Study on Gender Dimension in Dhaka Urban Transport Project

1 Background

1.1 Transport constraints faced by women in the city of Dhaka

The rapid spread of the city of Dhaka and growth in the population\(^1\) over the past decade has led to a massive demand for transport. This demand has not been matched by sufficient investment in transport infrastructure, services and management. As a result, traffic conditions in Dhaka have seriously deteriorated, characterized by daily traffic jams at many points, long delays and high incidence of road accidents. While inadequate transport services adversely impact all residents of the city, women commuters face particular mobility constraints. As Bangladesh’s society is highly segregated, women’s access to social and economic opportunities and their mobility in public places are greatly compromised by the lack of an effective transport system. The social institution of ‘purdah’\(^2\) (seclusion of women from men) defines separate places for men and women. The inability of the existing transport system to address the specific needs of women places additional constraints on their mobility. In addition, men and women have distinct transport needs based on their different roles within the household and society.

Available evidence suggests that women are facing multiple problems with the current transport environment in Dhaka. The fundamental attitude towards women’s mobility is restrictive and constrains their participation in employment, education and society in general. The transport services currently provided by the public and private buses are insecure, unreliable, congested and unsafe. It is difficult for women to compete with men for the limited space on the buses particularly given the cultural background in Bangladesh. Bus operators, with their major focus on maximizing returns are less inclined to accommodate the specific needs of women which are necessary for making their journeys more comfortable and secure.

Between 1981 and 1991, the female labor force participation in Dhaka increased from 4 percent to 14 percent and nearly 18% in 1999. The trend in other Asian cities suggests that female labor force participation is likely to increase in the future, with women competing directly with men. The garment sector in Dhaka city alone employs about 70

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\(^1\) The urban population growth per decade has averaged 6.7% during 1961-1991.

\(^2\) Please note that the seclusion is applied in less severely than in other Muslim countries.
percent of the total female labor force in the city, of which 60% walk to their work place, spending nearly two hours for commuting per day.

The transport problems presently encountered by women require particular attention, not only because women’s labor force participation and productivity are adversely affected, but also because it impairs women’s access to educational opportunities or impacts on the educational performance. Over the past few decades women’s opportunities at every level of education have increased significantly due to policy shifts towards increasing women’s education. Unfortunately, however, many women’s education opportunities have been restricted due to the inadequacies of the existing transport system. For many poor families transportation costs are simply unaffordable, while for the other young commuters the risks of sexual and verbal harassment are simply too high. Subsequently this combination of unsafe, unaffordable and inaccessible transport system has almost certainly put heavy constraints on female commuters.

The multiple roles of women have forced them to undertake tasks that were not their responsibility previously, such as shopping, visiting doctors and paying household bills in addition to the other domestic chores and undertaking of remunerative tasks outside the household. This has in turn increased their demand for transport. In the absence of adequate transport, many women are forced to rely on more expensive, private and para modes of transport or spend more time walking to their destinations.

1.2 Dhaka Urban Transport Project

Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) prepared from 1997 became effective in March 1999 and project completion is expected by the year 2004. During the project preparation, the government and non-government agencies responsible for project preparation made special efforts to address women’s issues to the extent feasible. The project is implemented by Greater Dhaka Transport Planning and Coordination Board (GDTPCB) a newly set up Board with representatives from various governmental and municipal agencies working on urban transport issues.

The overall project objectives are to: (i) improve urban transport infrastructure and services in Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA) in economically and environmentally sustainable manner; and (ii) strengthen institutional and policy framework and address long-term transport planning and coordination issues in Dhaka Metropolitan Area. The transport problems in DMA are multi-faceted and massive and would need a phased program spread over several years. This project would focus on the first phase, to deal with the most pressing constraints, including building up an institutional framework and a policy environment that envisages active private sector and community involvement including involvement of women beneficiaries.

