are there on the road. They are mostly overcrowded. The few seats in these buses are very uncomfortable. Yet we hear somewhere a regional transport authority exists. People take solace in the saying, "When there are takers for husk who is going to sell wheat? (*Jiska bhoosa bikta ho woh kanak kyon bechay?*)"
(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 16, 21/09/2019)

Summary moved to amend motor vehicle law, SHC told

The Sindh High Court was informed by provincial authorities that a summary had been sent to the chief minister to amend the Motor Vehicle Ordinance.

They also submitted a draft bill for the Sindh CNG Kit & Cylinder Fitness Authority in court.

The bench, headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar, was hearing a number of petitions about use of substandard CNG kits and cylinders in commercial vehicles as well as school vans.

An additional advocate general filed a statement, duly signed by the transport and mass transit secretary, submitting that a summary had been moved to the chief minister for making some amendments in the Motor Vehicle Ordinance in view of the order passed by the bench on the last hearing.

A law officer has submitted draft bill to set up the provincial CNG Kit & Cylinder Fitness Authority

One of the petitioners' lawyers argued that they were using approved CNG kits as per the licence of the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra).

However, the counsel for Ogra submitted that no such licences were ever issued to any alleged authorised workshop or agency.

A representative of the All Pakistan CNG Association argued that he would file a list of some workshops having expertise in installation of CNG kits and they also applied for a licence from Ogra.

The bench directed him to file the list on the next hearing with advance copy to the counsel for Ogra and the Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan.

It also asked both the lawyers to do their homework to intimate the court regarding the status of such applications with Ogra, if any.

An additional secretary of the college education department submitted that they had already imposed a ban on CNG vehicles unless proper legislation was made and a similar statement was given by the additional secretary (law).

The hearing was adjourned till Oct 22.

SC expunges adverse remarks against judge

Expunging adverse remarks against a sessions judge, the Supreme Court has observed that a stricture passed by a single bench of the Sindh High Court against the judge was against the principle laid down in some rulings of the apex court since no opportunity was afforded to him.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Naveed Soomro had challenged before the apex court an SHC order in which a SHC judge had set aside a conviction handed down by him and observed that the sessions judge had not only misused his position or

unlawfully exercised his authority by reopening the case after the statement of the accused, but also failed to appreciate the statement of the accused recorded under oath in correct perspective.

The SHC observed that this judgement may be placed in the personal file of the sessions judge and it should also be brought to the notice of the chief justice.

After hearing the petitioner's lawyers, the three-judge SC bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam observed that the stricture passed against the petitioner was against the principle of some rulings of the apex court as no opportunity, explanation or hearing was afforded to him before passing any stricture against a judicial officer.

It was said that the adverse remarks contained in the impugned judgement against the sessions judge were expunged. (By The Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 22/09/2019)

Karachi traffic police announce plan for Pakistan-Sri Lanka ODI series

Karachi Traffic Police have prepared a comprehensive plan to manage the flow of traffic across the city, during the one-day cricket series between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to be held from September 27 to October 2. As per the plan, 2,000 traffic police officials will be deployed across the city during the period the Sri Lankan cricket team visits Karachi for the three-match series to be played at National Stadium Karachi.

Providing details about the plan during a press conference on Wednesday, Traffic DIG Javed Ali Mahar said that spectators visiting the stadium would only be allowed to park their cars in areas reserved for parking if they produce original CNICs and match tickets. The Federal Urdu University Ground, the Ghareeb Nawaz Football Ground near Millenium Mall, Expo Centre Karachi and parking ground of Rana Liaquat College, adjacent to Aga Khan University Hospital, have been reserved as parking areas for spectators' cars, he said.

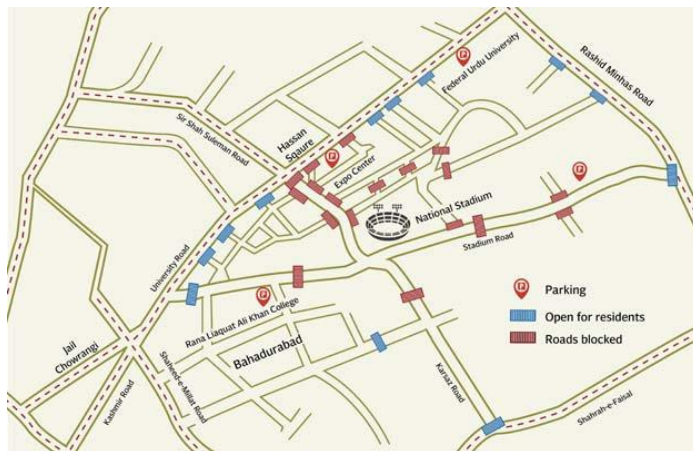
According to Mahar, citizens know about the areas reserved for spectators' parking, as the same spots were reserved for spectators' parking during cricket series previously held in the city.

Routes

Spectators from the West District will be able to reach the Federal Urdu University Ground via Nipa and Lyaqatabad no. 10. Two routes have been designated for approaching the ground from Malir and East districts – one extending from Safoora Chowrangi to Nipa and another stretching from Sohrab Goth to Gulshan Chowrangi. In order to reach the Ghareeb Nawaz Football Ground, residents of Malir and east districts will have to travel from Drigh Road to Rashid Minhas Road and then take a left from Millenium Mall to reach the Stadium road, leading to the ground.

To approach Expo Centre Karachi from the South District, Korangi and DHA, citizens will have to travel to the University Road via Shahrah-e-Faisal, crossing Shahrah-e-Quaideen, Allah Wali Chowrangi, Society Chowrangi and PP Chowrangi on their way, and then take a U-turn near Baitul Mukarram Masjid. Similarly, residents of central and west districts will have to approach the U-Turn near the Baitul Mukarram Masjid via route leading to Hassan Square from Nazimabad, crossing Liaquatabad no.10 on the way. Those who will park their cars at Expo Centre Karachi will have to go through a checking procedure at the centre's gate no. 2, before they will be allowed to move towards National Stadium Karachi.

Residents of Tower, Saddar and DHA will be able to reach Rana Liaquat Girls College, on Stadium Road, via MA Jinnah Road, taking a U-Turn to approach the University Road. However, those coming from DHA will have to travel a few extra miles, crossing Shahrah-e-Faisal, Shahrah-e-Quaideen and PP Chowrangi to end up on MA Jinnah Road. From Rana Liaquat Girls College, spectators will be provided shuttle service to reach National Stadium Karachi.



Diversions

Speaking at the press conference, DIG Mahar also provided details about alternate routes. He said that during matches, citizens will not be allowed to travel to the stadium from Shahrah-e-Faisal via Karsaz, advising that those travelling on this route take a detour to Rashid Minhas Road in order to avoid inconvenience. Those travelling from the airport will be able to approach Rashid Minhas Road via Drigh Road and Nipa via Millenium Mall, he said.

Mahar further said that routes leading to National Stadium Karachi from Rashid Minhas Road, via Dalmia Road, will be blocked during the matches. Citizens will be able to approach Shahrah-e-Faisal and Millenium Mall through Nipa, crossing Askari IV and Drigh Road, he added. Citizens will have to travel through Nipa in order to reach Safoora Chowrangi, and will be able to

approach Gulshan Chowrangi via Sohrab Goth, said Mahar.

He said that the road leading to the New Town U-Turn from the University Road will be blocked but the route from Jail Chowranghi, Shaheed-e-Millat Road and PP Chowranghi to the U-turn will remain open for traffic.

According to Mahar, University Road, Shaheed-e-Millat Road and Rashid Minhas Road will remain open for traffic during the matches, which flow of heavy traffic will be restricted from Sohrab Goth to Nipa, from Liaquatabad no. 10 to Hassan Square and from PP Chowranghi to University Road.

DIG traffic said that the residents of Stadium Road will be allowed to go to their houses after producing their original CNICs. However, residents who have a different residential address mentioned on their CNICs will be allowed to go to their houses on Stadium Road after confirmation of the address, he said.

He appealed to the management of public schools to cooperate with law enforcement agencies and traffic police, while requesting the citizens to follow the guidelines issued by the traffic police.

The matches will start at 3pm and will continue till 11pm and the routes will be blocked three hours before the matches start, said Mahar.

He said that the citizens can call on 1915, visit the Karachi traffic police's facebook page or call on WhatsApp helpline number, 0305-9266907, for further guidance. Regular updates about the situation of the traffic will also be provided on Radio FM 88.6. (By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 26/09/2019)

Cyclists pedal down Seaview to celebrate girl power

Women's power is indeed gathering strength at the grass-roots level. This was very much evident at the 'Aao cycle chalaen' (Let's go cycling) event organised at a Seaview park on Friday where hundreds of girls were in attendance along with their female family members to celebrate 'International Day of the Girl'.



The majority had come from Lyari — once a violence-hit area — not just to have some fun together but to send a strong message to their counterparts across the city that women must not sit back, overcome their barriers and empower themselves.

“Why can't girls ride a bicycle or even a motorbike in our city? I think today's event would encourage and motivate other girls to engage in healthy activities like using bicycles for transport,” said Zulekhan Dawood, a young activist representing the Lyari's Girls Café (LGC), adding that it would also help reduce pollution in the city.

The non-profit organisation was set up three years ago with an aim to provide a forum to young girls and women to learn vocational skills, educate, socialise and brainstorm ideas.

It also offers training for sports like boxing and football — games which girls are generally not allowed to play in society.

“We started our journey with five to six girls and faced a lot of resistance. But, it didn't dampen our spirits. We used to counsel families whenever a member decided to leave and try to address their concerns,” explained Dawood.

The LGC cycling programme, which took off with six members on rented bicycles, now has registration of more than 100 participants and the issue of getting vehicles was to an extent helped by the German consulate.

Girl Force: unscripted and unstoppable

Conversation with a few participants revealed that healthy activities were positively influencing girls' thinking process and helping them dream big.

“I love to play football and boxing and dream of becoming a pilot one day,” said 12-year-old Sabah Aji Bachal.

Najmunisa, a 16-year-old science student, said that participation in the LGC events made her proud of herself. “Often girls are discouraged to do things independently. I am fortunate that my mother supports in all educational and vocational endeavours.”

Fourteen-year-old Iqra expressed her desire to join the army. Habiba Allahbad in her 40s was there with her two young daughters; all participating in the cycle race. “In our area, women lack the freedom they deserve as a human being. I joined the LGC because it provided me with the much-needed space I always wanted in life; learning new skills and becoming empowered,” she said.

Asked about how people in her locality reacted to this change, she said: “I routinely use the bicycle for transport in my neighbourhood. The forum gave me the confidence that now I just ignore what others say.”

Among the guests was Mark Rakestraw, the Deputy Head of Mission at British Deputy High Commission, who congratulated the organisers and hoped that such activities would help end gender discrimination, open up more avenues for girls to utilise their potential and become a productive member of society.

Maren Dick representing the Consulate of Germany expressed similar sentiments. The event concluded with a cultural show. (By Faiza Ilyas Dawn, 15, 12/10/2019)

Girls cycle for empowerment in Karachi

In an attempt to break gender stereotypes and draw attention to the benefits of cycling, scores of young women, students and activists gathered at Karachi's Captain Farhan Shaheed Park on Friday, commemorating the International Day of the Girl Child.

Marking the occasion, Lyari Girls Café organised an event titled 'Let's Go Cycling' at the park, aiming to promote women empowerment through cycling and to highlight the health benefits of cycling.



The event also featured singing performances, awareness sessions on the environment and a bicycle race. The participants of the race, in particular, shed light on the benefits of cycling, which according to them, is an environment-friendly and cheap mode of transport with numerous health benefits.

Cycling to empower women

According to the event's volunteers, cycling has long been the sign of women empowerment and a symbol of personal mobility and liberty.

Zulekha Dawood, who is a cycling instructor at Lyari Girls Café, said that the activity gives women and especially young girls a chance to lead a healthy and productive life.

"We want to play an active role in advocating for the rights of women, she said, adding that the practice of girls commuting via bicycles should be normalised. "We started with just five girls but now we have over 50 participants who take part in the weekly cycling activity every Sunday," she continued.

"Parents should not stop their daughters from pursuing this activity and there is a need to promote such healthy exercises in universities and colleges," said Zulekha.

