

## A Dedicated Urban Transport Cadre

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

### Why in News?

Recently, an issue has been raised in Lok Sabha 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 work 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 set up 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](#)