

Last week, I argued that transit is not only the provision of increased numbers of buses; or the introduction of increasing numbers and frequency of ferries to link waterfront centres; or the introduction of grandest form of mass transit, namely the Rapid Rail. The existing transit modes are (1) publicly-owned and publicly-operated: the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC); (2) privately-owned and publicly-operated: maxi-taxis, taxis, and PH (illegal). I showed that the second category of existing transit modes, also called paratransit, includes private school vans, rented cars, and dial-a-ride taxis (such as, airport taxis, and hotel taxis), and that the Government-owned PTSC is but one component of the existing national transit system.

I gave the strengths and weaknesses of paratransit systems, and concluded that paratransit is a collection of independent services, rather than a system that can be readily planned and controlled, but it is critical to seek to integrate and coordinate transit and paratransit.

So transit not only has to compete with auto drivers for passengers and road space, but has to fight among its own operators (PTSC / maxi-taxi / taxi / PH). The development and success of national transit depends on the creation of preferential treatment for overall public transport.

What are the problems of current transit operations in TnT (for those just arriving)? (a) For transit and paratransit users: unreliable operation, no schedules, no passenger information, too long waiting time, delay, congestion, improper location of stops, lack of park-and-ride facilities, too high cost, too far to walk, not accessible to all society, not caring or treating passengers with dignity and respect, not serving a wide range of origins and destinations, not responsive to

changing travel needs and patterns of activity, no assurance of high standards of physical safety, no security from fear of assault, attack or other anti-social behaviour throughout the journey; (b) For paratransit operators: Too high operating cost, poor amenities, no concessions, no priority, no administration; and, (c) For the rest of us: severe traffic delays on the roadways due to the indiscriminate stopping, pulling off, driving on the road shoulders, and slow driving (looking for passengers) by paratransit.

How can public transport usage be an attractive option to the auto driver, when the auto offers direct access to all points, almost door-to-door, while public transport requires unpredictable waiting, payment of several fares, has no coordination between trips on different routes, provides no easily available information or unified and logical fares, and has tremendous friction in transferring among routes and modes (non-seamless intermodal travel)?

All transit should be operated as efficiently as possible, but that the entire transit system should serve passengers, rather than to maximise profit. That is, the primary purpose of transit is to provide integrated, reasonably priced public service aimed at maximisation of ridership, and its secondary purpose is commercial enterprise aimed at increased economic and organisational efficiency.

Currently, the public agency (PTSC) competes with uncontrolled competing privately-owned maxi-taxis and taxis, and these private operators concentrate on the most lucrative routes and during peak periods, while they leave less lucrative services to the PTSC and PH taxis. Also the fares are charged for each service, so that every leg of the journey that requires a transfer to another vehicle demands a new

fare. There is also varying quantity and quality of service by the transit players, including frequency, reliability, comfort, ventilation and air conditioning, vehicle cleanliness, etc. Encouragement of unregulated services results in lower public expenditures for public transport, but also in lowering the quality and image of paratransit.

A national transit authority has long been required to arrange all transit services in an appropriate manner. These services will involve sequencing desired levels of PTSC operations together with the contracting of paratransit services with appropriate regulations. This will include consideration of the following: safety, franchise, and contractual arrangements.

Safety regulation involves the following: vehicle design and performance, including structural strength, braking capabilities, fire resistance, etc; frequency and scope of vehicle maintenance; operational practices, such as driver hours and duties, and vehicle control.

Franchise is the right and obligation given to an operator to provide service on a given route. It ranges from free market and minimal regulation, with potential cut-throat competition and low service qualities to controlled competition with advanced regulations requiring adequate funding and competent management. According to Prof. Vukan Vuchic, the combination of one regulated operator (usually public owned) competing with unregulated ones (privately owned) usually results in provision of two types of services with different qualities or classes and low reliability and unstable conditions for all operators.

Contracting of paratransit services may be handled through Public-Private Partnerships. Service quality and contract cost should be the main criteria in selecting

operators. The contracts would be given out for certain duration, usually three to five years in developed countries, with reviews of performance and renewal subject to satisfaction of the contract with respect to quality of services offered and economic efficiency, with a cancellation clause included. The operator is obliged to perform service and in the case of discontinuance must give a specified notice, usually several months ahead.

The problem in complying with regulations and contracting has become how to provide the necessary functions and desired effects of transit without incurring excessively complex procedures, costs, and delays.

Next week, I'll close this discussion with an example of how contracting for maxi-taxis and taxis could be integrated with PTSC for the provision of a well-organised national transit system.

e-mail: info@ccost.org