Meanwhile, a participant of the race, Najamunnisa, lamented that cycling for girls in the country is neither accepted as a hobby nor as a sport.

"Girls are not encouraged to go out alone or participate in such activities at large. We do not see girls cycling on the roads at all," she said. "All in all this activity has instilled confidence in me and has proven that girls are also capable of facing the world alone."

Another cyclist and a volunteer at Lyari Girls Cafe, Samina Butt, stated that society still looks down upon women and does not consider them as equals.

"There are so many girls who are not allowed to pursue their goals or live a productive, good life. Some of our fellows couldn't make it to the event because they aren't allowed to leave their hometowns and this is a sad reality," she said.

Serving the cause

Speaking to *The Express Tribune*, the organiser of the event, Sultan Mandhro, said that girls in different parts of Lyari as well as Karachi continue to face hardships and are not even allowed to make the choice going out on their own, let alone being permitted to take decisions for themselves.

"Through this initiative, we want to educate and empower young girls and give them a voice that is often found to be lacking in a male-dominated society," he said. "Our event's theme corresponds with that of this year's International Day of the Girl Child- 'uninterrupted and unstoppable'".

Talking about the problems that diminish the cause of educating and enlightening girls, Mandhro pledged to continue to raise awareness about women empowerment.

"Of course we have faced resistance from certain sections of society as we work towards empowering young girls but our aim is to carry on with the struggle and not give up," vowed Mandhro. According to him, his efforts have started showing results as he proudly says, "as many as 78 girls have registered to participate in the cycling event and a culture of cycling is indeed taking shape in [Pakistan]."

Lauding efforts

Also speaking on the occasion, British Deputy High Commissioner in Karachi, Mark Rakestraw, lauded the efforts of the volunteers and the organisers and said that such public events inspire others.

"This event touches so many issues including gender equality, girls' education and the environment [preservation]. Climate change affects more women than men," he said.

"Promoting gender equality is one of the essential foundations of work we do in the British government office here, and opening up access for girls to education is a key goal in particular," he maintained. "Since 2011 we have supported education reforms and so far about 11 million girls have benefitted [through our efforts]," said Rakestraw.

(By Allia Bukhari *The Express Tribune*, 05, 12/10/2019)

Incomplete underpass in Karachi forces change of Chehlum plan yet again

Given the ongoing construction of Numaish Chowranghi underpass, the mourning procession for the Chehlum of Imam Hussain (RA) will be taking an alternate route. The rerouted procession, which will start from Nishtar Park and conclude in Hussainia Iranian, will also touch Karachi X-Ray Lab, Peoples Chowranghi, Preedy Street, Regal Chowk, Tibet Centre, Radio Pakistan, Lakshmi Building, Bombay Bazaar and Kharadar on its course.



“The long-standing development work at Numaish has rendered the original route unfeasible for the processions as it poses a security risk and isn't a safe terrain for children,” said Syed Shabbar Raza, one of the procession organisers, while speaking to *The Express Tribune*.

The construction of the underpass, which has remained a perennial issue in Karachi, has also previously been responsible for the rerouting of processions throughout the month of Muharram. But according to Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (SIDCL), all preparations for the Chehlum processions along with Numaish Chowranghi's roof work have been completed.

“Although there's some work going on at MA Jinnah Road, we've barricaded it to ensure safety of the route and the organisers can let the procession pass through Numaish Chowranghi and MA Jinnah Road” told a relevant SIDCL engineer.

However, another SIDCL engineer on the basis of anonymity revealed that Commissioner Karachi, DC Karachi, police officials and rangers had inspected Numaish Chowranghi with the procession organisers. After inspection, police officers expressed their apprehensions about the narrow passages being unsafe and inadequate for the procession and left the final decision to the organisers.

Phase-1 of the federal government's Green Line Bus Project, Numaish Chowranghi Underpass, still remains a distant reality amid the differences between Sindh and federal government over the project's design. According to the proposed plan, the roof work of the underpass was to be completed five months ago and had the project followed its timeline, the entire project would've been completed by September of this year.

Nevertheless, the federal government has been unable to implement the project according to the announced schedule due to certain reasons. According to relevant engineers from SIDCL, the carpeting work at Numaish Chowranghi is likely to be completed after the Chehlum and the road from Britto Road to Shahrae Quaideen will be opened for traffic from November 15. Whereas, Numaish Chowranghi and MA Jinnah Road will be opened for two-way traffic by December of this year; completing the entire project by the year 2020.

(By Ashraf Ali *The Express Tribune*, 04, 20/10/2019)

Accessibility denied: Pedestrian bridges - an insurmountable hurdle

Over the past 40 years, different ruling governments and private companies have constructed more than 100 pedestrian bridges in Karachi to facilitate its citizens. Even though the bridges provided considerable safety to pedestrians, who would otherwise find it very difficult to cross busy roads, only five bridges in total were built to facilitate differently-abled persons.



To make matters worse, out of the five pedestrian bridges where ramps were built to accommodate wheelchairs, only three are left in the entire city, while the remaining two of the five have been demolished.

Reportedly, the ramp which was built for the pedestrian bridge near the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST) in Gulshan-e-Iqbal was destroyed by the anti-encroachment cell at the behest of a private builder.

Similarly, amid the construction of a flyover near Crown Plaza at Shahrah-e-Faisal, both the pedestrian bridge and the ramp had to be demolished, never to be constructed again.

According to a survey conducted by *The Express Tribune*, even though the ramps built for the remaining three bridges still exist, none of them are of any use to differently-abled people anymore because barriers have been installed around them to stop wheelchair-bound people from accessing the bridges, all of which are situated at Shahrah-e-Faisal. It has been learned that barriers were installed around the ramps of two bridges by the city government as people would misuse the facility and take their motorbikes atop the bridge to take shortcuts, harass women and loot people. Meanwhile, the third bridge has been completely closed off.

The city government has installed iron barriers at the pedestrian bridges near Lal Kothi and Awami Markaz bus stops. As a result, wheelchair-bound individuals cannot access the bridges without the support of others. However, senior citizens and women are still able to cross the bridge by bypassing the ramps.

The bridge at Natha Khan Bus Stop, on the other hand, has been made completely inaccessible for the public and a three-foot concrete barrier has been constructed on the bridge to stop people from accessing it.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, many people lamented that instead of closing the bridge or installing barriers for motorcycles, the city government should have tightened security measures by installing CCTV cameras or deploying traffic wardens near the bridges to control criminal incidents.

At present, there are almost 112 pedestrian bridges in the city, majority of which are maintained and monitored by the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC). Meanwhile, almost eight pedestrian bridges come under the control of the cantonment boards and the National Highway Authority (NHA).

Under an agreement with private companies, the city government constructed 13 pedestrian bridges on Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis. And although these bridges are still under the control of private firms, they are under the custody of KMC.

The first BOT pedestrian bridge was constructed in 2005 with the inclusion of a ramp for the differently-abled persons. Ex-nazim Naimatullah Khan inaugurated it and the bridge's design was later followed by city Nazim Mustafa Kamal.

During Kamal's tenure, pedestrian bridges were built with government funds and new bus stops were also constructed. As many as four pedestrian bridges with ramps were built during that time.

In 2010, the Sindh government restored KMC by dissolving the city government and approved the Sindh Local Government Act 2013 under which the control of the bridges was handed over to the KDA. As a result, the maintenance and repair of pedestrian bridges, which was previously carried out under a single operation window, was divided among KMC and KDA.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Armada on Road Advertising, Irfan Hashmi said that his company built three pedestrian bridges on a BOT basis, two of which had ramps.

"While designing our first pedestrian bridge near FUJAST, special consideration was given to women, children, senior citizens and heart patients as well as differently-abled individuals," he said. "Seeing our inclusive design, ex-Nazim Naimatullah Khan took a personal interest in the project and approved the design."

He said that after the construction of the bridge, all pedestrian bridges in the city followed the same design with smaller steps and protective railings on the sides. Prior to that, there was no such facility available in the city.

"In 2008, we received complaints that motorcyclists have been using the ramps to take shortcuts which created a lot of trouble for the pedestrians," Hashmi explained. "The KMC demolished one of the ramps from a bridge at the request of a private builder whose office was near the bridge."

A ray of hope amid difficulties

Even though there are currently no pedestrian bridges for differently-abled people, the government has planned to construct new ones under the two projects of rapid transit buses. Reportedly, lift and escalators are being installed at all 25 bus stations. Once these projects will become functional, differently-abled people will be able to avail the facilities without any problems.

KDA Traffic Engineering Bureau Executive Engineer Raza Husain said that KDA will construct 16 new bridges in Karachi, for which PC-1 has already been sent to the Sindh government for approval. The new bridges, however, will not have ramps for differently-abled individuals.

Shedding light on the matter, Senior Director Traffic Engineering Bureau Naveed Izhar said that they installed ramps per public complaints but it was not possible to stop the entry of motorcyclists.

"It was the responsibility of the law enforcement agencies to stop the violation of traffic laws and other criminal activities taking place at the bridges," he said. "In the new design for the pedestrian bridges, ramps are not included for the differently-abled persons but soon as the Sindh government approves the PC-I, construction work will commence."

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 24/10/2019)

CS ordered to resolve bus terminal land issue

The Sindh High Court on Friday directed the chief secretary to resolve the matter related to 100 acres for a proposed bus terminal along the Superhighway.

A two-judge SHC bench, headed by Justice Mohammad Ali Mazhar, was hearing a set of petitions regarding rerouting of heavy traffic away from residential areas of Karachi to solve traffic problems.

The bench observed that the Board of Revenue had claimed that it would consider transfer of the land, whereas the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) had contended that the corporation had no funds to pay salaries and pension to its employees.

When a set of petitions related to the issues of heavy vehicles and deteriorating traffic situation came up for hearing, the transport and mass transit department secretary, a senior member of the Board of Revenue and a representative of the intercity bus transporters filed statements, which were made part of record.

As the land was required to be handed over by the Sindh government to the KMC, Chief Secretary Mumtaz Ali Shah had been called to assist the court in handling the issue of 100-acre land.

Bureaucrats, transporters file statements in traffic congestion case

The chief secretary assured the court that he would look into the issue and would file a progress report at next hearing, while the KMC had also given a proposal that if the land was handed over to it, it would develop the proposed terminal on a build-operate-transfer basis.

The bench directed the chief secretary to resolve the issue in the larger public interest and adjourned the matter till Nov 14.

In their petitions filed against the relevant authorities over worsening situation of traffic and seeking rerouting of heavy vehicles away from residential areas and improvement in public transport, Faisal Bengali and others had asked the court to issue directives to the authorities to improve public transport and introduce alternatives to facilitate commuter and reduce the existing burden on public transport.

UTP's rights

Another division bench of the SHC issued notices to the provincial authorities on a petition seeking provision of fundamental rights to undertrial prisoners (UTPs).

In their petitions, the Pakistan Institute of Labour, Education and Research (Piler) and two others informed the bench that prisons were overcrowded due to "delayed" trials and "wrongful" detentions.

According to the petitioners, around 59 per cent of the country's prison population comprised UTPs who are not only kept with convicts but also subjected to inhuman treatment.

Seeking complete data about undertrial prisoners, the petitioners maintained that the fundamental rights of UTPs included dignity, life, protection from unlawful detention and fair trial as guaranteed under Articles 4, 9, 10, 10-A and 14 the Constitution and pleaded for their speedy trial.

The bench, headed by Justice Mohammad Iqbal Kalhoro, later issued notices to the chief secretary, law and home secretaries, IG prisons and other respondents.

(By Newspaper Staff's Reporter Dawn, 13, 26/10/2019)

New players entering Karachi's transport market to fill the void left by govt

As the federal and provincial governments have failed to complete their respective bus rapid transit system (BRTS) schemes, local and international players are poised to capitalise on a huge business opportunity in Karachi's transport sector as two ride-sharing services have launched their van and bus service while another is set to enter the market.



To fill the void, two private operators — Airlift and SWVL — have already registered hundreds of vans and Coasters for their respective ride-sharing bus service apps.

"It's a city of 22 million people so the transport needs of Karachi are massive," said Shahzeb Memon of SWVL — an Egypt-based ride-hailing business that recently

launched its services in Karachi.

