

**COSTUMER SERVICE QUALITY OF HIMACHAL ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION AND SATISFACTION
LEVEL OF TRAVELLERS**

***Anupam Sharma**

ABSTRACT

Transportation is an important aspect of modern life which facilitates movement of people and goods from one place to another. In big cities people commute daily in large numbers from their homes to their workplaces. This leads to increased traffic issues and problems of congestion in the cities. Public transport plays an important role in this regard by facilitating mass movement of daily commuters at affordable daily expenses and reducing the excessive usage of private vehicles thereby easing off traffic congestion on the roads. People generally prefer their own vehicles for daily commuting because of the ease and comfort they get by using their own vehicles. They would be motivated to use public transport if they feel the same ease and comfort in using public transport. Policy makers and governments endeavor to lure people to use public transport by providing various facilities to the commuters. This study endeavors to measure the level of satisfaction of users with the existing status of public transport facilities provided by the government.

Keywords: public transport management, traffic management, urban congestion

*Ph.D. Research Scholar, Himachal Pradesh University Business School, Summer Hill, Shimla.

Overview

Transport is the main facilitator of movement of people and goods from one place to another at a faster pace and in short period of time. Transportation is the lifeline of the modern world without which the modern day comforts cannot be availed in large numbers by people. It significantly helps in removing the barrier of distance and time. An efficient transport system is essential for the economic development of a country and the world. It helps in connecting people and nations. Better means of transport enhances the industrial productivity and substantially helps in the delivery and distribution of goods and services to the end consumers. It provides the consumers with choice and access to better quality and prices. Efficient transport is indispensable to the all round development of a nation. There are different modes of transportation available these days which include road transport, rail transport, water transport and air transport. These different means of transportation provides the users with choice of movement. Among all these the road transport is the most commonly used by people since it facilitates door to door delivery of goods and services. It also provides flexibility of changing route and mode at any point of time. Road transport is the only means which is feasible and affordable for short distances and daily commuting. It has access to deep pockets of towns and villages thereby providing personalized services to the general public and business entities.

Significance of Transport in Modern Times

Transportation has been used by human beings since centuries but its significance in the modern times has increased manifolds. The economic development and social development of a country is primarily dependent on the quality and efficiency of its transportation system. It promotes the industrialization and boosts the availability of job opportunities in the economy to a great extent providing means of livelihood to the population and helps in raising the standard of living of people. It facilitates in maintaining big distribution networks and efficient logistic support and leads to better industrial growth. Industrial growth of an economy is highly dependent on the availability of raw materials on time and at the right place along with the facilities of transporting the goods to the end consumers through distribution networks supported by transport systems. Efficient transport system enables the manufacturers to transport their goods at lower costs and to reach a wider consumer base which help in growth of business. Growing businesses in return create more job opportunities. It also facilitates the movement of labor across industrial zones and thereby encouraging more employment avenues resulting into industrial growth. Availability of goods and services at doorsteps and on time improves the quality of life of people and it also contributes in the development of a nation. Advancement in the transport sector has resulted into comfort and convenience of movement. Well functioning transport systems enable economic prosperity and social well being of societies. Improved transport leads to better industrial growth. Industrial growth and transportation have a direct relationship. Both complement each other. In absence of improved modes of transportation it would not have been possible for the manufacturers and producers to manufacture and sell their goods to the far away markets. Transportation facilitates movement of raw material and industrial equipments from the place of supply to the place of production and movement of finished goods to the marketplace. A large number of employment opportunities are created in the process.

Along with the movement of industrial goods, another aspect of transportation is related to the movement of people. With increase in job opportunities and incomes of people, the travelling frequency also increases significantly giving rise to problems related to urban congestion, parking problems and traffic management issues. Increased job opportunities lead to increased daily commuting and increased incomes lead to rise in the private vehicle ownership which directly contributes to road traffic congestion posing a challenge of traffic management and congestion. Usage of public transport by large number of daily commuters could meet out this challenge only if people are convinced to use public transport. With rise in income there is a general tendency among people to use their own vehicles for daily commuting because it gives them comfort and ease of travelling at any time and to whatever place they want to. Public transport generally plies on main roads and moves as per fixed time schedules, adding to the discomfort of commuters. Lack of proper feeder services worsens the case for the usage of public transport by people. Motivating people to use public transport is a challenge for the governments and policy makers.

