

Public Transport in Developing Countries

PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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PREFACE

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Transport problems in both developed and developing countries, and the planning and management of transport systems in developed countries, have been the subject of numerous books. However, while many of the characteristics of public transport are common throughout the world, there are others which are unique, or of greater significance, to developing countries. In addition, with a higher proportion of the population dependent on public transport in these countries, the problems tend to be much more critical. Thus there is a need for a book which addresses the issues of planning, regulation, and management of public transport specifically in developing countries.

This book aims to meet that requirement. It examines and explains the problems and characteristics of public transport systems in developing countries, and discusses the alternative modes, management methods, and forms of ownership, control, regulation and funding, in the context of different stages of development, operating environments and cultural backgrounds. While it deals with urban, rural and long distance transport services, a significant part of the content is devoted to road-based public transport systems in urban areas: this emphasis reflects the magnitude of the urban transport problem, and the predominance of road transport in most developing countries. However, in the planning or operation of any public transport system, it is necessary at all times to consider the alternatives, as well as the complementarity of the different modes. Other forms of transport, including light rail transit, suburban and long-distance rail, are therefore also covered in this book, albeit in much less depth than the principal road transport modes. The planning of bus services, particularly in urban areas, is covered in some detail, since this is often an area of considerable weakness. Similarly, the management of transport services and the maintenance of vehicles, including vehicle design and transport fleet planning, are also dealt with at length.

There is no clear definition of a “developing country”. The term tends to be used loosely, as it is in this book, and applies mainly to the poorer countries of the world, principally those in Asia, Africa and South America. Every country in the world is developing to some extent,

although the rate of development varies significantly; some countries, which may still be regarded as developing, have reached a much more advanced level of development than others. Some are in fact becoming poorer: populations are increasing rapidly, but economic growth is slow or even negative, so that purchasing power is diminishing, and achievable standards, including those of transport services, are falling as a result.

There are a number of important differences between the operation of public transport in developing and developed countries. Income levels are lower in developing countries, resulting in low car ownership and hence a strong demand for public transport, and a supply of relatively cheap labour; low incomes also lead to problems of affordability of fares. There is often a lack of skills, at various levels: skilled drivers and mechanics, as well as skilled managers, may be scarce. In the poorer countries shortage of funds is a major problem, while political instability, poor enforcement of laws and regulations, and corruption may have a significant effect on the management of a transport system. Road conditions tend to be difficult, with poor road surfaces on inter-city and rural routes, and severe traffic congestion in urban areas, while climate is often more of a problem in developing than in developed countries. Standards of safety, comfort, punctuality, reliability and air and noise pollution, and users' expectations, are often far lower than those in developed countries; for example, people in some countries do not expect buses to run to schedule, and are prepared to endure long waiting times, and to travel in conditions which would be unacceptable elsewhere.

While the developing countries have many characteristics in common with one another, there are also very significant differences between them, particularly in terms of culture, geography, expertise and stage of development. No two countries or cities are alike, and each has different problems. Many of the problems discussed are not encountered in every country, while others may vary considerably in severity between one country and another. Similarly, although in broad terms the potential solutions are often similar, and some measures are applicable in most situations, the differences must be recognised and taken into account. What may be appropriate in one case may not be workable or acceptable in another, and solutions need to be tailored so that they can work within the prevailing environment. In addition, while the highest possible standards should be aimed for, it is important to be realistic with regard to what can and cannot be achieved. The objective of this book is therefore not to prescribe universal or "ideal" solutions to the problems, but to show how the various options for future development may be identified, and how to determine which are most appropriate in the circumstances.

Several of the countries mentioned in this book may be regarded as developed in many respects, although their transport problems may be similar to those in much less developed countries. In any case, much of the content of the book will apply equally to developed countries, and examples from developed countries have been included where these are considered to be useful or relevant. Since the pace of development in some countries is rapid, many of the specific examples given in this book may be out of date; this does not, however, detract from their relevance or validity.

THE AUTHOR

Richard Iles began his career in transport in the United Kingdom in 1964, but has spent most of his working life in developing countries. He was born in England in 1945, and was interested in transport from an early age, choosing to study economics at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne with a view to eventually working in the transport industry. At that time there were few degree courses with a significant transport content, and his course was no exception, but as an undergraduate he submitted a dissertation on the economic problems of rural transport. After receiving an Honours Degree he spent a further two years at Newcastle as a postgraduate carrying out research into economic aspects of the co-ordination of transport. As a student he worked during the vacations for Scottish Omnibuses Ltd. in Edinburgh, as a bus driver and in various administrative capacities; on leaving university he joined another major Scottish bus company, the Central S.M.T. Company, as a junior manager.

After a few years with Central he decided to broaden his transport experience and moved into the logistics field as a distribution depot manager for a food company. This was followed by a spell as manager of a London coach company, operating long distance and tourist services. He then entered the consultancy profession, in which he was involved in a variety of projects in passenger and freight transport and distribution, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. Finding overseas work interesting and stimulating, in 1977 he joined United Transport Overseas, which later became United Transport International (UTI), a holding company with subsidiaries in road passenger and freight transport in many parts of the world.

With UTI he worked first as a consultant on assignments in several countries, and later in the management of some of its subsidiaries in Africa. In Kenya, he was involved in the management of urban and long-distance bus services, a large tourist operation and a passenger and vehicle ferry service. For six years he was Managing Director of United Transport Malawi Ltd, which was jointly owned by the Malawi Government and UTI, and operated passenger transport services throughout Malawi and into neighbouring countries, as well as freight and car hire operations. Following UTI's decision to withdraw from transport operation in developing countries, he started a small consultancy business, IBIS Transport Management Services, in 1990, but has been operating as an independent transport consultant since 1996. In this capacity he has worked in more than twenty different countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Caribbean. As well as advising on passenger transport, he has worked on other road transport projects including several involving the management of government vehicle fleets in various African countries.