"Currently we have introduced 13- and 22-seater vans and Coasters but it doesn't end here. The [number of] buses and vehicles would grow gradually as well as their capacity. We have close to 100 routes in Karachi alone," he said.

Bus ride-sharing services Airlift and SWVL have launched their operations in the metropolis

Private operators say the city offers immense business opportunities when it comes to transport service. This pushed their organisations to pursue operations in Karachi where the public sector transport system has almost collapsed and new projects are still in the pipeline.

Mr Memon said that the city offered such a big transport market that one could not handle it alone.

Like SWVL, Airlift has also started its operation across the city and scores of vehicles painted with the company's logo are found on the roads of Karachi in almost all districts.

The new ride-sharing services have started operations in Karachi and Lahore with private bus operators and industry sources say the two services are now offering more than 800 such vans and Coasters to Karachiites and their number is expected to increase within the next few months.

"Another private company which is already in the ride-hailing cab business is set to add value to its operation and going to introduce a bus service like Airlift and SWVL," said an industry source. "The reason behind such a plan is very simple. This city is huge with poor infrastructure and declining public service facilities from the government. So any business which offers services to the people at affordable prices and makes their life easier will definitely grow."

The situation highlighted by industry insiders about the city's transport service was described years ago by renowned city planner Arif Hasan with Mansoor Raza and the Urban Resource Centre in their 2015 report.

Titled Karachi: the transport crisis, the report argued that the public transport sector of the country's largest city was on the verge of collapse due to a history of failure, negligence, inefficiency and lack of follow-through in both government and public-private partnership projects.

The 32-page report, which was released in January 2015, painted a bleak picture of the state of transport affairs in Karachi. It indicated that transporters were crippled by high fuel costs and limited government support, while the public was caught between rising prices and an inadequate number of alternative options.

The situation has not changed much in the public transport sector since the report was published.

Promises, promises

However, Sindh Transport Minister Syed Awais Qadir Shah promises that the provincial government projects were expected to mature soon and the authorities also welcomed the private sector to contribute their share for quality transport service in the city.

"It is our resolve to complete them [public transport projects] within the stipulated time," he said. "At the same time, the Sindh government is very much encouraging the private sector and we will do everything to facilitate their business. Apart from their business interests, it's also the government's positive response which attracts major companies for operation in any sector," he said. (By Imran Ayub Dawn, 15, 31/10/2019)

Parking for millions

Drive through any thoroughfare in Karachi and on every second step, you will find a man wearing a yellow cap, often accompanied by a high visibility vest, jump in front of your car and direct you to an empty parking spot. If you park your car or motorcycle there, the man will hand you a torn receipt, which would bear a random serial number, the name of the issuing authority and the fee, which can vary between Rs30 and Rs50 for a car and Rs10 to Rs20 for a motorcycle.

If at the time of parking your vehicle, you somehow manage to evade payment, you would come back to find one of the windscreen wipers standing erect. This is a reminder, more for themselves, that they must collect what they believe to be rightfully theirs before you can drive off.

Against the said fee, all citizens get is a kind of assurance that their car or bike will not be lifted by the traffic police. However, there is no guarantee that their vehicle will not be stolen or harmed as the disclaimer – 'parking at the owner's risk' – is already written on the receipt.

The issuing authorities

There are 17 land controlling agencies in Karachi that are empowered to collect parking fees within their jurisdictions. Main roads fall under the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), while inner streets under the District Municipal Corporations (DMC). Meanwhile, cantonment boards charge the fees for parking in their respective areas.

There are more than 40 parking sites under the KMC, which have been outsourced to private contractors through tenders. Similarly, the DMCs have also given the charged parking sites in their jurisdictions to contractors.

The parking fee approved by the City Council is Rs5 for motorcycles, while Rs20 for cars. This is almost never the case, however, as citizens are charged Rs40 to Rs50 for parking their cars at most of these sites. In this way, millions of rupees are collected from citizens on a daily basis. Furthermore, the collected amount does not even go to the government treasury, with the contractors pocketing most of it.

Illegal sites

Notwithstanding the situation at the officially notified parking sites, there are over 200 illegal sites operations in the city. There is no record of these unauthorised parking spots available with the KMC or any other land-controlling agencies.

The majority of these are operations in East, South and Central districts, which are home to most of the business centres and government offices and thousands of citizens park their vehicles in these areas on a daily basis. Almost the whole of the Saddar area, Tariq Road, University Road and other business hubs of the city are under the control of this parking mafia.

According to the rules set by the City Council, the parking contractors are not authorised to charge the parking fee on Saturdays and Sundays. On the contrary, the mafia is even more active on these days in the commercial areas as people come for shopping, dining out and other activities with their families, which boosts their earnings. Moreover, if you return to your parking spot late at night, you will see a man waiting for you in the dark to receive money, though it is illegal to charge the fee after 11pm. The mafia is so powerful that if a citizen refuses to pay them the due amount, they would get their car lifted with a lifter and would not be able to get it released until the fee is paid.

When The Express Tribune reached out to senior officials of the KMC to inquire about the situation, they gave the same old clichéd statements that "action is taken against the contractors charging additional amount and against the illegal parking sites". (By Naeem Khanzada The Express Tribune, 04, 31/10/2019)

SHC orders transport department to fix official fares for public transport

The Sindh High Court (SHC) directed the provincial transport department on Friday to fix transport fares according to the law while hearing the plea filed against the collection of fares on inflated rates in public transport vehicles.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Agha Faisal heard the plea.

The petitioner's counsel maintained that the transport mafia was out of control. No notification pertaining to public transport fare has been issued since 2015, but the fare for public transport vehicles has been rising, he argued.

An official of the transport department told the court that a committee has been formed for fixing the official fares for public transport. A decision would be made soon, he said. The deputy inspector-general (DIG) of traffic police submitted his reply before the court and the bench expressed annoyance at the absence of his signature on the reply.

The court directed the government lawyer to write a letter to the Sindh IGP and inform him about how reports were being submitted before the court. "Are you not aware that a written reply requires a signature?" remarked the bench, addressing the DIG.

The bench inquired who permitted the transport mafia to do as it pleases, and asked whether the transport department has a system in place to fix the fares.

The transport department was directed to immediately fix public transport fares according to the law with a warning of contempt of court notice against them if the directives aren't followed through.

Transgender rights

The bench directed the Centre to submit a report after making the rules for the rights of transgender persons in 60 days while hearing the plea filed on non-compliance with laws pertaining to the rights of transgender persons.

The petition was filed by advocate Tariq Mansoor. He argued that the legislation for the rights of transgender persons was done in 2018 but the rules for compliance with the new laws haven't been made as yet.

The reply submitted by the federal ministry for human rights stated that the process of making rules had begun after the law was legislated and a committee was formed for this purpose.

"Rules could not be made in a year?" questioned the bench.

"Transgender persons would be prevented from begging but where would they go for employment. Rules should be made for the provision of employment for transgender persons," said Justice Mazhar, adding that matters progress through implementation on the laws made, not just legislation.

The bench directed the federal human rights ministry to make the rules and submit a report within 60 days.

College lecturers

Meanwhile, the bench sought an explanation from the Sindh Tdepartment by November 15 while hearing a plea pertaining to the non-provision of timescale to government college lecturers.

The petitioner's counsel maintained that the Sindh education and literacy department provided time-scale to school teachers but college lecturers weren't provided the same. He argued that many lecturers retire on the same scale despite giving 30 years of service.

The court sought an explanation from the education department by November 15. The department was directed to mention the number of years of service of these employees and why they were not being provided the time-scale.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 02/11/2019)

Government launches crackdown on intra-city buses

Transport department launched a crackdown on Saturday against intra-city passenger buses which are collecting high transportation fares.

At least 41 buses were imposed a fine of Rs 56,000 for collecting high fares. Moreover, ten buses were refrained from operating in the city for being unfit to carry passengers and a collection of high fares.

Sindh transport minister Syed Awais Qadir Shah said that the crackdown was launched in Karachi, Hyderabad, Larkana, Sukkur, Dadu, Mirpurkhas, Badin, Thatta, Khairpur, Noshehro Feroze, Shikarpur and other cities of the province. He ordered to cancel the permits of buses collecting high fares and directed the transport department secretary and regional secretaries to submit reports in this regard on a daily basis. The transport minister also said that more than 40 unregistered chingchi rickshaws have been restricted from operating in Larkana with a fine of Rs 10,000 imposed on each. Furthermore, LPG and CNG cylinders of numerous vehicles, in Hyderabad, Sukkur and Jacobabad, were seized for being unfit.

Challans of Rs 11,000 were issued to 13 vehicles in Sanghar and Rs 5,000 of extra money collected in the name of fares was returned back to the passengers. He said that unregistered chingchi rickshaws' drivers had been given time to get registered. The action has been taken after the given deadline to the transporters expired.
(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 05, 03/11/2019)

\$71m loan approved for Karachi mass transport plan

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has approved a loan of \$71.81 million for the Karachi Bus Rapid Transit Red Line project, which will provide an efficient and sustainable public transport system in the mega city.

The AIIB — a new Chinese-sponsored multi-lateral financial institution that aims to support the building of infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region — accorded the approval at a meeting of its executive board held at its headquarters in Beijing on Nov 11.

The components and planned activities under the project are: a 24.2km red line main corridor, a 2.4km section of common corridor along with all bus rapid transit (BRT) lines merging in the city centre, and off-corridor direct and feeder service routes connecting the corridor to communities; with the establishment of BRT operations, including procurement of compressed natural gas-hybrid fleet and systems.

According to the financing plan, the project will cost \$503.33m, of which the Asian Development Bank will provide \$235m, French development agency \$71.81m, Green Climate Fund \$37.20m with a grant of \$11.80m, and Sindh government \$75.71m.

To be launched next year, project is expected to bring revolutionary changes in public transport system

The project, which is scheduled to be launched in August next year, will improve public transport system in Karachi through efficient and safe connectivity and reduced journey times, and provide high-quality, accessible and affordable mass transport.

The deadline for completion of the project has been fixed by end of December 2023.

It has been anticipated that the new transport system would be able to carry 320,000 passengers on a daily basis, increase average bus commercial speed on the BRT corridors to 25kms per hour, and reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions by using CNG-hybrid buses.

Karachi's current transportation system cannot be considered fit for this purpose since it is characterised by long commuter trip times, rise of private and para-transit modes, weak traffic management and decline of public transport.

Services are currently provided by informal para-transit vehicles and about 4,000 privately owned and operated buses, serving 2.8m passengers daily. These weakly regulated services are irregular and lack designated schedules, stops and customer standards.

Public transport drivers compete with each other and pull over to pick up passengers at will, or wait in place until the vehicles fill, which worsens congestion and impairs safety. Boarding the vehicles can be challenging, particularly for the elderly, children and physically disabled. During peak hours, it is common to see passengers sitting on the roof or hanging from the side of moving vehicles.

Vehicles in this informal network tend to be old and poorly maintained, leading to inefficient fuel consumption, increased emissions and higher operational costs. The services tend to be expensive for the urban poor, as customers must pay again for each transfer between services and modes.

Most women in Karachi do not take up employment far from home because of mobility restrictions resulting from cultural and social norms and security concerns. In particular, women are reluctant to use public transport system, mainly due to the risk of harassment they face in overcrowded public buses.

Consequently, most women prefer to walk, two kilometres per day on average, or are forced to use more expensive private transportation, which affects their disposable income. The inadequate and unsafe public transport system thus compels them to work close to home and restricts their labour force participation, which stands at 15.9 per cent in Sindh.

(By Staff Reporter Dawn, 03, 17/11/2019)

In Karachi, part of Club Road caves in again

A part of the Club Road near Metropole Hotel caved in again on Saturday evening soon after it was done being carpeted. Commuters started capturing photos and shouting slogans against the performance of the city government. "They can't even fix a part of the road," commented a passerby while uploading photos of the site on social media. "It took more than two weeks but it has caved in again."

On November 4, a mini truck toppled over at the same spot when a section of the road caved in, disrupting the flow of traffic and bringing the city's crumbling infrastructure into the limelight. The road has been closed for traffic since November 4. Officials of the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB) had said that the sinkhole had formed because of the collapse of a 54-inch sewerage line laid under the road. They said that the sewerage line was at least five decades old.