The main project components are: (i) infrastructure development: including rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, particularly roads, traffic management measures and other facilities; (ii) equipment support: providing project agencies responsible for
transport sector management and operations with necessary equipment, computers accessories, and vehicles to strengthen the technical and institutional capacity of these organizations in the long run and for immediate project implementation and supervision support; (iii) institutional strengthening and capacity building: providing institutional support, including strengthening of traffic management, project supervision and management, financial management, environmental management, performance monitoring through training consultants’ services and equipment; and (iv) land acquisition and resettlement: developing a policy framework for addressing unavoidable negative impacts, and a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), detailing the implementation mechanism for assisting affected people with compensation, relocation, livelihood assistance and other support mechanisms in accordance with the Operational Directives of the Bank and in agreement with the Government of Bangladesh.

1.2.1 Various Participatory Mechanisms used during the Preparation and Implementation of DUTP.

The project envisaged a number of participatory mechanisms in order to fully integrate the interests of the male and female commuters. This section specifically indicates the activities carried out during the preparation stage and the implementation stage.

1.2.1.1 Preparation stage

During the project preparation, the urban community in Dhaka metropolitan area was consulted extensively. These included representatives of government agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, NGOs, community groups, vehicle manufacturers and assemblers, research institutes, women’s groups, vehicle owners and drivers/ operators associations. Four participatory mechanisms were used and they include:

- study on ‘Gender Dimension in Transport in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area’;
- workshops;
- survey on “Premium Bus Service”;
- international travel/stay for the transport operators; and
- media.

Study on “Gender Dimensions In Transport in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area” was carried out in 1997 by a women’s NGO called Nari Udyog Kendra (NUK). The main objective of the study was to assess the needs and priorities of both male and female commuters in the city of Dhaka. It involved surveying, focus group discussions and in-depth interviewing with male and female beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders.

Upon completion of the above study, a national workshop was held to discuss the findings of the study, elicit ideas and recommendations from the Government, students, garment workers, NGOs, donors and other concerned users of the transport system. Following the national workshop, numerous workshops were held within the city of Dhaka to continue the open dialogue with the female beneficiaries.
“Premium Bus Service” was one of the pilot initiatives established under the DUTP to facilitate quicker movement of passengers allowing only “sitting” within the bus. A survey was carried out during the project preparation, to create an awareness of the newly introduced service and also to identify the extent to which the service addressed the needs and priorities of various categories of beneficiaries including women.

Under the project, the private and government transport service providers of Dhaka were financed for travel and short stay in India in order to learn from the Indian experience in setting up a gender sensitive transport system and also to establish a communication channel for exchange of information.

Finally, media was effectively used to disseminate the proposed project objectives and the strategy to achieve the project goals. However, it is important to note that though media covered the largest number of beneficiaries, it was only an information dissemination technique and did not provide a two-way dialogue between the project and the beneficiaries like the other participatory mechanisms used during project preparation.

1.2.1.2 Implementation stage

A working committee is constituted under DTUP to monitor the gender and social issues related to the project. The committee includes representatives from the Project Unit, BRTA, private transport service providers, NGOs, women and male community members. The committee would meet quarterly to discuss the status of women in transport and document both the efforts and the process undertaken to respond to the needs of women in urban transport sector of Dhaka.

Separate funding has also been allocated to undertake beneficiary assessment during every stage of the project to ensure that the objectives of the participatory framework are being met satisfactorily.

Finally the current ‘Study on Gender Dimension in Dhaka Urban Transport Project’ was implemented to ensure that the needs and interests of potential women beneficiaries were reflected in the project design.

2. **Description of the Study on Gender Dimension in Dhaka Urban Transport Project**

2.1 **Sample Population of the study**

2.1.1 **Men**

Three broad categories of men were selected as sample population. They are:
- *Employed men* — in private and public/formal sectors, self-employed and private entrepreneurs (vendors, traders, rickshaw - pullers, drivers etc)
- *Unemployed men*;
Students (school, college, university and others)

2.1.2 Women

Four broad categories of women were selected as sample population. They are:
- Housewives;
- Employed women – in private and public/formal sectors, self-employed and private entrepreneurs;
- Unemployed women (doesn’t include house-wives), and;
- Students (school, college, university and others).

