Public Transport - Tamil Nadu Case

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- After nearly seven years, bus fares were recently hiked steeply in Tamil Nadu.
\n
- At this juncture, an analysis if our public transport policies are consistent with good economics and the concept of green mobility is necessary.
\n

\n\n

How significant is Public Bus Network in Tamil Nadu?

\n\n

\n
- As one of the most urbanised States, Tamil Nadu provides reliable access to its remotest towns by government-run buses.
\n
- Significantly, out of the 1.5 lakh state owned buses that ply for public transport all over India, Tamil Nadu alone operates a network of around 22,500 buses.
\n
- There are concerns about a lack lustre safety record.
\n
- However, the sheer number of busses talks for its significance, especially in the State’s economy.
\n
- It is also a major employer with more than 1.5 lakh employees.
\n

\n\n

What are the concerns?

\n\n

\n
- Lack of expansion, modernisation and acquisition of new technologies to

adapt to a changing market has plagued the system.
\n
- More strikingly, Tamil Nadu government has no organised feeder service for many local train stations, which affects both bus and train revenues.
\n
- Additionally, erratic managerial practices and the massive political interference in the affairs of the bus corporations are major concerns.
\n
- Notably, rest of India’s bus system also has been falling apart for the same reasons although their extent of coverage has been far lower in comparision.

\n

\n\n

What are the challenges?

\n\n

\n
- **Commuter Preference** - Personal cars and two-wheelers have kept pace with global trends, adding features of comfort and convenience.
\n
- This has ushered in a commuter migration away from buses towards more comfortable personal modes.
\n
- This notably has come with pressures to address a plethora of traffic related woes, necessitating investment in better roads and flyovers.
\n
- The result of the above is huge losses in State transport corporations.
\n

\n\n

\n
- The government primarily finance it through fare hikes.
\n

\n\n

\n
- **Financial** - The difficulty in creating modern bus networks is often attributed to weak revenue streams from low fares.
\n

\n\n

\n
- If finances are the only trouble, the “carbon emissions mitigation route”

could have been used to raise funds, especially since the Paris climate accord.
\n
- Also, to enhance finances, National Urban Transport Policy was formulated in 2006, which talks about differential pricing for buses.
\n
- This should have ideally led to a rapid expansion of differentiated bus systems, by opening up services like WiFi and air-conditioning in select buses.
\n
- But rather than mere finances, traditional state transport systems seem to find differentiated fleets and other innovative business practices too challenging.
\n

\n\n

What is desired?

\n\n

\n
- **Technology** - App-based aggregator taxi companies have usurped considerable ground in the transport sector in India.
\n
- Bus networks should start adopting options like GPS tagging for enabling commuter tracking and other smart ticketing facilities.
\n

\n\n

\n
- GPS tagging will enable commuters to track buses, thereby reducing waiting time, which will consequently enhance bus reliability and patronage.
\n
- A validated real-time passenger information (RTPI) technology for public transport has already been developed.
\n
- Incorporating such initiatives, for ushering in operable models for schemes like Smart Card Ticketing, are needed.
\n
- **Augmentation -** A severe supply shortage in buses calls for further augmentation.
\n
- It is forecasted that an additional 4.6 lakh buses were needed to achieve 50% of all urban transport trips by public modes by 2031.
\n

- This is crucial to meet the national commitments on climate change and controlling air pollution.
  \n
- **Policy Changes -** A law mandating the expansion of bus fleets in major cities by using tax funds and a congestion charge on cars could help.
  \n
- Also, schemes for regulated small-bus/share-auto type entreprices to develop should be formulated to enhance shared commuting.
  \n

\n\n

  \n
- In all, public transport should be viewed beyond profitability, as a public good with an optimum operating tariff.
  \n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n