They had claimed that the repair work would hardly take up to three days.



On Saturday, the road was being carpeted and the same part caved in as the engineer and workers were finalising the other corner of the road.

“Was there any fault in the line under the ground,” questioned a passerby. He believed that the engineering department of the city government miserably failed to fix even minor issues. A traffic official deployed on the road asked the commuters to keep a distance from the site as it could cave in further. The confused staff of KWSB kept a distance from the site until people stopped making videos and capturing photos of the destruction.

An official on the site on the condition of anonymity told *The Express Tribune* that there was pressure over them to finish the task on urgent basis. “I think we have to fix the issue once forever,” he said, adding that it will take one more week to repair the line and carpet the road.

Asadullah Khan the Managing Director of the KWSB, was approached several times to comment on the recent collapse of Club Road but he was not available to comment.

(By Our Correspondent *The Express Tribune*, 05, 17/11/2019)

Bus(iness) as usual: You waited for the Orange Line. Now wait for the buses

Karachi has long yearned for an efficient mass transit system to abate the city’s acute public transport crisis. So when Sindh Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah inaugurated the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project in 2016, it initially came as a source of relief to the teeming city of 20 million.



However, three years of back-to-back setbacks and delays have dampened much of that original enthusiasm and while the long-anticipated project has managed to crawl into its final stages, there is still no agreement over the procurement of buses for the much needed transport network.

According to Sindh Mass Transit Authority (STMA) Managing Director Iqtidar Ahmed, approximately 70 to 80 per cent of work for the Orange Line bus network has been completed and the project will be ready by January of next year. “The foundation for the pedestrian bridges will be laid in the next ten days, while the middle fencing is complete and work on two out of the four BRT stations has been expedited.”

However, despite the STMA’s promises of bringing the mega-project to completion in the next few months, there is yet no word on who will provide the buses to run on the new Orange Line network. As per the STMA MD, the chief minister has been sent two recommendations for the procurement of the buses. According to the recommendation, the buses could either be procured by the Sindh government itself or they could be paid for by the Sindh government and imported by the federal government along with the Orange Line buses. “It’s up to the chief minister; whichever proposal he chooses out of the two will be implemented,” Ahmed told *The Express Tribune*.

It is worth mentioning that the Green Line Bus Project, which stretches from Surjani Town to Jamia Cloth Market M A Jinnah Road, has been initiated under the federal government, which will render the project to Sindh government after supervising it for three years. The federal government will also pay for the procurement of the 80 buses needed for the project as well as bear the construction and operational expenses for the first three years of the project under its supervision.

On the other hand, the Orange Line BRT project was initiated by the Sindh government that will bear all expenditures of the project, including the procurement of 18 buses and the cost of construction and operation.

The Orange Line BRT project, attributed to philanthropist Late Abdul Sattar Edhi, was initiated in June 2016 and was expected to be completed in years’ time with the construction of a 3.9 kilometer network. However, despite the relatively small scope of the project, Sindh government has been unable to build the network in the last three years while the incessant construction has been a source of nuisance for the residents of North Nazimabad, Orangi and Banaras.

The bus network runs through some of the busiest districts of the city; featuring seven eminent educational institutes—Jinnah Women University, Jinnah College, Homeopathic College, Polytechnic College, Matric Board office, Abdullah Girls College, and Inter Board Karachi—two private hospitals, two grave yards as well as the State Bank of Pakistan. Thus the delay in construction of the bus network has been a source of severe traffic jams and gridlocks in the city, which have hampered the productivity of the organizations in its proximity.

According to Ex MNA and Administrator Al-Khidmat Hospital Laiq Khan, Sindh government has failed to come up with a counter strategy for the issues created by the delays in the project. Khan further shared that Al-Khidmat Hospital is situated along the Orange Line route, which becomes a hassle for the ambulances and endangers patients who may require urgent medical attention. “Once a woman was forced to give birth on her way to the hospital while stuck in a severe traffic jam caused by the construction,” Khan shared with *The Express Tribune*.

A survey conducted by an *Express* correspondent reveals that the Orange Line BRT—Orange Town Office to Matric Board Office— is constructed along Sharah-e-Orangi. The project has a system length of 3.8 kilometers, out of which the 0.8 kilometers account for elevation whereas the main network itself spans for a total of 3 kilometers, which is to be carpeted. The Orange Line buses will run at the Bacha Khan flyover with rest of the traffic and all major construction work for the Bus terminal near the flyover has been completed.

An Orange Line engineer, speaking on condition of anonymity, shared that the project's civil infrastructure – bus terminal, two stations, and main corridor – is expected to be completed by the end of January 2020. "Lifts and stations of two out of the four stations have still not been imported, which could be a reason for further delay in the project, whereas the import of buses could add another year to Orange Line's completion," he revealed.

The project, according to the engineers, has two packages, which are assigned to two separate contractors. Package one includes building of two stations and elevated structures from Orangi Office to Banaras Pul. Meanwhile, the second package includes the reconstruction of Shahrah-e-Orangi, a bus terminal and two stations.

The reconstruction of Shahrah-e-Orangi and the majority of the work for the construction of the station at the elevation has been completed. The foundation has been laid for the construction of stations at Orangi Number 5 and Abdullah College. However, the construction of Matric Board Office station is still in its initial phase and pedestrian bridges are also being constructed with every station.

According to project engineers, initial legal hurdles caused the Orange Line BRT project to be delayed by a whole year. "When the work commenced again, it was the leakage of sewerage and water lines and the non-cooperation of water board which became the next hurdle for us, but we've mitigated the issue using project funds," a project engineer told *The Express Tribune*. (By Syed Ashraf Ali *The Express Tribune*, 05, 18/11/2019)

Karachi transport plans

It is hardly a secret that Karachi's public transport system has collapsed. Commuters face an uphill challenge every day getting to work, school and markets as most public buses have either disappeared, or the ones that remain are in decrepit shape, with passengers fighting to grab a seat, or ending up travelling on the vehicle's roof for want of space. This, in a nutshell, is the state of public transport in Pakistan's economic hub in the 21st century. Some private players have moved in to fill the gaps, such as ride-hailing apps (which are expensive) while app-based van services have also rolled out their fleets in the metropolis. But considering the fact that hundreds of thousands of commuters are on the move in Karachi daily, these interventions are inadequate. Yet we regularly hear in the media that various multilateral lenders are willing to finance public transport projects worth tens of millions of dollars; the people of Karachi read these announcements with some scepticism, and wonder when these buses will actually hit the roads. As reported in this paper, the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has approved a \$71m loan for the Red Line Bus Rapid Transit Project. The deadline for the project has been mentioned as December 2023.

The latest intervention is welcome. However the question remains: will one bus line (that is able to carry a little over 300,000 passengers daily) be able to significantly improve the city's public transport situation? Perhaps the bigger question is: will the project see the light of day, or be consigned to limbo due to unending delays? After all, the federally funded under-construction Green Line project — that was started in 2016 — still awaits completion, leaving a traffic mess in the centre of the city due to the closure of part of M.A. Jinnah Road. Both the federal and Sindh governments are experts in signing impressive-sounding transport deals for Karachi; yet the delivery and execution of these projects leave much to be desired. (By Editorial Dawn, 08, 19/11/2019)

Motorists' woes: 200,000 cars still wait for their registration plates in Sindh

The Sindh Excise and Taxation Department has failed to issue official number plates for over 200,000 new cars, around half of which were registered during the financial year 2015-16 in the province. The majority of the newly-bought vehicles have been registered in Karachi and according to Excise officials, around 100,000 cars are registered in the city every year.

Despite an overwhelming number of vehicles being registered in the city, no number plates have been issued to motorists for the past one year. As a result, many motorists have been forced to run their vehicles using temporary number plates.

To top it all off, motorists with temporary number plates have to bear the brunt of the excise department's sluggishness as they are frequently pulled over and fined by the traffic police for not displaying original number plates.

There is growing frustration among motorists as the excise department's motor vehicle registration wing has charged advance payment for issuing official number plates for every new vehicle during its registration process. Earlier, Rs500 were charged for a issuing a number plate for each newly-registered car. However, the fee has been increased to Rs1,000 for each vehicle since July this year due to inflation and hike in dollar prices.

If the amount charged by the excise department from 0.2 million customers is calculated at the rate of Rs500 each, it makes Rs100 million. Possibly, motorists have paid additional amount in the form of fines to the traffic police for not having original number plates.

Aijaz Ahmed, a resident of Karachi, who is also going through the ordeal of not having a permanent number plate, said that he got his new car registered with the excise department a year and a half ago but he is still waiting for the number plate.

"It was a series of BLP numbers that is still not available at the excise department's motor registration section. I have contacted the relevant authorities many times but their reply has remained the same that number plates of this series have still not arrived," Ahmed lamented.

Ahmed told *The Express Tribune* that he has paid fines to the traffic police on different occasions for not displaying an original number plate.

"The wastage of time and suffering my family and I had to undergo at the excise department is a separate ordeal," he added.

Muhammad Tahir, a private agent who facilitates people with the registration of vehicles at the Motor Vehicle Wing of the Excise and Taxation Department located at Civic Centre, says the issue is not new but it has been blown out of proportion for the first time.

"People had to face a similar problem back in 2004 as well. However, at the time the problem was mostly related to commercial vehicles instead of private cars," he said.

According to sources, the financial interests of certain excise and taxation officers is one of the main reasons for the huge backlog of number plates. Per an insider, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the tender for awarding the contract to the number plate manufacturer was cancelled because the financial interests of officers concerned was not guaranteed.

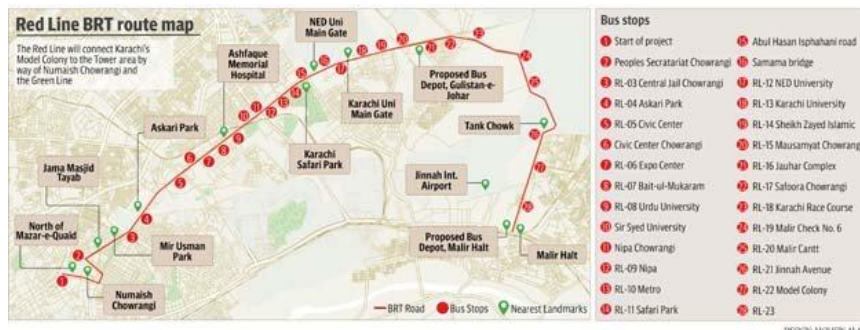
"The department has cancelled the tenders at least four times during the current financial year because of the personal financial interests of certain officers," he added.

When approached, the Deputy Director Motor Registration, Sher Muhammad Shaikh did not respond despite repeated phone calls and messages. Excise and Taxation Secretary, Abdul Haleem Shaikh, however, was available for comments.

"Initially, this issue was developed after the issuance of a stay order by the Sindh High Court against the tendering process of 2015-16," Shaikh said. "Afterwards, contracts for the manufacturing of number plates were not awarded during financial year 2018-19 either. The department cancelled the tenders because it received offers at higher rates," he added.
(By Razzak Abro *The Express Tribune*, 04, 21/11/2019)

Transport development: Red Line BRT all set for green signal

After much sputtering, it appears the Red Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project is finally ready to start.



Delayed for many years, the Sindh government has completed all financial and technical preparations for the transport scheme and will float a request for tenders in January. Construction work on the project is set to begin from August next year and is planned to be completed within the 24 months that follow, officials associated with the development said.

Once finished, the Red Line will connect Karachi's Model Colony to

the Tower area by way of Numaish Chowrangi and the Green Line. From Numaish Chowrangi, Red Line buses will make use of the Green Line corridor till Jama Cloth Market and divert onto another specially constructed corridor from there to reach the tower. As the hub of the entire BRT system, Numaish Chowrangi will also allow Red Line travellers to switch to other lines and access the rest of Karachi.

The funding

While the Red Line is expected to cost a staggering \$503 million, according to project documents shared with *The Express Tribune*, much of this amount is being loaned by donor agencies on easy terms. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$235 million loan for the project in July after it was green-lighted by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) earlier this year.

The Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIDB) approved another loan worth \$71.81 million last week and the same amount is also being provided by the French Development Agency (FDA). The Green Climate Fund is providing another \$37.2 million as a loan and \$11.8 million as a grant to make the project environment-friendly.

The Sindh government itself is putting in \$75.9 million and has acquired all the other loans on easy terms. It will have to pay off all debt in 30 years. Although a Sindh government project, the federal government has given a sovereign guarantee for the Red Line BRT.

Eco-friendly

"Our vision for the Red Line is to ensure it is environment-friendly," said BRT Project Director Rasheed Mughal. "The buses will run on compressed natural gas (CNG) and there are plans to build a bicycle path along the route."

According to Mughal, CNG for the buses will be sourced from a specially constructed biogas plant. "This plant will be set up in Bhains Colony and will produce 20,000 kilogrammes of CNG a day from manure," he told The Express Tribune.

"We will purchase 10,000 kilogrammes of CNG from the Bhains Colony biogas plant at a cost of Rs23 per kilogramme to run the Red Line buses. The other half will be supplied to the Sui Southern Gas Company and fetch the plant Rs1 billion annually, removing any need for subsidy for Red Line operations," he said. "Under the Community Development Programme portion of the BRT project, dilapidated roads in Bhains Colony will also be cleaned and reconstructed," he added.

Talking about the Red Line route, the BRT project manager said it would comprise two corridors spanning a total length of 26.6 kilometres. The main corridor will extend from Model Colony to Numaish Chowrangi while the secondary corridor will run from Jama Cloth Market to Tower. The two corridors will be connected by a 2.4-kilometre portion of the Green Line track, which will serve as a common corridor for all BRT lines. He added that a total of 24 bus stations will be built for the Red Line apart from the five stations it will use along the common corridor.

The route map

A total of 213 buses will run along the Red Line charging fares ranging from Rs15 to Rs55, according to Mughal. "For the first time, we are implementing a third generation BRT system that will let us like 10 public transport routes to the Red Line corridors via feeder buses," he said.

"The Red Line's special corridor will be completely built at grade level without any elevated structure, but elevated roads and underpasses will be built at Newtown Police Stations Bus Stop, Mausamyaat Bus Stop, Safoora Chowrangi and Shahrah-e-Quaideen for general traffic," he added. "Historic buildings along the Red Line corridors will be renovated and parking areas will be set up as well. We will also build a 53-kilometre drainage system."

Engineers working on the Red Line said the project plan entails construction on footpaths along the centre of University Road to cause minimal disruption to traffic. They added that Red Line authorities will rebuild any portion of the recently reconstructed University Road that is damaged during construction.

Beyond meeting some of Karachiites public transport needs, the Red Line will also help promote cycling culture in the city, Mughal said. "We are going to build a 58-kilometre cycling pathway from Model Colony all the way to Tower," he pointed out.

"Given the importance of the Red Line to the city, its construction and operation will be managed by Trans Karachi, a new non-profit which will operate under the Sindh Mass Transit Authority (SMTA)," the BRT project director said. He added that the SMTA Project Implementation Unit will be merged into Trans Karachi which will make further appointments on merit.

"All preparations are complete and tenders will be invited in January. Following that, the project will be launched in August and completed in the following 24 months," he added.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 27/11/2019)

Sindh, centre agree to run city transport on methane gas

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government in the centre and the Pakistan Peoples Party administration in Sindh on Thursday appeared to be on the same page for improving the metropolis's near-collapse public transport system. The authorities in the province vowed to complete the ongoing projects and bring new ones within the shortest possible time while those in the centre promised to power the system with environment-friendly biomethane produced from animal waste as a fuel.

This will provide an efficient and affordable transport solution for citizens and significantly reduce the carbon emissions level in the metropolis.

Speaking at the national conference on Biogas Project for Karachi Red Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) at a hotel here, Adviser to Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam and the Sindh transport minister shared their plans for the transport system, raising hopes for the city where the transport system is on the verge of collapse due to a history of failure, negligence, inefficiency and lack of follow through in both the government and public-private partnership projects.

Mr Aslam said the government was taking serious steps for the improvement of environment and strictly pursuing the vision of Clean and Green Pakistan. He said developing urban transport was not just a matter of supplying buses.

The adviser said that in the era of environmental concerns, a critical consideration was how to power the system. He reiterated that climate change remained a top priority for the federal government to support Prime Minister Imran Khan's initiative to reduce the effects of climate change and any potential initiative should be encouraged and replicated across the country.

The environment-friendly fuel may help reduce carbon emissions level

The adviser said that over 50,000 gallons of water was being wasted daily in Karachi, which would be utilised in this project. Emission of carbon gas at a huge level was polluting the environment of the megalopolis. He said that 213 buses would benefit

around 300,000 people of the city under the project on a daily basis. He termed the project a “transformational” one and a “big gift” for Karachiites.

Sindh Minister for Transport Awais Qadir Shah in his address said that two major challenges were being faced by the government; lack of transport facilities for the masses and environmental change. He said the mass transit project was the most important need of the city and this project would benefit the citizens at large with the provision of affordable travelling facility besides being an eco-friendly project.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) Country Director for Pakistan Xiaohong Yang said most jobs and employment opportunities were located in the urban economies. Road congestion was costing the Asian economies an estimated two to five per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) every year due to lost time and higher transport costs.

She said that one of the biggest challenges being faced by Karachi like any other urban city of Asia was maintaining vital economic growth while ensuring quality of life and liveability standards. The Karachi Red Line BRT, especially the biogas project, was part of ADB's vision to transform Karachi into a competitive, equitable and environmentally sustainable urban centre.

Ambassador of France to Pakistan Marc Barety also spoke at the conference and said that his country's Agence Francaise de Development (AFD) had been working in Pakistan since 2006. The AFD was also funding the Red Line project as it was focusing on projects of urban management, he added.

He said the AFD was prioritising such environment-friendly projects. The scheme was a wonderful example of international cooperation.

Earlier in his welcome address, Sindh Minister for Energy Imtiaz Ahmed Shaikh said that the government of Sindh was fully cooperating with the international agencies for the execution of the mass transit project. He told the participants that the Red Line project was the world's first transport project to receive funding from UN Green Climate Fund because of its use of an innovative and environment-friendly fuel resource.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 15, 29/11/2019)

Two underpasses on Shaheed-e-Millat Road to open for traffic soon

The construction work on the underpass at the Tariq Road intersection on Shaheed-e-Millat Road has nearly been completed and it will open for traffic in a week. Meanwhile, the underpass at the Hill Park intersection will also be completed by December 15.



The two underpasses are part of a 10-kilometre signal-free corridor, stretching from Korangi Hino Chowrangi to Jail Chowrangi on University Road, which also includes the recently-built flyover at Tipu Sultan Road intersection.

According to the Deputy Project Director, Khalid Masroor, the Tariq Road underpass has been built at a cost of Rs574 million, while the Hill Park underpass cost Rs653 million. The price tag, said Masroor, included the cost of transferring utility lines as well as construction of serviced roads running parallel to the underpasses.

The project

Pakistan Peoples Party chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is likely to inaugurate the Tariq Road underpass next week. The entire project, including the two underpasses and the flyover at Shaheed-e-Millat Road, was built by the Sindh government under the Karachi Project. The estimated cost of the project, at the time of its launch in fiscal year, 2017-2018, stood at a staggering Rs1.88 billion. The flyover was constructed at a cost of Rs660 million last year, after which the provincial government had initiated the construction of the Hill Park underpass in March this year. The underpass was meant to be constructed in eight months.

At around the same time, construction work on the Tariq Road underpass was initiated and the chief minister, Syed Murad Ali Shah, had directed to completion of the work within six months. The construction was, however, delayed by a month due to the monsoon rains, hence delaying its completion within the deadline.

Picture on the ground

At the Tariq Road underpass site, major construction work has been completed and the labourers are now adding final touches. The road has been carpeted and street lights too installed, while plants have also been placed, in line with the plantation campaign on green belts. A separate system for the discharge of rain water has also been built. The traffic signals on the Tariq Road intersection have been reinstalled.

A field engineer at the site told The Express Tribune that though the 10-km route stretching from Jail Chowrangi flyover to Korangi Hino Chowrangi has been made signal free, the traffic signal overhead the Tariq Road underpass has been installed to control the flow of traffic between Bahadurabad and Tariq Road.

Sigh of relief

Speaking to The Express Tribune, owners of superstores and several outlets located on Shaheed Millat Road and adjoining areas, expressed relief over the completion of the project as it had severely impacted their businesses. They complained that the

project had resulted in traffic gridlock every day since it commenced, while the dust rising from the construction site also caused severe problems.

The Sindh government had provided an alternative route for traffic along the service road.

The narrow road had, however, resulted in traffic jam on a daily basis.
(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 05, 02/12/2019)

Transport woes

It is a matter of great shame that successive governments — federal, provincial or municipal — have, despite considerable financial help from foreign donors, failed to resolve transport problems in all major cities of the country. Be it Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore or Karachi, all mass transit projects are being subjected to delays, while the residents of these cities continue to be inconvenienced for no fault of their own. A cursory glance at their progress is enough to reveal that these projects — even if the work is 'almost' complete — are delayed not so much by the dearth of funds and resources as by political point-scoring and the sheer incompetence of the ruling elite.

As one PTI-led government in KP scrambles to manage the disaster of the Peshawar BRT, the other in Punjab appears to be delaying the launch of the Rs200bn Orange Line Metro Train initiated by former chief minister Shahbaz Sharif. The bidding process for the maintenance and operation of the Orange Line was restarted in July by the current dispensation because the leadership was unsatisfied with the earlier effort. It is deplorable that the people of Lahore should continue to suffer because of political rivalry and the government's tendency to tamper with flagship projects initiated by past dispensations. Meanwhile, there are bureaucratic delays in the completion of the Islamabad Metro Bus Project, where 90pc of the construction work has been done. The relevant authorities seem to be passing on responsibility to each other, while contractors have halted work due to the non-payment of dues. Then there is the largest city of the country, Karachi, where no mass transit project announced by the past few federal, provincial or municipal governments have come to fruition. The Sindh government recently shelved a proposed Blue Line bus project due to the paucity of funds while ongoing construction work on the federally funded Green Line seems to have been stalled as parts of the city centre remain dug up and are inaccessible to commuters. However, the incomplete projects notwithstanding, the provincial government plans to start work on yet another project — the Red Line — for which around \$400m have been obtained from foreign donors. These mass transit projects were launched for the public, but their shambolic management have only added to commuters' misery. If only the authorities focused more on providing relief to the people instead of political point-scoring, the country could witness positive change.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 04/12/2019)

Transit woes: Slow economy brings city's short-term transport solution to a halt

As Karachi continues to sprawl outwards, the lack of an adequate public transportation system remains a bane for the megacity. While the authorities have some high profile long-term initiatives in the pipeline, little has been done to address the metropolis's growing need for affordable transport in the short run.

The provincial government had previously sought the assistance of the Daewoo private bus service in an attempt to manage the city's burgeoning transport crisis. However, seven months after signing the memorandum of understanding, the company has so far been unable to add a single vehicle to the city's dwindling fleet of around 4,000 public buses.

According to Sindh transport minister Owais Shah, Daewoo has already been issued a warning and the company hopes to bring in the promised buses within the next three months. "However, if the company fails to provide the promised fleet of buses, they are going to face penalties under the law," he told The Express Tribune.

Shah explained that the Korean company had inked an agreement with the Sindh government to bring and operate 1,000 air-conditioned CNG buses in the city, the routes for which have already been planned by the provincial transport department. Under this agreement, the company would provide the buses in two installments.

The first instalment will introduce 200 modern buses onto the streets of Karachi and the remaining 800 will be provided over time. However, the delay in the provision of buses has created a void in the city's affordable mass transportation system that private start-ups and transport services are attempting to fill.

Daewoo Chairperson Shehryar Chishti blamed the rise in dollar prices for throwing a spanner in the works of the project. "Now that the rupee is stable and the country is in a better economic state, we are working on importing the required buses from China and the service will soon be available to the citizens of Karachi," he said.

According to him, the first fleet of 200 Daewoo buses is expected to arrive in Karachi by January of next year. "Tickets for the new buses will be charged at between Rs20 to Rs40 and the buses will operate on CNG fuel, which will be provided to them even during CNG station closures to ensure their smooth functioning."