The rationale for choosing these groups is that they are the potential beneficiaries who face transport/mobility problems while performing their social and economic responsibilities within the respective communities. These groups also suffer from different implications of being the vulnerable road users in public transport systems in a gender and class segregated society.

2.1.3 Categories of service producers

The four different types of categories include:
- Bus owners in private sector-Premium, Duranta, Maxis and Tempos
- Bus owners in government sector- BRTC
- Bus drivers/conductors of both private and public sector;
- Policy personnel from BRTA, DCC and possibly the members of Ministry of Communication and Roads Transport

2.2 Study Methodology

Methodology involved review of existing studies, literature, series of consultation with relevant stakeholders/affected groups and analysis of the gathered data. The methodology blended both qualitative and quantitative data with focus on feedback from discussions with the women beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders. Five techniques used and the participants of each technique include the following:

a) desk review of relevant documents such as the study on ‘Gender Dimensions In Transport in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area’;

b) house-hold surveys;

c) workshops: national and city-wide workshops;

d) focus group discussions (6-8 participants); and

e) in-depth interviews around key topics with selected stakeholders.
2.2.1 **Surveys (5,426)**

- Men respondents (1,666 employed, 915 students and 168 unemployed) and
- Women respondents (1210 housewives, 429 employed women, 183 unemployed women and 857 students)

2.2.2 **In-depth interviews (124)**

10 male rickshaw pullers, 10 scooter drivers, 10 tempo drivers, 5 BRTC drivers and 5 conductors, 5 PBS drivers and 5 conductors, 8 maxi drivers, 9 Duranta drivers, 4 local bus drivers and 3 conductors, 10 officials from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), 20 from Employees Association, 10 heads of education institutes and 10 employers from garment factories.

2.2.3 **National workshop (1)**

Representatives from Government, local and national women’s NGOs, donor organizations, student groups, garment workers, and other users of transport service.

2.2.4 **City-wide workshops (3)**

employed women, unemployed women (not housewives) female students and housewives

2.2.5 **Focus group discussions (30)**

Women vendors, female production workers, female service workers, female garment workers, self-employed women, unemployed women (not housewives), female students and housewives.

2.3 **Study Findings**

The study findings are based on the outcome of 5,426 household surveys, 124 interviews, one national workshop, 30 focus group discussions and three city-wide workshops.

Media, public consultations, and workshops were the information dissemination techniques used during the project preparation. Among the three techniques, media was noted to rank as the foremost technique of information dissemination that covered the largest number of beneficiaries; however, public consultations and workshops (both national and city-wide) created the maximum impact on the beneficiaries as the process was participatory and involved direct interaction (two-way dialogue) between the project and the beneficiaries. The study ensured that overall needs and interests of potential women beneficiaries have been reflected in the project design. Some of the major findings of the study on specific topics are included below:
2.3.1 Expenditure on transport

The study data indicates a positive relation between household monthly income and expenditure on transport. The entire sample population with an average monthly household income of 8761 Tk incurs an average travel expenditure of 769Tk per month, constituting of 8.8% of the total monthly income. It is noted that as the level of household income rises, the transport expenditure also rises simultaneously. Please refer the following graph for details.

This trend suggests that the travel needs increase as income level rises and that a greater capacity to afford transport facilities leads to greater freedom of mobility, providing enhanced employment opportunities resulting in greater income earning capacity.

Another important observation is that transport expenditure amongst the low income households accounts for only 4 percent of the total monthly income. The capacity of these households to afford transport is significantly lower than their higher income counterparts. Consequently, the members of these households experience restricted mobility leading to less income earning capacity and as a result often have to live in overcrowded, unsanitary slum areas, in order to be within the walking distance to employment, schools and other necessary services.
Amongst all the categories, male businessmen are noted to have the highest commuting expenditure followed by housewives. In general, male workers had a higher average daily commuting cost than their female counterparts. Male businessmen had the highest commuting cost of 31.3Tk and female garment workers had the lowest at 7.5Tk per day. Exceptions were noted to be female domestic servants and service workers who had higher average daily commuting costs than their male counterparts.

