

New buses good but where are bus stops?

MINISCULE Survey shows only 19% commuters in Jaipur use public transport

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JAIPUR: The new low-floor buses which add a touch of modernity to Jaipur's traditional traffic, seem to be getting a good initial response from commuters, despite hitches like lack of bus-stops and adequate fleet of buses.

The buses have provided a much-needed modern, convenient and affordable public transport alternative to people who used to the ramshackle privately-run mini-buses and State Roadways Transport Corporation buses.

"The mini buses were a terror on the road," The drivers used to drive rashly and they used to stuff people like sardines. The new buses are better and faster," said Kavita Mathur, a bank executive who commutes from Mansarovar to Church Road.

"Climbing and getting off the old roadways buses were a struggle. But the new buses are

comfortable and convenient. The coloured bands on each bus make it easy to identify routes," said 70-year-old Yassin Khan, a retired businessman.

The buses are part of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) being funded under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). Under this project, dedicated bus corridors in the North-South and East-West directions of Jaipur city are in the process of development up to a length of 47 kms.

"A survey by the government before the buses were introduced showed that only 19 per cent people were using public transport," said GS Sandhu, principal secretary, state government's Urban Development and Housing Ministry.

"The buses were introduced on June 10 and since then the ridership has increased from 55,000 to 2,00,000," says Malini Agarwal, Managing Director, Jaipur City Transport Services Limited (JCTSL), a Special

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Purpose Vehicle formed as a joint venture of JDA and JMC and entrusted with the bus operations.

"Our revenue has gone up from ₹5 lakh to ₹11 lakh, so the bus service has picked up," she says. The bus fares are a flat ₹7 for all routes.

"The overall plan is to introduce 400 buses which have cost ₹11 crore. In the first phase, 210 buses have been put on the roads," says Agarwal, adding that 100 buses will soon be introduced on suburban routes. Also in the pipeline are eight low-floor air-conditioned buses for

the city's residents and 12 for tourists.

But the buses, while they have got passengers over long distances, have not been able to wean away the car users.

"Distances are not too much in Jaipur so people still rely on their own modes of transport, like cars and two-wheelers. It will take some time before people shift to the buses," says Pramod Bhasin of the NGO, Muskaan, that works for road safety.

Imran Khan, a businessman, says he finds it convenient to travel by car. "The buses are good for office-bound people who don't have to travel during the day. Also the buses are too big for Jaipur's narrow lanes and cause traffic jams."

Another issue is bus stops. There are no modular bus stops like in other cities. The JCTSL has put up yellow signages to demarcate the bus stops but they are little more than open air stands.

Agarwal says there are some

500 sites identified for modular bus stops and now work will begin on their design. "The bus stops here are only used for ads. People rarely use them."

"This is in part because the mini buses are totally undisciplined and stop anywhere the commuter wants," says Bhasin.

Mohammed Yusuf Khan, who used the bus for a month from the walled city to C-Scheme where he works in a private office, said that though the buses claim an 11-minute frequency, very often passengers have to wait a long time. "Sometimes I had to wait 15-20 minutes and sometimes three buses would arrive together. The buses stop anywhere to pick up passengers," said Khan.

Prem Saraswat who travels from Sanganer to C-Scheme, said, "Passengers have to board from the front and get off from the back and often the drivers start moving before people have got off."

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