While Chishti hopes the new buses will considerably diminish the megacity's transport crisis, Karachi currently requires almost 11,000 public buses to meet the needs of its growing population. In the past 16 years, the provincial government has done little to address the citizens' concerns about an affordable mass transport system and the city of 15 million has been left at the mercy of ad hoc projects like Qingqi rickshaws and private transport companies.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 07/12/2019)

Orange Line train's test run begins

Test run of the Orange Line Metro Train (OLMT) began on the entire 27-km route (Dera Gujran to Ali Town) after the PTI-led Punjab government inaugurated its trial operation on Tuesday.

The test run would continue at least for next three months before launch of its commercial operation (opening for the public at large). "Orange Line is the first transport project of its kind being completed under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It also symbolises Pak-China friendship and is a magnificent gift for Lahorites," Punjab Minister for Transport Jahanzeb Khan Khichi said after he inaugurated commencement of the trains' trial run at a ceremony by unveiling the plaque at Ali Town.

The OLMT is the first mega public transport project of its kind in Pakistan envisaged by the Shahbaz Sharif-led PML-N government in December 2013. The tenders for the project were floated on Jan 29, 2014. And after a meeting of the then president of Pakistan with the Chinese premier on Feb 19 in Beijing, China decided to fund the project through soft loan, declaring it a "gift to Pakistan."

Commercial operation will start after three months

On June 24, China recommended CR-NORINCO Joint Venture for execution of the project's components — electrical and mechanical. After getting a go-ahead, the LDA started civil work assigned by the company in October 2015.

The project activities also remained halted for over a year due to long litigation at Lahore High Court and Supreme Court. In May 2018, the last month of the PML-N five-year tenure, Shahbaz Sharif had got the test run of the train conducted just ahead of the 2018 general election. However, the PTI government in Punjab allegedly expressed doubts about various contracts of the project and also sought fresh tendering of the operation and maintenance contract that was [almost] finalised by Shahbaz Sharif's government. Finally the Buzdar-led dispensation directed the Punjab Mass Transit Authority to start the tendering process afresh, causing delay in the commercial operation.

Minister Khichi, while responding to the Monday's 'mock inauguration' of the Orange Line staged by the PML-N workers, said it was not a project of any political personality or party but of the provincial government that aims to provide state-of-the-art transport facilities to the people of Lahore.

The project also holds distinction of being first electric transport of Pakistan. It is the first electric vehicle for Pakistan public sector besides having distinction of first computer-based control train. The service's speed, break and other functions will be operated automatically by the computer. As the process of trains' brakes, alignment, signal and other technical tests would now be conducted for next three months, the service would be fully operational for the public after this phase.

Earlier, Mr Khichi along with Information & Culture Minister Fayyazul Hassan Chohan, Energy Minister Dr Akhtar Malik, Food Minister Samiullah Chaudhry, Adviser to CM Dr Salman Shah, MPAs, Secretary (Transport) Asadur Rehman Gillani, Managing Director (Punjab Mass Transit Authority) Sibtain Fazal Haleem, Executive Deputy General Manager of Chinese (NORINCO Company) Wang Yunlin, journalists and notables travelled in the train that successful completed its test run from Dera Gujran to Ali Town.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 02, 11/12/2019)

The BRT problem

VARIOUS Pakistani leaders have made bus rapid transit or BRT projects the centre point of their political rhetoric. Often a misleading impression is created that BRT programmes will comprehensively address a plethora of public transport issues. BRT projects sound and appear grand, but considering the cost it often takes to complete them — more often than not with generous help from foreign donors — their efficacy leaves much to be desired.



Take the Lahore Metro Bus; it enables less than 250,000 passenger trips per day against a total of over 12m passenger trips in the city. Even when the Karachi BRT — comprising a total of five bus lines — becomes fully operational, it will cater to only around nine per cent of the total number of passenger trips per day. All five lines of the Karachi BRT will cover a distance

of nearly 113 kilometres at a cost of around Rs170 billion, while the cost of the Peshawar BRT is more than Rs55bn for covering a distance of a mere 27km.

What these grand plans tend to ignore is that in their current form BRT programmes in any Pakistani city cannot function without total integration with other modes of public transport, as well as non-motorised options such as bicycles. In thriving megacities, accessibility and physical connectivity are prime considerations for transport planning.

These factors are also vital with respect to social justice. The rich and powerful are usually found to control the public resources that are diverted towards projects expected to generate limited benefits.

Total integration with other modes of transport is necessary.

For instance, in Karachi, the Lyari Expressway was built to facilitate the fast movement of vehicles at a cost of about Rs23bn. The amount is huge, but not more than 40,000 vehicles ply the Lyari Expressway on any given day, while ordinary citizens generate more than 27m work trips that need to be serviced through public transport.

According to a World Bank report, less than 5,000 buses operate in Karachi, serving about 100 routes. Considering the mushrooming of nine- and 12-seater rickshaws in the city, this amount of Rs23bn could perhaps have been better spent on the purchase of more buses for public transport.

In Pakistan, cities often have an uneven distribution of population where high-income groups live close to the city centre or major work locations. Lower-income groups are left with limited options and thus reside far away from their workplaces, ending up spending a sizeable portion of their meagre incomes on commuting.

A factory worker living in Orangi in Karachi spends half of his salary on transport simply to maintain his job, as opposed to a senior executive at a multinational who resides in Defence and has his office in the closely located Clifton area. Such anomalies merit review when planning mass transit projects. Intelligently worked out financial management solutions, such as specialised fuel outlets, fare rate adjustments and motor vehicle tax exemptions for public transport are also options worth considering.

In addition to this, the government can consider raising the motor vehicle tax on private cars so the rich may balance the cost of their luxury with the poor.

Moreover, the bad quality of roads in the country also makes mass transit projects unsustainable. Karachi is a typical example. Lack of periodic maintenance, poor design and quality of construction, frequent inundation by fresh and sewage water have all contributed to extensive wear and tear. These are also becoming the reason for a large number of road accidents. On the other hand, public transport vehicles are usually driven by often illiterate and amateur drivers who may have only a rudimentary understanding of vehicle operations and a less-than-adequate road sense.

Many problems related to traffic jams, congested road space, noise pollution and accidents could be curtailed through proper driver education.

Karachi possesses more than 10,000km of developed road length. Though repair and maintenance are necessary for about two-thirds of this distance, the work can be divided into phases. In the first phase, all major arterial roads should be repaired. The next phase of the project can address the issue of repairs of main roads in commercial locations and key industrial areas. To achieve this, however, the present capacity of municipalities would need to be drastically upgraded.

Tracking devices and street cameras can be used to document traffic offences, especially those committed by drivers of public transport vehicles. The value of non-motorised transport such as bicycles is also very important. For short- and medium-range trips, bicycles can become a cheap and effective mode of transport for city dwellers. This option needs proper facilitation to add value to our commuting choices.

(By Noman Ahmed Dawn, 09, 11/12/2019)

Auto sector slowdown

AUTOMOBILE companies here have been reeling from contracting demand for several months now. The slowdown in the automobile industry is widespread and has affected every segment. But it is more conspicuous in the case of car assemblers who are compelled to reduce the number of shifts, shut down their plants for the better part of each month, and end jobs or furlough employees to save fixed costs. Overall, car sales have plunged 44pc during the first five months of the current fiscal from a year ago. The demand for some variants has dipped up to 75pc in spite of 'special offers and substantial price discounts' announced by companies to clear their growing inventories. The impact on local suppliers of parts to the manufacturers is much more devastating. Though no reliable data is available, the vendors are reported to have abolished at least 50,000 jobs since July.

The industry, especially the three Japanese car assemblers who have monopolised the domestic market for over three decades, blame the massive rise in their prices on the steep currency devaluation, spiking leasing costs owing to higher interest rates and imposing new taxes in the current budget. The trend is in line with the ongoing contraction in manufactured output in the country because of fiscal and monetary policies aimed at stabilising the economy and bridging the current account deficit by discouraging imports. Nevertheless, the automobile industry is in a bad state. Fiscal and monetary policies may have contributed a lot to the unprecedented decline in sales, but car assemblers must also share the blame for their current situation. The currency depreciation has laid bare their failure to localise their cars as they have done in India as well as exposed their dependence on imports, despite enjoying substantially large tariff protections for decades. There is a need for the government to help the industry and protect jobs. But its support should not be unconditional. The assemblers must agree to achieve maximum localisation in a specified period of time in exchange for such support.

(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 13/12/2019)

Traffic: Relief for motorists as Numaish Chowrangi underpass to open partially this week

The upper part of the Numaish Chowrangi underpass, the construction of which was delayed for the past couple of years, is partially being opened for traffic next week. The move will give some relief to motorists as the incomplete structure had turned out to be a traffic nightmare for the citizens of Karachi.

Per sources, the two-way road between Britto Road and Shahrah-e-Quaideen and the road from Gurumandir to Numaish Chowrangi will be opened for traffic on December 20. Other routes connected to Numaish Chowrangi, however, will remain closed due to development work.



In February 2020, all roads leading from Numaish intersection, MA Jinnah Road and related roads will be opened for traffic, but the construction work under Numaish Chowrangi underpass will continue. The entire project of the underpass is scheduled to be completed by May 2020.

According to a survey conducted by The Express Tribune, the carpeting of road has been completed on both the tracks of Shahrah-e-Quaideen adjacent to Numaish Chowrangi. However, construction work is underway on Britto Road. The final carpeting of the road has been completed from Gurumandir to Mazar-e-Quaid at Numaish, while the track between Numaish Chowrangi and Gurumandir is under construction.

The track between Gurumandir and Imam Bargah Ali Raza has also been temporarily opened for traffic amid ongoing development work and parking issues. However, the narrow lane with the two-way traffic poses a serious risk of accidents. Alongside vehicles, trucks and dump loaders also continue to use the road to supply the material and machinery for construction. Meanwhile, the track from Capri Cinema to Numaish Chowrangi remains closed for traffic.

Under the supervision of the federal government, the construction of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Green Line Project, Surjani Town, Abdullah Mor to Municipal Park (Jama Cloth Market) was started in January 2016 and was scheduled to be completed by December 2017. However, the sluggishness exhibited by the federal government, together with repeated changes in the project design and a conflict between the federal and the provincial government, led to undue delays and the project could not be completed on time.

Phase I of the Green Line Project covers a 17-kilometre track from Surjani Town to Gurumandir. The civil works for Phase I are complete, while the construction of stations and depots is about to be finished. The second part of Phase I covers a track from Numaish Chowrangi to Taj Medical Complex but it has been delayed for the last three years.

On the other hand, phase II of the project, which extends from Taj Medical Complex to Municipal Park, has not even started yet. The development work on Numaish Chowrangi has been postponed several times. As per the original plan of the federal government, this part was supposed to have an elevated structure, but after an objection raised by the management board of the Quaid-e-Azam Mausoleum, the federal government decided to change the design and build an underpass.

By the end of 2017, when the tender award was given for the construction of the underpass, the Sindh government raised an objection that the land concerned had to be used for the Red Line Bus Project in future, while a Blue Line Bus Project was also planned in front of the Karachi Goan Association Ground. The provincial government contested that the federal government should also reserve some space alongside the underpass for provincial projects.

As a result, the construction work for the Green Line Project was halted for several months. At the request of the Sindh government, the federal government amended the design of the project again and awarded new contracts which took about eight months. Finally, in October 2018, the Numaish Chowrangi was completely closed for traffic for the construction of the underpass.

Due to the ongoing development works, all the roads linked with the MA Jinnah Road and the surrounding roads have been closed due to which citizens commuting to Saddar, Tower and II Chundrigar Road have been subject to much misery.

The Numaish Chowrangi has been the busiest intersection of the city as it links ten passages and lanes, including the busiest main roads and two small roads. MA Jinnah Road is the most important thoroughfare from Gurumandir, Numaish and Capri Cinema, while Shahrah-e-Quaideen and Britto Road near Numaish are also two-way roads. Moreover, there are two smaller roads originating from the Parsi Colony Road and Nizami Road from where the traffic flows towards Numaish Chowrangi.