In reference to various categories of beneficiary women, specific costs for commuting are: (i) housewives spent the maximum amount averaging about 30Tk per day when compared to 17Tk for the employed counterparts; (ii) female students have a slightly lower daily average commuting cost than their male counterparts, for example: 16.4Tk and 18.7Tk respectively; and (iii) male workers had an average daily commuting cost than their female counterparts, 21Tk per day as compared to 17Tk per day.

While reviewing the cost per kilometer for commuting, it was observed that housewives generally paid more than the other categories of women beneficiaries. Specifically among the sampled categories of women, female workers paid 2.8Tk as commuting costs per kilometer while female students paid 3.2Tk, and housewives paid the highest average of 5.5Tk.
Another interesting observation was that, among the total sampled population, it was noted that in most forms of transport, female commuters paid slightly more per kilometer than their male counterparts. This was most evident in relation to rickshaw travel by employed commuters, with females paying up to 3.0Tk per kilometer as compared to 2.1Tk paid by their male counterparts.

2.3.2 Trips per day

Male and female employees: Out of the total sample of employed female household members, 70.6 percent made one to two trips per day, 21.6 percent of these employed females did not commute daily\(^3\), 7 percent made three to four trips per day, and 0.8 percent commuted more than five times per day.

Among the employed male commuters, 85.0 percent of those currently employed made one to two trips per day and almost 14.3 percent made up to three to four trips per day and the remaining 0.7 percent made more than five trips per day.

\(^3\) These women were self-employed and worked at home.
Unemployed male and female commuters: It is interesting to note that 87.8 percent of unemployed females rarely commuted, however a number of these women indicated that they would be prepared to take up employment (even outside their homes) if appropriate, affordable and secure transport was made available. Furthermore, it was also noted that more than half of the total unemployed male (54.2%) sample population also did not commute regularly.

House-wives: Out of the total sample population of housewives, 47.3 percent commuted and made an average of 1-2 trips per day. The remaining over 50 percent of the sample housewives did not commute as appropriate affordable secure transport was not available.

Students: All students regardless of age or gender commuted to and fro from school/universities. Over seventy percent of the total sample of both the male and female students made one to two trips per day.

2.3.3 Mode of transport

The most common mode of transport has been noted to be walking for low-income female employees followed by male and female students.

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*Footnote:* House-wives are not included in this category
Low-income employees: Walking is the most common mode of transport among the low-income female employees. Amongst the specific occupational categories, 80.0 percent of female production workers, 66.7 percent of service workers and 71.8 percent of garment workers walked to work as compared to 61.5 percent, 49.0 percent and 64.9 percent of their male counterparts.

For these lower income earners, accessing other forms of transport is often unaffordable and they therefore have little alternative but to reside within close proximity to their workplace, often living in inadequate, unsafe and overcrowded conditions. In comparison, women employed in higher paying occupations traveled greater distances by more appropriate modes of transport. These females used rickshaw as their predominant mode of transport (57.1 percent). A significant number of women employed in administrative and management positions also used their own car or government / employers transport for commuting.

Students: The study showed that 36 percent of male and female students used walking as their main mode of transport. However, there were evident disparities among the different categories of students. For instance: over 40 percent of the primary and secondary school students walked to and from school, although only less than 10 percent of their university and college counterparts utilized this mode of transport.

Rickshaws were the most common form of transport used by the university and college students with 45.5 percent of females and 38.7 percent of males using this means of transport. Only small numbers of students used school or college transport services for
commuting, with female students using this mode slightly more (2.4 percent of females and 1.6 percent of males). Public buses were also poorly accessed by male (3.1 percent) and female students (1 percent).

Low utilization of school and college transport facilities reflects the unavailability and inefficiency of such services. Unreliable time–tabling and lack of security especially for female students who often experience harassment, are possible reasons for low utilization of public services.

Housewives: Among the modes of commuting used among the housewives, only 20.2 percent traveled by foot against 53 percent of their working counterparts. For housewives, the dominant mode of transport is rickshaw, with 52.8 percent using this mode, while about 27 percent used scooter/tempo, which are more costly forms of transport against 4 percent of their working counterparts who used this mode. However, it was interesting to note that the different modes of transport were always combined with walking, thus clearly re-emphasizing that walking is the most common mode of commuting.

