

Private Bus Counts Nosedives in Kerala

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Abstract

Most of Public Transport undertakings in India are often cash-strapped in many cases, the operating cost per bus kilometre exceeds revenues and bus fares are often kept low irrespective of the cost of providing service. Unskilled labour too create much problems in this sector. This study is to investigate the problems faced by the Private bus industry in the state of Kerala. Private Bus were seen as a symbol of status in state of Kerala and the roads of Kerala has been filled with a large number of private buses. This industry not only created and developed owners but also created large number of job opportunities directly and indirectly. The scenario changed a lot the number of private buses in Kerala has plummeted from 34,000 in 2011 to the present 7,300, and the government is doing little to break the fall. Subsidies in diesel, reduction of taxes and insurance should be made to boost the sector. Private bus industry is a major contributor of revenue to the government directly and indirectly. This industry also provides employment opportunities to many people. This industry is going through its crisis. Many owners had surrendered their permit as this sector cannot be operated.

Keywords: Public Transportation, Private Bus, Government, Operation Cost

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I. Introduction

Public transportation services are essential for every society. Countries needs an operative public transport services for transit users, apparent or future, who need and value different modes of public transport. Public transportation is a transportation by conveyance that provides continuing general or special transportation to public. Urban Cities play a vigorous role in upholding economic progress and richness. The development of cities largely depends upon their physical, social, and institutional infrastructure. In this framework, the importance of public transportation is paramount. There must be a general recognition that without public transport, cities would be even less viable. There is a need to embolden public transport instead of personal vehicles. This requires both an increase in quantity and quality of public transport and effective use of demand as well as supply-side management measures. The errands of public transportation are to encounter the accumulative demands of all kinds of passengers and to earn equivalent social and economic profits in an approved period of time by providing high quality of service based on limited public traffic vehicles.

Second half of the last century witnessed the gigantic growth of urban population. This has resulted in a steady increase in number of cities with increased population. This level of urbanization has fetched in its wake its own problems, especially with regard to its impact on the infrastructure facilities. The urban transportation systems have come under heavy strain affecting the quality of life of urban occupants. Lack of mass transportation facilities has resulted in heavy shift of commuter patronage to private and intermediate transport consequently, a huge increase in the number of intermediate and private vehicle ownership. Encouraging optimal use of existing and proposed public transport will be an effective

Objective

To understand the challenges faced bus the private bus sector industry in the state of Kerala.

II. Methodology

The study is taken as a descriptive analysis. The study concentrates on bringing out the real challenges faced by the private bus industry in the state of Kerala. This study is based on secondary data collected from both published and unpublished sources.

Bus Transportation

Among all the public transportation systems, buses are the most prevalent and most universally used ones because of their inherent tractability, adaptability to changing employment and residential patterns, and low capital costs. Except higher income group people, all others prefer bus transportation for the mode of transport. Therefore, many researchers focused on improving bus transportation systems by reducing the cost of operations, minimizing waiting times, improving the quality of service, etc.

The design of bus transit system may be considered as an organized decision process consisting of four stages: network design, frequency setting and timetable development, bus scheduling and driver scheduling. However, the two most fundamental elements, namely the design of routes and setting of frequencies, critically determine the system performance from both the operator and user point of view. Significant savings in resources can be made by reorganization of bus routes and frequency to suit the actual travel demand.

Benefits of Public Transportation

The public transportation can help a community expand business opportunities, reduce sprawl, and create a sense of community through transit oriented development. For these reasons, areas with good public transit systems have economically flourishing communities and offer location advantages to businesses and individuals choosing to work or live in them. Public transportation also helps to reduce road congestion, travel times, air pollution, energy, and oil consumption, all of which benefit both riders and non-riders alike. Some of the important benefits of incorporating public transportation are:

1. Stimulates economic development.
2. Increase of jobs in the related areas like engineering, manufacturing, construction, retailing and other services.
3. Decreases traffic congestion: Traffic is raised due to more number of private vehicles. It can be reduced if the passengers prefer traveling in public transportation vehicles.
4. Improves air quality and reduces energy consumption: Public transportation helps promote cleaner air by reducing use of private vehicles and adhere to pollution norms.
5. Ensures safety: Public transportation continues to be one of the safest modes of travel in India. Transit vehicle operators are highly trained to anticipate and avoid problems. Most transit vehicles are larger, newer and maintained properly.