According to sources, around 150,000 vehicles pass through the intersection every day. However, the construction work on the site has been forcing commuters to take alternate routes, including tracks from Soldier Bazar, Garden and Shahrah-e-Faisal.

Saleh Farooqi, the chief executive officer of Sindh Infrastructure Development Company Limited, told The Express Tribune that work on the underpass at Numaish Chowrangi is almost complete and development work on the sidewalks is also underway.

“On December 20, the track leading to Britto Road and Shahrah-e-Quaideen will be opened for traffic while the remaining development work will be completed in the next two months,” he said. “In February next year, all the routes connecting Numaish intersection, including MA Jinnah Road, Nizami Road and the Parsi Colony Road, will be opened for traffic.”

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 16/12/2019)

Traffic DIG proposes plan to ease vehicular flow in city

Putting forth a plan to improve traffic management in Karachi, Traffic DIG Javed Maher identified 91 damaged roads that are major impediments to the flow of traffic, along with issues such as illegal parking, encroachments and lack of taxi, bus and truck stands, on Wednesday. He said traffic congestion had also worsened due to 33 on-going development projects in Karachi, including the bus rapid transit projects.

He was briefing the Provincial Public Safety and Police Complaint Commission (PPS&PCC) during a meeting chaired by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah. The CM said that the damaged roads were being repaired, adding that the Karachi Municipal Corporation had already launched anti-encroachment operations.

According to Maher, there are 5.3 million vehicles in the metropolis, which include 3.2 million motorcycles and 1.2 million jeeps and cars, among other vehicles, operating on a road network of over 10,000 kilometres.

Maher pointed out that 52 roads are significantly obstructed by encroachments, adding that the city police had arrested 168 people during operations against these blockages. Out of 159 signals in the city, 33 signals were out of order, he said.

In addressing the matter of illegal parking, the commission was told that 31 commercial buildings had converted their parking spaces into shops and godowns. Mumtaz Ali Shah, the provincial chief secretary, said that notices had been issued to the owners of these buildings, directing them to restore the parking spaces.

The police suggested a plan where the Lines Area Parking Plaza and Baradari basement parking could be utilised to reduce the load of parked vehicles on the streets of Karachi. They also proposed three more grounds to be used for parking, namely Railway Ground near the General Post Office, China Ground at Kashmir Road, and a vacant plot at Hassan Square. The CM directed the chief secretary and the Sindh IGP to review the proposal and implement it if it was feasible.

In his plan to improve traffic in the city, Maher recommended the construction of a bypass road from West Wharf to Northern Bypass along the coastline, behind Machar Colony. He also proposed the construction of a southern bypass to divert traffic from Karachi Port Trust to Korangi Industrial Area via Sea View beach, the construction of an interchange bridge at ICI Junction, and the construction of a flyover bridge from PIDC bridge to the TPX container yard along Moulvi Tamizuddin Khan Road.

The CM responded that these projects had already been included in Karachi's development package, and the Sindh local government minister had initiated a consultative meeting with the relevant agencies.

CM Shah further told the chief secretary to make arrangements for 'speaking roads,' with road signs and lane markings for the convenience and safety of the public. The chief secretary responded that several points had already been identified for these markings.

The commission was also informed that 3,363,753 tickets were issued by the traffic police in 2019, with the collection of fines of Rs755.8 million – 30 per cent more than the challans issued last year.

Action against gutka and narcotics

Briefing the commission, Sindh IGP Dr Kaleem Imam said that strict action had been taken against manufacturers and smugglers of gutka and mainpuri. His report stated that the police had arrested 6,995 suspects and seized over 3.5 million kilogrammes of the two substances, while also sealing 206 productions units.

Meanwhile, he said, the police had also arrested 11,057 suspects in connection with narcotics, seizing 12.9 kilogrammes of ice, 72.7 kilogrammes of heroin, 698.9 kilogrammes of hashish, 7,619.7 kilogrammes of charas and 186.3 kilogrammes of opium. They further confiscated 180,844 bottles of local liquor and 2,353 bottles of imported liquor.

Iranian diesel

The commission was also informed that 1,141,111 litres of Iranian diesel had been seized and 448 people arrested for smuggling it by the police.

At this, the CM explained that although it was not the responsibility of the police to deal with this matter, he had assigned them the task because the money generated from the smuggling of Iranian diesel was used to finance terrorist activities.

Annual policing plan

The Sindh IGP said he would present the provincial annual policing plan in the next meeting, adding that the rules of the commission had been framed and sent to the Sindh Law Department for vetting.

Meanwhile, a resolution passed against Dr Imam for failing to attend the last two meetings of the commission was withdrawn at his request.

(By Our Correspondent The Express Tribune, 04, 19/12/2019)

Hazard in the making: A new year with no traffic lights?

New year celebrations may be a light-driven affair in most parts of the world, but Karachi's motorists may be left in the dark come 2020. No, we don't mean streetlights.

Thanks to an unresolved payment issue, drivers in the city may be forced to navigate its streets without the aid of traffic signals as they enter the new year.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, sources associated with the traffic authorities said the financial crisis the Karachi Development Authority (KDA) is facing is now threatening to shut down all signals in the metropolis. According to them, the

contractor repairing the signals has warned that it will stop servicing all of them should KDA fail to pay the Rs20 million in arrears the authority has racked up over the past 20 months by January 1.

Most of the city's traffic signals are being repaired over and over on a daily basis at present, a situation borne out of lack of timely maintenance on account of the financial crunch. The sources said the absence of these day to day repairs could result in the signals not working at all, drastically increasing the risk of traffic jams and accidents.

Of the 163 signals installed on the city's main arteries, 101 are controlled by the KDA Traffic Engineering Bureau (TEB). Of the remainder, 60 are operated by the Clifton Cantonment Board and two by the Civil Aviation Authority.

The operation of all is assigned to the Traffic Police, but its officials only turn the signals on and off. All other work, such as maintenance, repair and payment of electricity bills, is carried out by other concerned departments.

According to TEB officials, they control the signals via an urban traffic control (UTC) system, which allows operators to set timings according to traffic volume round the day. The bureau, they said, has awarded the annual repair contract to a firm called Silicon Communications and Security.

In a recent letter to the KDA director general, the contractor warned that it could not continue its services unless the Rs20 million it is owed is paid by January 1. The company pointed out that its own financial health was under immense strain at present, making it difficult for it to continue installation and repair work on new and old traffic signals. The letter – which was dispatched to the chief secretary, local government secretary, deputy inspector general traffic and other senior officials as well – also stressed that dues were not cleared despite repeated reminders from the company and verbal assurances from KDA representatives.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a KDA finance department official admitted that the authority has been under immense financial strain for the past eight months. "The grant we recently received from the Sindh government is being used to pay off the salaries and pensions," the official said.

"Just a few days ago, we finally managed to pay the salaries and pensions to employees of grade 1 to 15. Other officers are set to be paid this week, but a months-long deadlock persists," he added.

"Under the KDA DG's orders, we are working to bring about a turnaround in the authority's financial position, but any real improvement is contingent on resolving this deadlock." According to the official, the authority in the meantime will request the Sindh government for another grant to pay the contractor's dues.

When contacted, TEB Senior Director Naveed Azhar said they were aware of the sensitivity of the issue and are working to ensure the dues are cleared despite the immense crunch KDA is under.

Many of Karachi's traffic signals have been uprooted due to ongoing development work in the city and need to be reinstalled. The construction work has also damaged many underground power cables, further complicating the reinstallation process along with creating issues with other untouched signals nearby. In the absence of signals, Traffic Police officials direct traffic manually which more often than not increases frustration among motorists.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 23/12/2019)

Pedestrian dies

A pedestrian died in a hit-and-run accident in PECHS on Sunday.

A spokesperson for the Edhi Foundation said that Faisal, 40, was passing through Tariq Road when an unknown vehicle hit him. He sustained critical injuries and was taken to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, where he died during treatment. (By Newspaper's Staff Reporter 13, 23/12/2019)

Prolonged CNG closure hits road users hard financially

The closure of CNG stations for a longer duration has proved to be a great burden on the pockets of consumers as rickshaw and taxi drivers are demanding exorbitant fares while peak factor on ride-hailing services has remained a constant irritant owing to lack of public transport.

The current week also saw a huge rush of people at bus stops waiting for public transport vehicles as buses were taking too long to reach their designated stops because of being a few in numbers.

A number of transporters had also parked their vehicles in parking areas owing to non-availability of gas.

Most public transport buses use CNG instead of diesel.

Due to prolonged gas loadshedding, people are facing a great deal of problems in finding seats in three wheeler rickshaws, usually called qingqi.

Some qingqi operators are seen demanding Rs25-30 instead of the actual fare of Rs20 for a ride.

Due to non-availability of public transport, peak factors on ride-hailing services (two, three and four wheelers) have also severely hit cash-strapped consumers.

'Business environment in the CNG sector is now turning hostile because of gas price hike'

Due to the peak factor, the fare of ride-hailing services becomes more expensive than the fares being charged by private rickshaws. For a distance of 12km, rickshaw owners, after a long bargain, demand Rs350-450 while rickshaws and cars of Uber and Careem charge around Rs600-800 during the peak factor.

Private CNG rickshaw owners have placed a 1.5 litre bottle of petrol to show customers that they are using petrol, which justifies high transportation charges.

CNG business becoming 'non-profitable'

"We will block the main roads in case gas supply to stations is closed for more than three days next week against the schedule of SSGCL," Chairman of CNG Dealers Association Abdul Sami Khan said.

He said CNG sales were badly hit in the current week due to longer duration of station closures coupled with switching over of consumers to petrol.

"We have been encouraged by previous governments to invest in CNG sector for ensuring clean environment and curbing oil import bill, but the business environment is now turning hostile," he added.

On reports of gas tariff hike by up to 221 per cent from January 2020, Sami Khan said, adviser to prime minister on petroleum products Nadeem Babar assured him on Saturday morning that "decision on gas increase will be made by mid January 2020".

He said that he had received a message from the PM's adviser, which said: "there is no increase. OGRA has recommended it. But the government is still considering it. Decision will be made in mid January".

The SSGCL has been undertaking loadshedding due to low pressure of gas in the system. As a result, domestic consumers as well as industrial units are facing serious problems of low gas pressure.

Low gas pressure

The coordinator Sindh, All Pakistan CNG Association, Samir Najmul Hassan claimed that gas supply to CNG stations had remained shut for over 141 hours in the current week, thus hitting the daily sale and causing problems to the people.

He said CNG stations were not getting required pressure even when the gas was restored.

He added that in normal days, 90 per cent pumps get 8psi and 10 per cent pumps get 15psi but the pressure remained in the range of 2psi to 4psi at pumps which used to get 8psi. Due to low pressure, some 40 per cent pumps could not open their gas stations.

He said over the past one and a half years, CNG price had risen to Rs123 per kg from Rs87 per kg, causing 30 per cent decline in sales.

Even on the closure of CNG pumps, domestic consumers and industries in SITE were getting low pressure.

He said there should be no gas loadshedding as CNG stations in Sindh consumed only 62mmcf of gas out of total 1,285mmcf of gas consumption. He said in case CNG rates were increased as per OGRA proposal — consumers would pay Rs144 per kg as compared to current rate of Rs123 per kg.

"The government cannot afford three billion dollars for importing additional petrol per year in case CNG is closed in the country," he said.

Concern over proposed hike in gas price

The president of Korangi Association of Trade and Industry (KATI), Sheikh Umer Rehan, has expressed deep concern over proposed hike in gas prices by Ogra and termed any such decision a blow to industries.

He said that already industries were facing troubled times due to higher production cost and higher tariffs of energy.

In current situation, industry could not afford any increase in utility prices due to already shooting production cost which had adversely affected exports.

He was of view that gas price increase for industry, captive plants and CNG sector would widely affect the industry and the common people as well.

He added that with increased gas prices captive power plants would not remain feasible and this would lead to interruption in industrial production and especially pharmaceutical sector where any disruption can cause challenges for public health.

He added that increase in gas prices for domestic user and roti tandors would directly affect the general public.

