A Dedicated Urban Transport Cadre

Mains: *GS I – Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

Why in News?

Recently, an issue has been raised in Loksabha regarding urban mobility issues and a proposal was made for the creation of a specialised All India Service Cadre for the urban transport sector.

What is the status urban transport governance India?

- **Jurisdiction** – It does not find explicit mention in any of the three constitutional lists (Union, State, and Concurrent).
- While urban planning is a state subject, and highways and railways fall under the Union, urban transport cuts across both.
- **Nodal ministry** – Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Mo HUA). In 1986, the subject of urban transport was formally transferred to the Ministry of Urban Development.
- **Programmes** – Training and capacity building programmes to train town planners and professionals through projects like the Sustainable Urban Transport Project (GEF-SUTP).
- **Dedicated officers** – The Ministry appointed an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) for Mass Rapid Transit Systems (MRTS) to oversee upcoming metro rail projects.
- These were typically senior railway engineers with deep project execution experience on metro systems.
- This evolved into the OSD for Urban Transport a position occupied by several bureaucrats who played a vital role in piloting policies.
    - National Urban Transport Policy (2006), Metro Policy (2017), and managing centrally funded urban transport projects in several cities.

What are the Needs for integrated planning and management of urban transport?

- **Committee's recommendation** – *The High-Level Committee on Urban Planning Report (2023)*, recommended the creation of an All India Urban and Regional Planning Service.
- **Governance challenges** – Indian cities today face governance issues in the urban transport sector.
- **Separated responsibilities** – Duties are divided across municipal corporations, metro

rail corporations, State Transport Undertakings (STUs), Regional Transport Offices (RTOs), and other autonomous agencies.
    - They works with its own logic, data, and priorities, often without a shared vision.
- **Detached workforce** – Professionals trained in urban transport engineering, planning, or policy backgrounds are dispersed across consultancies, academia, civil society organisations, and think tanks.
- **Lack of distinct officers** – While municipal commissioners currently fulfil many of these responsibilities in cities, they have limited tenures and are usually generalist than specialists.
- **Absence of a unified administrative structure** – Cities lack a dedicated corps of officers for long-term strategies, facilitate coordination among stakeholders, and lend continuity to policy frameworks.
- Many states have not setup their own *unified metropolitan transport authorities.*

What is Unified Metropolitan Transport Authorities (UMTAs)?

- **UMTA –** It is a nodal agency that *brings together all the agencies* working in the area of urban transport in Chennai to ensure seamless delivery of mobility.
- **Background** – It was recommended by the *National Urban Transport Policy (2006)*, the *12th Five-Year Plan's Working Group* on Urban Transport and the Metro Rail Policy (2017).
- **Objective** – To act as nodal agencies for coordinated transport governance.
- **Established in** – Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Assam.
- **Ongoing proposal** – The Delhi government is planning to set up a UMTA to ensure seamless integration and efficient urban mobility.
    - The transport department is working on an Urban Transport Policy under which a unified body and a task force would be set up to coordinate with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), and Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), and other transportation-managing authorities.
- **Worldwide examples** – Cities such as London, Vancouver, Singapore, and Paris have lead institutions equipped with professionals to handle the complexities of urban transport.
    - ***For example**, Transport for London (TfL) is responsible for the management and coordination of urban transport in the city.*
- **Issues –** There are numerous issues faced by UMTA
    - Legal ambiguities
    - Lack of inter-agency coordinating mechanisms
    - Jurisdiction of UMTA
    - Institutional turf protection.

How urban transport cadre could help?

- **Universal practices** – It could draw techniques from other nations and tailor it to address the complexities of Indian cities.
- **Indian administrative model** - It would comprise professionals trained in transport policy, planning, finance, and infrastructure management.
- This lies *Similar in spirit to the Indian Forest Service or the Indian Statistical Service.*

- **Expertise** – Officers from this cadre could provide proficiency on policy, planning, regulation and operation of urban transport at the city or metropolitan levels.
- **Coordination** – They could support city governments, help establish and manage UMTAs, and foster coordination among various agencies.
- **Availability of training** – Administrative training and support could be sought from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).
- **Collaboration** – In addition to technical competencies, focus on building collaborations with local leaders and elected representatives.

What are the Challenges in setting up a dedicated cadre?

- **Existing concerns** – The administrative system already faces challenges that often obstruct good governance.
- Adding a new cadre without addressing existing administrative and capacity constraints could add another layer of difficulty.
- **Complexities of issues** – Moreover, urban transport is not merely an engineering problem *it is a deeply social, political, and environmental one.*
- **Depends on deeper reforms** – The success of such a cadre would depend a lot on enabling the 74th Constitutional Amendment.
- It should empower urban local authorities to set up bodies like UMTAs.
- **Not a magical solution** – All India Urban Transport Service is not a single and simple solution to address urban transport problems in Indian cities.
- It could *only be seen as a first step towards addressing the issues* of capacity and professional expertise in urban transport planning at city or metropolitan level.

What lies ahead?

- India could develop a professional, permanent institutional presence in cities *to address complex and evolving urban challenges* with the necessary expertise and stability.
- Government could *make institutional reform* that need to be responsive to local context, adaptability, and citizen participation.

Reference

The Indian Express| Special Cadre for Urban Transport in India

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