Present Scenario of Private Bus Industry in Kerala

Private Bus were seen as a symbol of status in state of Kerala and the roads of Kerala has been filled with a large number of private buses. This industry not only created and developed owners but also created large number of job opportunities directly and indirectly. The scenario changed a lot the number of private buses in Kerala has plummeted from 34,000 in 2011 to the present 7,300, and the government is doing little to break the fall. Similarly operating cost has increased highly over a decade. Even worse, bus operators are introducing mini buses and those with lesser passenger capacity to reduce operational expenses, further defeating the cause of public transport. This is apart from abrupt trip cancellation to suit the convenience of owners and crew members.

Bus operators cite the steep increase in operational cost and paucity of good drivers, rigid and archaic government policies are the reason for buses surrendering their permits. The on-road price of a new bus rose from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 23 lakh during the past decade. "The annual road tax works out to between Rs 1.20 lakh and Rs 1.50 lakh, depending on the number of seats. Similarly, insurance premium, spare parts rate and diesel price also paved the way for the doldrums in this sector. The State government is doing nothing, despite demand from various quarters to augment public transport in order to lessen congestion, pollution and accidents."

The number of bus passengers declined more than half within the last 10 years in the state. The report of the Motor Vehicle Department noted that private and KSRTC buses have lost at least 68 lakh passengers a day. As many as 1.32 crore people depend on bus services to travel in the year 2013. However, this figure dropped to 64 lakh passengers now. At least 550 passengers will be currently affected if a bus halts its service, informed MVD. According to the data released by MVD, not less than 20 people move on two wheelers, when a bus service ceases on a route. Around 32,000 workers in private bus sector has lost their jobs amid pandemic crisis. Accordingly 16,000 workers lost their jobs during the pandemic period when the services were stopped. While another 16,000 lost their job due to suspension of services and reduction in staff. Hit by Covid-19 pandemic. Buses which had four workers slashed the numbers to two and three. During the period of Covid 19, many passengers stopped travelling in buses to avoid contact. Later, many of them bought new vehicles and stopped using buses permanently.

Table1: Showing Decline in Number of passengers and Buses from 2013 to 2023

Particulars	2013	2023
Number of private buses	19000	7300
Number of KSRTC buses	5500	4200
Number of private bus passengers	1.04 crore	40lakh
Number of KSRTC bus passengers	28 lakh	24 lakh