In Himachal Pradesh the primary mode of transportation is road transport. Due to typical hilly topography of the state, other means of transport are not feasible in the region. Developing road transport infrastructure in the hilly areas is a big challenge and requires large amounts of funds and human effort. Apart from this, too much tampering with the fragile hilly areas may lead to ecological imbalance and manmade disasters. Despite of this it is essential to develop the transport infrastructure in the region to facilitate the movement of people and goods. The state has witnessed a significant improvement on different parameters of growth and development in the recent years which has led to increase in economic activities and movement of people and goods and services. The road connectivity has also increased significantly in the state over the years which, however, may not be sufficient for the increasing population and growing economy. The state is also an internationally known tourist destination which witnesses increased flow of tourists and travelers during peak tourist seasons. This further creates challenges for the transport infrastructure of the state. In addition to national highways, the state has a network of state highways and village roads. Most tourist spots in Himachal are well connected with roads. The government owned Himachal Road Transport Corporation runs a huge network of buses to other states and throughout the state and provides connectivity to travellers to the remotest corners of the state. The state being a major tourist destination requires all weather roads and efficient transportation services. With rapid increase in urbanization and rise in incomes of people, the demand for passenger transport has risen to higher levels in the recent years. The state road transport corporation, although, is providing reasonable service to the people of the state but identifying bottlenecks and providing better services to increasing population and providing connectivity to remote areas is a big challenge. Owing to increased vehicular density, increased travel frequency, congestion and heavy traffic, road transport has become a challenge for the government. The sector needs new technology and improved service quality to cater to the needs of commuters. A sound transport policy and adequate fund allocation is needed to improve the condition of transport services of the state since road transport is the main mode of transportation in the state.

Review of Literature:

Singh (2005) in his research paper titled, "Review of Urban Transportation in India," finds that vehicular pollution, higher number of accidents and congestion are the major problems of urban transportation. The author recommends implementation of various policy measures such as focusing on bus transport, financial support to the local bodies operating urban transport, discouraging use of polluting vehicles, coordination between different modes of transport and encouraging green modes of transportation.

Mitra (2006), in his research study, "City Transport in India: Impending Disaster," laments that easy availability of car and two wheeler loans, cheap parking spaces and growth of middle class has contributed to increase in ownership of private vehicles and resulted into heavy traffic congestion and air pollution. He suggests incentivizing the use of public transport by increasing its comfort, frequency and network and discouraging usage of private transport by increasing parking charges, tolls and registration charges.

Jaiswal and Sharma (2012), in their research paper, "Optimization of Public Transport Demand: A Case Study of Bhopal," have studied the public transport system of Bhopal city and the preference of people towards public transport. The authors emphasize that the number of vehicle population is going to increase in the future based upon estimates of government, leading to more congestion and traffic jams in cities. On the basis of their study the authors have identified reasons for the non-preference of people for public transport. They have found that people do not prefer public transport because of poor accessibility, discomfort, low frequency, more waiting time, more travel time and no feeder service.

Rationale:

Transportation plays a very vital role in the lives of people of the present day world. The frequency of people moving from one place to another has significantly increased in the past few decades. The daily commuting of office goers and business people within the local cities cause a lot of traffic and transportation problems and creates congestion on the roads. Public transportation and mass transit facilities provide solution to these issues. To motivate people to use public transportation becomes tough if they don't feel any comfort and utility in using the public transport. Therefore, a need was felt to evaluate the existing public transportation facilities provided by the government and its utility to the general public. The present study focuses on various attributes which measures the comfort level of commuters while using public transport facilitated by the government.

Objectives of the study:

The following objectives have been drawn for this study on the basis of review of literature.

1. To study the customer service quality of Himachal Road Transport Corporation.
2. To know the satisfaction level of users with the services of Himachal Road Transport Corporation.

Scope and Methodology:

The study has been conducted in Shimla town of Himachal Pradesh keeping in view the increasing traffic in the city and peoples' expectations with the public service transport system. The study was conducted in a limited time frame of two months and the primary data was collected from 50 respondents who are daily commuters and frequently use public transport. Analysis of data has been done with the help of statistical tools like mean and standard deviation and findings and suggestions have been given on the basis of analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation:

The data collected from respondents through primary survey has been analyzed using statistical tools and has been presented in the following tables. The first table below shows the responses of the users on various attributes reflecting the customer service quality of Himachal Road Transport Corporation. The second table shows the responses of users on different attributes depicting the level of satisfaction of the users with the Himachal Road Transport Corporation.