2.3.4 Primary objective for commuting

Among the entire sampled women beneficiaries, primary objective for commuting is generally to reach place of employment/education except for housewives who have multiple objectives. 88.5 percent of employed females and 84.3 percent of their male counterparts commuted for the primary objective of getting to and from their workplace. Similarly, the majority of female and male students, 91.4 and 79.7 percent respectively, commuted for the primary reason of getting to and from their place of education. However, housewives commuted for a variety of reasons with 42.7 percent of commuting being for the purpose of social visits, 21.0 percent commuting for accompanying children to and from school, 13.2 percent for shopping, 14.0 percent for seeing the doctor and 9.1 percent for the purposes such as paying household bills. These figures reflect the changing role of housewives.

2.3.5 Willingness to pay

Nearly 50 percent of the female beneficiaries earning more than 2,000Tk are willing to pay more for transport than what they are actually paying now, if appropriate, safe and reliable modes of transport were made available to them. However, this is not applicable to female beneficiaries who earn 2,000Tk or less.

Discussions with female beneficiaries who earn less than 2,000Tk indicate that they have to cut down on food expenses if more resources have to be set aside for transport services. But, if their incomes increased, they would then be willing to pay more for transport services. The same was not applicable to male counterparts, who indicated a desire to pay less. The study also clearly indicates that majority of women do not have to ask permission from other family members to pay extra fare for improved transport services.
2.3.6 **Average distance of travel for various categories of women beneficiaries.**

Among the entire sample population, the housewives are noted to travel the longest distances (12.0 kilometer per trip) followed by employed females who travel (6.0 kilometer per trip), and female students travel the lowest average distance of (5.2 kilometers per day).

![Bar chart showing average distance of travel for various categories: Housewives, Employed females, Female students.]

The main reason for the longest distances covered by the housewives is that a large percentage of their trips are to carry out social visits often located far away from their residences. In addition, they often combine tasks such as shopping, accompanying children to and fro from school, visit to the doctor and other household duties including paying household bills.

2.3.7 **Travel time per kilometer**

Amongst all occupations categories, female workers averaged almost twice as much as their male counterparts in relation to minutes of travel per kilometer. Higher income earners from the professional, administrative, management and clerical categories fared the best in terms of time per kilometer, with males averaging 4-5 minutes per kilometer and their female counterparts 6-8 minutes. This reflects the faster and more reliable modes of transport used by male commuters. Workers from the lower occupation
categories such as domestic servants, garment workers and production workers experienced the greater per kilometer time, with males averaging to 5.6-6 minutes per kilometer and females averaging to 10.7-15 minutes. The major reasons indicated are that these categories of sample population often walk to and fro from their place of work.

2.4 Transport Service Providers

2.4.1 Categories of service providers

Five major categories of transport service providers were identified during the study in the city of Dhaka and details on the service delivery of these various transport providers were gathered. Specifically, different types of transport service providers include:

- BRTC Women only service;
- Premium bus service, Maxi;
- Tempo service;
- Duranta service; and
- other private local buses.

2.4.1.1 BRTC (Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation) Women only Buses:

Currently only the BRTC addresses the concerns of women in transport by introducing the special service for women during the peak hour. This service is currently reported as profitable. The existing route of the ‘women only bus service’ covers the major university and the government offices. However, it should be noticed that this service is beneficial only to female university students and employees and not to housewives, school going children or to women working in the informal sector (as traders in the open markets, domestic servants etc) as their interests have not been incorporated while determining the route or the time table of the bus service. Though BRTC does not have any preferred passengers, they still consider male passengers as their major regular passengers as women passengers are fewer in number than their male counterparts. Therefore, they are also reluctant to expand the women only services in other routes. They propose to address women’s concerns in transport by introducing more frequent services, regulations on seating arrangements, providing bus stops at points critical to female commuters and sensitizing the bus drivers and conductors to the needs of women passengers (such as starting the que-system, advance purchase of tickets, providing a little longer stop time for women to enter and leave the bus etc.).