Figure1: Number of Buses

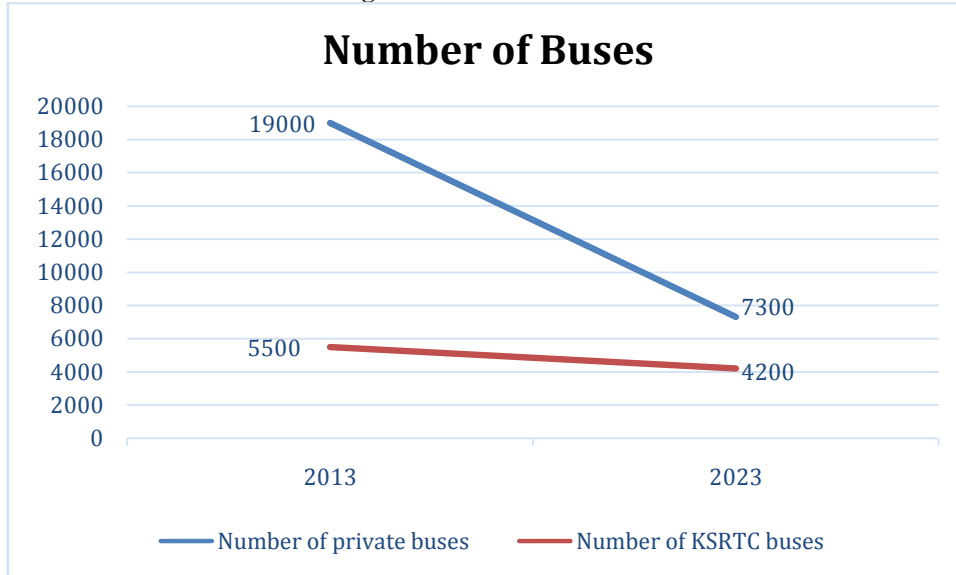
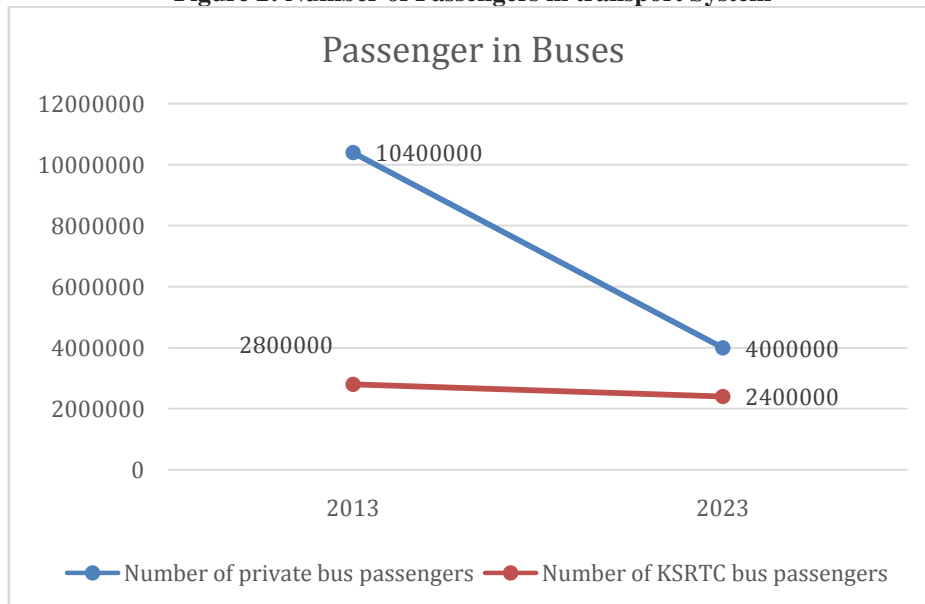


Figure 2: Number of Passengers in transport System



III. Findings

- State private bus industry is in crisis over the past few years
- Increase in operational cost is the major reason for the crisis in the said industry
- Archaic policies of the state government prevent the growth of the industry
- Lack of skilled drivers and their unethical job practices are becoming a headache for the owners and passengers
- Concession rates of the students had not increased in accordance with the present situation
- KSRTC's intervention in RTA meetings prevents private buses in entering in new route permits

- Hike in bus charge
- Availability of buses at the required time. This urged them to buy personal vehicles.
- Direct bus services will not be available in certain routes. Hence, several passengers resorted to buy vehicles to make travel easy and save time.

IV. Suggestions

- Subsidies in diesel, reduction of taxes and insurance should be made to boost the sector
- Government should frame policies that will benefit for the betterment of the sector
- Training centres should be created either by the government or by Private bus owners' associations and training should be given to the staffs both driver and conductor
- Concession rates of the students should be increased
- Unwanted and unethical intervention from the part of KSRTC should be avoided

V. Conclusion

Private bus industry is a major contributor of revenue to the government directly and indirectly. This industry also provides employment opportunities to many people. This industry is going through its crisis. Many owners had surrendered their permit as this sector cannot be operated. Government, staff and some owners are the reason for the pathetic condition of this sector. Nosedives of this sector not only reduces revenue to government but also creates many employment problems in the state as majority of the citizens are engaged in transportation and its allied activities. So strategic decisions should be made by the stakeholders of private bus industry to carry its operations smoothly.

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