Table No.1

Customer Service Quality of Himachal Road Transport Corporation

Attribute	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	\bar{X}	S.D.
Reasonability of seats available	1	11	16	18	4	2.74	0.89
Leg space in the buses is sufficient	1	12	12	19	6	2.9	0.87
Waiting time is short	1	11	10	17	11	2.48	0.88
Number of buses is sufficient	2	9	10	21	8	2.52	0.83

As stated in the above table 1, regarding reasonability of the availability of seats in the buses of Himachal Road Transport Corporation, the rating of the responses is neutral to agreed that the seats are reasonably available in the buses of the corporation. However, since there is a variation of 0.89, it reveals that the responses vary widely indicating that the responses fall within the rating scale of agreed to disagreed regarding reasonability of the seats available in the buses. Further, regarding rating of the sufficiency of leg space in the buses, it is indicated that the respondents agree with it as the mean score of the Likert Scale is 2.9 though the standard deviation is again 0.87 which analyses that there is a wide disparity in the responses indicating that the responses fall within agreed to neutral. With regard to shortness of waiting time the responses have a mean score of 2.48, indicating that they are fairly satisfied with it and the standard deviation of 0.88 reveals that the responses fall between agreed to disagreed. With respect to sufficiency of the number of buses the responses fall between disagreed to agreed with a variation of 0.83.

Table No. 2

Satisfaction Level of Users with the Services of Himachal Road Transport Corporation

Attribute	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	\bar{X}	S.D.
Behaviour of drivers & conductors is satisfactory	1	7	16	17	9	2.48	0.689
Buses are clean & well maintained	1	6	11	21	11	2.3	0.758
Conductors do transactions fairly	4	23	12	7	4	3.32	0.83
Travelling fare is reasonable	2	18	13	11	6	2.98	0.85

As depicted in the above table 2, regarding satisfaction with the behaviour of drivers & conductors in the buses of Himachal Road Transport Corporation, the rating of the responses is neutral to disagreed indicating that the behaviour of drivers & conductors in the buses of the corporation is average. However, since there is a variation of 0.689, it reveals that the responses vary widely indicating that the responses fall within the rating scale of agreed to disagreed regarding behaviour of drivers & conductors in the buses. Further, regarding rating of cleanliness and maintenance of buses, it is indicated that the respondents agree with it as the mean score of the Likert Scale is 2.3 though the standard deviation is again 0.758 which indicates that there is a wide disparity in the responses suggesting that the responses fall within agreed to neutral. With regard to fairness of transactions done by conductors, responses have a mean score of 3.32, indicating that they are fairly satisfied with it and the standard deviation of 0.83 reveals that the responses fall between agreed to disagreed. With respect to reasonableness of travelling fare the responses fall between disagreed to agreed with a variation of 0.85.

Findings:

The study finds that reasonably seats are available in the buses of the corporation but it cannot be stated that seats are readily available as the responses fall within the range of neutral to agreed and not strongly agreed. Regarding availability of good leg space inside the buses, shortness of waiting time and sufficiency of the number of buses, the respondents are not satisfied. Further, regarding the behaviour of drivers and conductors, cleanliness and maintenance of buses and reasonability of travelling fare the respondents are dissatisfied. The respondents are, however, reasonably satisfied with the fairness of transactions being done by the bus conductors.

Suggestions:

- The frequency of the transport buses should be increased which will facilitate the availability of seats and also reduce the waiting time for the commuters.

- Also, the government should provide training to the staff to deal with their customers and with respect to maintenance and cleanliness of buses.
- The travelling fare should also be subsidized by the government to make it affordable and it will also promote the usage of public transportation by the public.

References:

1. Singh, Sanjay Kumar, (2005). Review of Urban Transportation in India. Journal of Public Transportation. Vol. 8(1), pp. 79-97.
2. Mitra, Siddhartha, (2006). City Transport in India: Impending Disaster. Economic and Political Weekly. Vol. 41(6,) pp. 473-475.
3. Jaiswal, A. and Sharma, A. (2012). Optimization of Public Transport Demand: A Case Study of Bhopal. International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications. Vol. 2(7), pp. 1-15.
4. Dash, D. (2021, January 14). Global Traffic Congestion Ranking Has 3 Indian Cities in Top 10. Retrieved from www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com
5. Viegas, V. (2021, March 12). Why is India's Traffic Still Among The Worst in The World? Retrieved from www.hindustantimes.com