2.4.1.2 Premium Bus Service

The Premium Bus Service (PBS) is the most popular gender friendly private transport service that was introduced under the DUTP project. However, it is identified that, due to its higher fare, only middle/upper class people can avail the services. However, women passengers feel comfortable to use the Premium services as PBS offers advance ticketing system with no standing allowed in the bus. Therefore, many recommendations and suggestion have been made to introduce the similar service manner with low cost
(without air conditioning and may be only standing) services so that low-income group can avail them.

The regular passengers of PBS are middle/upper class male and female university students and workers. They do not have any preferred passengers as they consider all passengers equal and aim to satisfy all travelers using their service.

2.4.1.3 **Maxi Service**

Maxi is newly introduced in the transport pool in the Dhaka City under the DUTP project. All Maxi operate under private entrepreneurship with the financial assistance from different private banks. Maxi service providers have a very different attitude towards women passengers than the private bus service providers. They prefer female passengers to male passengers and often give priority to women passengers over male passengers. Usually during the peak hours, majority of their passengers are female students and only women passengers are allowed to ride on the bus. They have also introduced the advance ticketing system. Maxi services provide special care and attention to allow women passengers than the male passengers. In addition, Maxi has their own counter and stop-stations in both starting and final destination. Furthermore, they are also planning to provide contact services for women employees of specific offices in the near future for drop and pick up on a regular basis.

2.4.1.4 **Tempo Service**

The Tempo is a seating only service and it is one of the oldest service that exist in the Dhaka City. They have no preferred passengers and treat every passenger with equal respect. Opinion received also revels that, in the tempo there is no gender discrimination and that women passengers are treated as passengers rather than women. However, they do not have any specific plans to integrate women into existing transport service.

2.4.1.5 **Duranta Service**

Duranta is currently introduced under the DUTP project. It is an advanced version of Maxi. These services prefer women passengers. As seating only service women can obtain their seats wherever available. However, since this service do not provide facilities for purchasing tickets in advance, women prefer to use the Maxi services over Duranta.

2.4.1.6 **Private/Local bus services**

Though private/local bus services usually reserve five to twelve seats for women passengers, they prefer male passengers over female passengers. Increased profit is the number one priority of these bus services. In order to achieve maximum returns, they allow standing, thereby increasing the number of passengers and un-regulated stoppages with limited time for entry and leaving the buses. Women passengers are allowed only when seats are available. Often women have to force the service staff to allow women’s access into the bus. As a result the low-income women are adversely affected by the
inadequate and hostile attitudes by these service providers as well as the male co-passengers while availing their services.

The study also reveals that the local and privately owned old outdated bus services are larger in size than the improved services introduced under DUTP, thus indicating that capacity per vehicle has not been fully addressed under DUTP. It was commonly agreed by the beneficiaries that the capacity of the buses is a critical factor while attempting to improve the existing transport service.

To conclude, the attitudes of the service staff of the private/local buses are found to be fundamental. They mentioned that, women passengers are slow and less in number. Therefore, they usually do not prefer women passengers and they have no future plan to improve services for women at all. The service staff rather felt that, women should rather use the slow and non-motorized transport like rickshaws and baby taxis etc.

2.4.2 **Overall suggestions of private transport service providers**

The study clearly brought out that all categories of private transport providers had little experience or knowledge on the problems faced by female commuters. They reported that their aim was to provide equal treatment to every commuter who are able to pay the required fare. Due to the slower movements of women, many of these service providers often favored male passengers, fearing that attending to female commuters would reduce the number of customers and thereby reduce income. It also appears that the private transport providers are not willing to partake in any initiatives that would improve the transport system for women, believing that the introduction of a ‘women only transport service’ would prove to be a high revenue risk. The general suggestion was that the government should take on responsibility of improving the transport facilities for women rather than awaiting the private sector to take the lead on their own. Some of them also indicated that the private sector would enhance the transport service for women if the government was prepared to offer subsidies and incentives for various initiatives started under the umbrella of the private sector. These recommendations remain to be addressed under DUTP.

