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A newly completed bus rapid transit system is transforming lives of people in Peshawar, Pakistan

A bus rapid transit system in Pakistan established with financing by ADB and Agence Française de Développement is improving lives in Peshawar, Pakistan.



The new 27-kilometer Zu Peshawar bus rapid transit system links east to west across the city.

PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN – For Muskan, travelling to university and work has always been difficult. She lives in Hayatabad, a suburb on the western outskirts of Peshawar, the teeming capital city of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in northwest Pakistan.

“I used to travel with [vehicle hire services] and mostly local transport, but this used to take me a lot of time ... and [vehicle hire services] are very, very high in cost,” the 24-year-old said. The roughly 15 kilometer (km) commute to her campus in the city center could often take almost an hour, while a trip to Chamkani at the opposite end of the city could take one and a half to two hours depending on congestion.

 Muskan, 24, appreciates the speed, safety, and convenience of the new system.

Muskan’s experience is typical of the large number of commuters who use public transport to navigate Peshawar’s congested streets to get to work and school every day. But since the inauguration in August 2020 of Zu Peshawar, a bus rapid transit (BRT) system running a fleet of low-emission, electric-hybrid buses with dedicated lanes to cut congestion, things have started to change.

A rapidly growing city with transport challenges

Nestled in the Indus Valley close to the border with Afghanistan, the city of around 2 million people has grown rapidly in recent years, which has put significant pressure on Peshawar’s already creaking transport infrastructure.

Public transport options for many in the city, including the estimated 40% who live under the poverty line, are limited to either pickup trucks, buses from the 1980s, expensive taxis, or walking.

Many of these vehicles don’t have permits to operate but compete aggressively for passengers, risking public safety and

exacerbating congestion. Vehicles are often overcrowded while bus stops are often badly lit, rudimentary, and lack schedule and itinerary information.

Commuting can be especially intimidating for women.

✘ Zu Peshawar runs a fleet of low-emission, electric-hybrid buses.

“In a place like Peshawar, in local transport, there is a lot of harassment and at times, you can’t trust anyone,” said Muskan. “I cannot say that [vehicle hire services] are very, very safe either for a girl to travel alone.”

Moreover, there is no step-free access at stations, rendering virtually all public transport unsuitable for the elderly, people with less mobility and disabled people.

“I used to go to my office by taxi but it was very hard to find one—usually most of the taxi drivers did not stop because it is very difficult to accommodate a wheelchair,” said Shabuddin, 32, who has used a wheelchair since birth. “And in local transport, it was simply impossible.”

New, well-lit stations and universal accessibility

The new Zu Peshawar system features 30 stations along a 27-kilometer corridor that links east to west across the city. Around 150 bus stops are planned across a network of 83 km of feeder routes interconnecting the city’s most densely populated neighborhoods.

“Since using BRT, it is very reliable, it is very secure, and it is pretty convenient,” said Muskan, standing in a modern, bright bus station constructed mostly of steel and glass. “It has separate waiting area, it has separate washrooms, it has separate female seats on the buses which is not normal in Peshawar. It makes me feel pretty well as a girl.”

✘ All buses feature dedicated seating for women and children.

In addition to well-lit stations equipped with priority ticketing counters and other dedicated facilities for women, there are priority ticketing counters for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The buses offer priority seating arrangements for women and disabled people while the entire line has 100% step-free, universal accessibility for people with disabilities.

✘ Shabuddin, 32: “The most important thing is this is totally universally accessible so now I can easily and independently travel.”

“The most important thing is this is totally universally accessible,” said Shabuddin. “Now I can easily and independently travel. Before, I needed two or three people to help me. But now, I can travel to my office easily by myself by using BRT services.”

Both buses and stations offer free wi-fi while stations also offer mobile charging points. Zu Peshawar is significantly less expensive than other forms of public transport.

“With BRT, it is very economical,” said Shabuddin. “I used to take a taxi to travel, paying more than 10 times [the cost of public transport]. You can imagine how expensive that was.”

Shabuddin and Muskan are among the more than 8 million people who have used the system since it opened. In the first three months, it has reached ridership of 145,000 trips per day. And once the remaining 40% of the bus fleet is operational, more than 300,000 people are expected to benefit from the system every day.


Zu Peshawar has already reduced traffic congestion in Peshawar. While traffic conditions on key arterial roads had declined precipitously in recent years, top speed along the new system’s main routes has increased to 36 km per hour on the express service. A two-hour, cross-town journey from Karkhano Market to Chamkani, can now be done in 45 minutes using the express service—saving more than 60% of travel time.

More than a transport system

There has also been complete urban regeneration along the route including façade-to-façade renewal, new energy efficient streetlights, quality footpaths, drainage systems and dedicated cycle lanes.

For Fayaz Khan, CEO of TransPeshawar, the company responsible for operating and maintaining Zu Peshawar, it is more than a transportation system. “This is also helping to promote non-motorized traffic in the city,” he said.

“We are providing sidewalks, bike lanes, and a unique bicycle sharing system for University of Peshawar and the Hayat Abad area. It’s creating a healthy lifestyle, it’s a modern transportation system which attracts businesses and other visitors to our city—so overall it has a very good impact,” added Mr. Khan.

 Zu Peshawar is a multi-modal corridor offering cycle paths and bicycle rental to promote a healthy lifestyle and last mile connectivity.

The system, which was jointly financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Agence Française de Développement, and government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is also expected to lead to a 31,000-ton-equivalent reduction in carbon footprint per year.

“The project is transforming the face of the city through sustainable urban mobility and helping to make Peshawar more livable for its citizens,” said Philippe Steinmetz, AFD Country Director for Pakistan.

“Peshawar BRT is our flagship project in addressing urban mobility challenges in Pakistan,” said Xiaohong Yang, ADB Country Director for Pakistan.

“Zu Peshawar is a state-of-the-art transport system that is significantly faster, safer, cleaner, and more environmentally friendly than all other forms of public transport in the city,” adds Ms. Yang. “It is a game-changer for Peshawar and will improve the quality of life for people in the city—in fact, it already has.”

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