He urged Prime Minister Imran Khan to consider the apprehensions of industry and people of Pakistan and drop any such consideration of gas price hike.
(By Aamir Shafaat Khan Dawn, 13, 23/12/2019)

Protest demo held against prolonged CNG closure in Karachi

Stakeholders of various CNG associations as well as workers on Monday held a protest demonstration outside the Karachi Press Club against the prolonged gas loadshedding by the Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL).

They said: "CNG stations have operated only 27 hours in the last week while remaining shut for 192 hours, causing serious hardships to the consumers, transporters as well as station owners."

All the CNG stations will remain closed from 8am to 8pm even on Tuesday "due to low pressure of gas in the SSGCL system". Chairman of the CNG Dealers Association Abdul Sami Khan said that when the gas supply was restored for "limited hours", more than 50 per cent of the stations could not operate owing to a very low gas pressure.

He said on Dec 19 SSGCL high-ups had assured station owners that gas would be supplied on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but this was not done.

He said captive power units are utilising 20pc of gas. As per the contract, the SSGCL is bound to keep gas supply suspended from Dec 1 to Feb 28, but captive power units are operating.

When asked about the future strategy, Mr Sami said: "We have three options: blocking the main roads, holding protest at the SSGCL's head office and placing protest banners in the city."

He urged the federal government to look into the grievances of the consumers and CNG industry and ensure supply of gas to the stations.

Mr Sami said the closure of CNG stations had rendered many workers jobless at the outlets while transport operators are also facing serious problems in running buses.

As per the Constitution, Sindh has the first right to use gas. "The tariff of our CNG sector has been the highest. The government does not apply industrial tariff to the CNG sector.

We are the only industry which is paying advance tax," he said.

Sources at the SSGCL said that out of 2,500mmcf of gas production in Sindh, 1,000mmcf to 1,200mmcf of gas is being diverted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab to meet the soaring demand of domestic consumers in winter there.

The current demand for gas in Sindh and Balochistan is 1,500mmcf but the SSGCL's system is facing a shortfall of 360mmcf, thus causing low gas pressure for domestic consumers as well as longer duration of gas loadshedding at CNG stations.

Sources said the CNG sector fell in the last category of a priority list of the government, while the top five priority sectors of providing gas are domestic, commercial, independent power producers, industries and captive power units.
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 16, 24/12/2019)

Mass transit woes

AFFORDABLE public transport and roads form the backbone of any economy. Not only do such fundamental services lead to an increase in productivity, they tend to act as equalisers in societies seeped in class and gender inequalities. There are also environmental and public health benefits of having fewer private vehicles on the roads, leading to a reduction in carbon emissions and congestion. But despite all these economic, social and environmental arguments for greater investment in public transport — and despite the reality of an ever-expanding population — the sector has been largely neglected in Pakistan. While Punjab has been able to develop proficient urban transit systems — primarily in the cities of Lahore and Multan — the other provinces have lagged behind. And time and again, we have seen how development projects and the provision of necessary services come to a halt with interruptions in governance. For instance, the Islamabad metro bus service was supposed to extend to the New Islamabad International Airport, but this plan has been put on hold since the PTI government came to power.

There is petty politics, and then there is political hubris, which is perhaps best illustrated in the case of the Peshawar Bus Rapid Transit project. The ambitious venture was announced one year before the general elections. However, from the beginning, the Peshawar BRT has been mired in controversy. Over two years and several design changes later, billions of rupees have been borrowed, hundreds of trees hacked, and there is still no sign of the project nearing its completion. The mismanagement of funds has also led to accusations of corruption, with the Peshawar High Court directing the FIA to carry out investigations.

Then there is the tragedy of Karachi. Residents of the metropolis had been told they would have their own mass transit system as part of a plan conceived by the Japan International Cooperation Agency in 2012. Seven years later, however, the plan is a non-starter, and the city is still waiting for even one of those four colour-coded bus routes to be completed, or the defunct Karachi Circular Railway to be revived. Instead, the roads that were dug up to make way for the Green Line have been abandoned midway.

Despite housing over 14m people and opening its doors to people from all over the country and beyond, and despite millions of dollars pouring in from foreign donors, it is nothing short of a travesty that the city does not have a single decent public transport system running, even with the federal government stepping in. The ever-enterprising private sector — ride-hailing services, rickshaws, buses — have rushed in to fill the gap, but many cannot afford the daily commuting expenses. Unfortunately, the country's economic powerhouse remains an afterthought to its leaders, especially the provincial government.
(By Editorial Dawn, 08, 26/12/2019)

Low gas pressure, limited time irk CNG consumers

Despite opening of CNG stations from 7am to 7pm on Sunday, many consumers faced problems due to low gas pressure at stations while many pumps remained inoperative due to very low pressure of gas supply from the Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL), CNG station owners complained.

However, an official at the SSGCL did not agree with the claim of the CNG station owners.

Coordinator of Sindh Zone, All Pakistan CNG Association, Samir Najmul Hassan said that some 40 per cent of pumps out of 331 pumps in Karachi could not run their pumps owing to almost zero gas pressure, while 60pc pumps operated at gas pressure of 160-180psi instead of 200-220psi.

Consumers made long queue hours ahead of the opening of CNG outlets in the cold Sunday morning, but station owners kept their pumps closed due to lack of required pressure.

At other pumps, consumers waited for longer duration to get even low pressure gas at any cost.

Samir claimed that 28 pumps were closed at West Zone, four pumps each at Nishtar Road, North Nazimabad and 20 pumps in Korangi areas.

"In the last 13 days — pumps in the city have remained operational for only 42 hours," he said.

Despite massive drop in CNG sale, he claimed that "station owners have so far not fired any worker or staffer from their job".

Around 10-15 persons worked at a single pump depending on two shifts.

Giving a different view, another official at the All Pakistan CNG Association, Shoaib Khanjee claimed that 60 per cent of pumps were shut down out of over 330 CNG pumps in Karachi because of zero pressure in areas like Orangi Town, Nazimabad, North Nazimabad, SITE area, Korangi, etc.

Chairman of CNG Dealers Association Abdul Sami Khan said: "It is true that gas at pumps in some areas of Karachi was not provided with required pressure."

On the contrary, the SSGCL official, who asked not to be named, said the surveying team of the company had not reported any shut down of pump.

He said all CNG stations were open on Sunday owing to gas holiday at industrial sector.

Agreeing over low gas pressure at pumps, he said, "No pump was closed on Sunday from morning to evening."

The official said gas supply situation would improve as 50mmcf of gas from two new fields were coming up in the system from the first week of January 2,020.

(By Aamir Shafaat Khan Dawn, 13, 30/12/2019)

Exclusive bus track

WHY are subway and light trains in developed countries more reliable than buses or private vehicles on roads? It is simply because they run on dedicated tracks and don't mix with other vehicles and get dragged down by vehicular traffic. This helps subway and light trains move quickly.

But if we give buses a fair shot by giving them a dedicated lane, they can run fast too. Although not every street is fit for a dedicated bus lane, Karachi's main roads such as Sharea Faisal, Shaheed-i-Millat Road and Khayaban-i-Ittehad, among others, are fit for a dedicated bus lane, which can double or triple bus speed on these roads by eliminating delays caused by cars and vehicles.

When Karachi residents, who use motorbikes and cars, will learn that they won't be stuck in traffic if they use buses to, say commute to work or on their way back home, they will most probably start using buses too. At least I will do that, for I hate being stuck in traffic every day. This way fewer vehicles will be on roads and this will ease the traffic congestion in the city.

If the government doesn't have quality buses on dedicated lanes, they can simply allow ride-hailing services such as Swvl and Airlift to run on these tracks and levy an additional tax on them.

This will be a win-win situation for all as these services will save on fuel and provide efficient transport services, resulting in a happy customer. On the other hand, the government can earn additional taxes that it can use to maintain those roads and bus lanes. The government should think about this easy and quick solution to the traffic congestion in Karachi.

Manzar Mashhood
Karachi

(From the newspaper Dawn, 09, 31/12/2019)

Public transportation: A decade of ebb and flow

Over the past decade, the population of Karachi has grown exponentially, which naturally created the need to upgrade its transportation system. To that end, the city's transport sector saw both positive and negative developments. On a government level, a big-bus service was added to the transport infrastructure, while on the other hand, citizens had to face a lot of problems because public transport was reduced to a fleet of 4,000 buses.

According to an estimate, Karachi needs at least 15,000 buses to cater to a population of more than 20 million. Over 290 public transport routes have been closed leaving only 79 operational routes for traffic. Due to the negligence of the provincial government, the fares of public transport have risen manifold due to which people belonging to the working and underprivileged class, together with women and students, have to face immense difficulties.

Innovations and developments

Even though the traditional public transport system of Karachi generally worsened over the past 10 years, it is worth mentioning that some positive developments also took place in the city in the form of local and foreign investments in the transport sector. The introduction of internet-assisted transport services, for instance, offered a lot of convenience to the citizens of Karachi as they could now book bikes, rickshaws, cars and small buses online.

The second-biggest development in the transport sector was the launch of a mass-transit system in Karachi – a project that had been on the cards for the past forty years. In 2010, the bus rapid transport (BRT) system finally started materialising and its construction on two corridors began.

Undue delays

Over the years, three public transport schemes were formulated at the state level. With the financial support of Rs2.5 billion from the federal government, there had been plans to introduce 4,000 CNG buses in Karachi under the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Scheme. The plan to launch another 1,000 new air-conditioned buses in collaboration with a private company was also in the pipeline.

However, both of the projects were red-taped due to the negligence of the Sindh government. However, another project for 1,000 buses signed with the Daewoo Company is underway. Although the buses under the project were supposed to arrive in Karachi by May 2019, a rise in the price of the dollar, together with other administrative reasons, caused undue delays.

Outdated buses and closed routes

Per a survey conducted by The Express Tribune, the public buses which are currently in use are very old, with many of them older than 40 years. The minibuses and coaches have surpassed their functional life and are running without fitness certificates.

According to transporters, as many as 10,000 public buses were operational until the early 2000s. However, the illegal nine-seat and 12-seat Qingqi rickshaws were allowed on the roads due to which the public transport system started facing a drastic decline. To top it all off, gas-load shedding, a surge in CNG prices and hikes in diesel rates also hampered the public transport system to a great extent.

The Sindh transport department, Regional Transport Authority and other organisations do not have accurate data on the number of operational public transport vehicles in the city. However, it is estimated that there are currently only 4,000 public transport carriers operating in Karachi, with only 400 big buses and 3,500 minibuses and coaches. There are a total of 60 routes for big buses out of which 47 are closed and only 13 are operational. The total number of bus routes is 236 of which 191 routes are closed. Mini-buses are operating on 25 routes, while coaches have a total of 75 routes including 21 operational and 54 non-operational ones.

Rising transportation fares

In 2018, public transport owners increased transportation fares without the approval of the government. The buses have started charging Rs15 to Rs30 from passengers, while fares for minibuses cost up to Rs20 to Rs40. Similarly, coach owners charge Rs20 to Rs50 per passenger for a one-way trip. Transporters maintain that due to an increase in fuel prices and illegal transportation of rickshaws, the number of passengers using public transport has considerably reduced, causing serious monetary losses.

This is the first time in the history of Karachi that fares have been increased without a notification from the Sindh government. Despite protest from the public, the provincial government acted as a silent spectator to the violation.

The Sindh government has no concrete plans for improving the transportation system in Karachi even though there is huge potential for investment in the sector. To make for the gap, private online transport companies like Bykea, Uber, Careem, SWVL and Airlift have attracted investments in the sector. The Sindh government has not facilitated these companies in any form, while

the provincial transport department has maintained that there is no law to regularise these companies. However, the provincial government has recently drafted a law has to regularise such companies which would be sent to the assembly for approval.

A ray of hope

The construction of the much-awaited mass transit system in Karachi, together with the revitalisation of the Karachi Circular Railway has been underway for decades. On the request of the Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ordered to connect the Karachi Circular Railway with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor in 2017 and issued directives to hand over the project to the Sindh government. However, no progress has been made in this regard.

Nonetheless, both the Sindh and the federal government deserve a pat on the back for rapidly starting the construction of the BRT system and its two corridors but work on both of the projects is slow-paced owing to various reasons but their expected completion date is December 2020 after which the bus service will start.

(By Syed Ashraf Ali The Express Tribune, 04, 31/12/2019)