2.5 **Steps taken under the project to address gender concerns in urban transport**

The following section indicates the manner in which recommendations from the beneficiaries are being currently addressed under DUTP and additional actions that need to be taken under DUTP in order to fully justify the participatory approach followed by the project.

2.5.1 *The project is currently ‘improving the pedestrian facilities’ as walking has been identified as the most common form of commuting by the low-income respondents.*

Specifically project is rehabilitating the existing sidewalks, constructing nearly 40 kilometers of new sidewalks along existing major arterial roads and building ten pedestrian foot bridges. In addition, traffic signals at key pedestrian crossings are also
planned to be provided at appropriate locations, where pedestrian footbridges do not exist.

Amongst commuters of the study population, 43.4 percent of females and 39.3 percent of males indicated the financial benefits of walking (with no waiting period), as there is no costs involved in walking. In addition, nearly 18 percent of both male and female commuters considered walking to be beneficial to health. With constant increases in fuel prices reflected in high transport costs, they prefer to continue with their traditional methods of transport – walking (even with head portage) – as they can achieve what they want to with minimum/no expenses. However, one of the major limitations of this recommendation is that it overlooks the social and economic value of time and has failed to analyze the value of time saved through improved transport facilities.

2.5.2 The project has addressed the issue of ‘gender bias’ by initiating gender sensitive training to service providers and by funding their international travel and stay in India to learn from India’s prevailing gender / passenger friendly successful transport system.

Physical and verbal harassment is of particular concern for all female employed commuters, applying to workers from all income groups and occupations, and 79.6 percent of female professional workers proposed the need for secure transport. The verbal and physical harassment and personal vulnerability while commuting results in decreased number of females accessing the public buses. Out of the total sample population, only 4.4 percent of working women are noted to utilize public buses for commuting. Subsequently the female commuters depend on alternate forms of transport that is costly and more restrictive. It was therefore suggested by female commuters to increase security associated with commuting. For male employed commuters security was not such a priority, although their female family members were exposed to heavy harassment. It was interesting to note that only eight percent of the total male sample population requested for increased security in the existing transport system.

2.5.3 DUTP has addressed the issue of ‘road safety’ by: (i) providing training to both public and private service providers on the importance of safety on the roads; (ii) rehabilitating the side walks; (iii) building new fly-overs in Mohakali and Jatrabari.; and (iv) providing necessary items of equipment to Dhaka Metropolitan Police to function effectively.

Bangladesh, whose per capita income of US$280 per year is one of the lowest in the world. Road accidents claim on an average 69 deaths per 10,000 registered motorized vehicles, a rate some 40 times higher than most industrialized countries. Pedestrians suffer a high accident involvement rate and account for over 60% of all road traffic accident fatalities reported in Dhaka. Road safety has thus become a major issue and is now the second highest cause of death after disease. However, the gaps under DUTP has been fully addressed in the ‘Community Safety Project’ that is currently under preparation.
2.5.4  DUTP has addressed the need for fast running buses, by introducing ‘Premium Bus Service’ that are fast, gender friendly, sitting only and with limited stops.

Over 35.8 percent of sampled households came from areas of Comilla, Chandpur, Bramma Baria, Mymensingh, Tangil, Gazipur or Noakhali which are situated 50 to 150 kilometers away from Dhaka city. The respondents repeatedly suggested that a fast cost-effective running bus could improve the existing transport problems of the city. According to the respondents, if there was a direct, secure, affordable and accessible bus service linking these areas to Dhaka, people could directly commute from these locations into the city center, instead of migrating to city centers as is the current trend. This would in turn reduce urbanization and various problems associated with over crowding. However, this initiative under DUTP has its limitation as it serves only the middle/upper income group of population due to its increased fare and the lower-income female commuters are not addressed within this initiative.

2.6  Next Step

To conclude we should recognize that the new initiatives undertaken or proposed so far to address concerns of women in transport remain very marginalized and are yet to be institutionalized. As a result, further efforts and actions based upon the recommendations need to be re-emphasized for policy intervention applicable to both public and private sectors.