

# Urban Development in an 'Unliveable' City?

Understanding Mobility & Development in Dhaka Through Role Play

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## Background

### Video

Here is a link a short [video](#) that gives you an impression of some of the challenges Rickshaw drivers face

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_NynY8pJgU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_NynY8pJgU)

### Intro to the Scenario

Welcome to our exercise! We (Anke Schwittay & Paul Gilbert) have developed these roles based on composite characters produced from literature (some of which, albeit not all, has been hyperlinked here - along with some relevant news articles in certain cases).

The scenario is related to ongoing developments in Dhaka's transport infrastructure: namely, a JICA-backed mass rapid transport system (elevated light rail), and increasing restrictions on rickshaw pullers plying their trade in certain areas.

In this scenario, a fictionalized 'stakeholder workshop' is being organized by JICA & the World Bank, to get feedback on ongoing transport developments, and try and understand and manage the concerns of all those involved. In your groups, Anke or Paul will play the part of the hired 'facilitator'.

The workshop is being held in Kawran Bazaar, a busy wholesale market surrounded by government and private office blocks (particularly TV and newspaper offices), roughly in the middle of the elite Gulshan area which houses donor agencies, NGOs and diplomats and Shahbag, the lively University district. It is not far from the busiest junction in Dhaka, Farmgate, so all of the issues related to Dhaka's traffic and transport infrastructure will be clearly on display while the participants travel to the meeting room.

Please do familiarize yourselves with the short role descriptors, which are written to give you a flavour of the characters - not necessarily meant to be totally consistent or 1 dimensional - and some potential 'facts' or positions you could deploy in the role play. We will have more info for you in the briefing, but in the meantime please email [p.gilbert@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:p.gilbert@sussex.ac.uk) or [a.schwittay@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:a.schwittay@sussex.ac.uk) with any questions

Image: [Kawran Bazaar](#)



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## JICA Transport Report (2016)

The Project on the Revision and Updating of the Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka

FINAL REPORT / Urban Transport Policy



12268298.pdf

PDF document

[OPENJICAREPORT.JICA.GO.JP](https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp)

## Role 1: Rickshaw Puller

### Rickshaw Puller, M, 17

I live in Korail *basti* by the lake. There is no work for me apart from pulling the rickshaw. I can make maybe 800 taka per day. After the owner takes their 150 taka, and I send to my parents in Dinajpur, I have very little left. Water and electricity in Korail is expensive. They say we are living here illegally so we cannot get official water or electricity. We rely on the political communities

who can supply us. Already, there have been more and more rickshaw bans in different areas of Dhaka. In rich areas like Gulshan, Bonani, there are now only 'official' rickshaws and 1000s of us cannot work. They cannot leave us alone. Years back I heard these rich neighbourhoods would even ban rickshaw pullers from wearing lungi. What can I wear? If more roads are closed to rickshaws, even just for a time, how will we eat? Where can we work? This development is not for us. We will organise as rickshaw-pullers, you have seen we have done it before. The rickshaw owners also will not like it, but really it is us who will go without food.

Image: Rickshaw-pullers demonstrating at the Rampura Bridge in protest at a ban on rickshaw movement on three important streets in the capital. Mahmud Zaman Ovi



## Role 2: Rickshaw User

### Graduate Student, F, 27

I am studying for my MBA at Dhaka University, and working at Standard Chartered Bank. Maybe half of my trips are by rickshaw. It is the same for colleagues at the Bank and also other students. Eventually I hope I will have a private car, but even so, the traffic is so bad in Dhaka that my family with private cars still use rickshaws for any short trips, for taking kids to school, purchasing food, that kind of thing. And especially for young people, for socializing around the University area, we would always use a rickshaw. Definitely, I wouldn't walk for much distance, probably because of the harassment - I don't think many of my friends who work and also have a family would walk. You will see women walking, often in groups, but this is more working class women like garments workers. I wouldn't walk much really. Sure I use rickshaws a lot but I think a metro rail would be so much quicker. Bangladesh is to graduate to being a middle income country soon and I think to be middle income, to be a world class city - we are so far from that! - we need some kind of metro. Or at least fewer rickshaws since they cause most of the jams. You cannot be a world class city with these kind of jams, without proper infrastructure. You know you see in the papers that we are always ranked the most unlivable city in the world? Worse than war zones! A lot of that is the transport, it's not safe, and the jams. Always there is jam! I think maybe its sad for these guys but some of the rickshaws would have to go.

Image: Mahmud Hossain Opu/Dhaka Tribune/Dhaka Tribune



## Role 3: Multilateral Donor

### World Bank Deputy Head of Mission, F, 58

Look, we've been here before to an extent. The World Bank was involved in one of the earlier plans for the Dhaka Urban Transport Project back in 1996 or so. I think I've got the old report here from the Government from around 1999 - yes here it is: "Development of the economy of Bangladesh will depend on it attracting ... global investment. Dhaka, as the nation's gateway ... must be provided with a reliable, secure and comfortable transport system if it is to compete successfully with other major cities." Actually I was here in Bangladesh briefly around that time too. At the initial meetings I think around 200 km of roads were going to be rickshaw free - that hasn't all happened but you can see how it's been seen to be necessary in parts of the capital already. Later in 2005 we made the decision at the Bank to withdraw because of a concern about livelihoods of rickshaw pullers and some other issues. But anyway, things look different now, and as we would say transport is at the heart of fighting poverty and climate change, and driving economic growth. Having these huge traffic jams is appalling for air quality, for climate change. And the truth is, it is impeding peoples' ability to access jobs, access healthcare. It's reducing productivity. I mean, there was that BUET report showing traffic destroys 5 million working hours a year! Imagine what that could mean for a place like Bangladesh whose economic growth has been driven by the availability of cheap labour? For some time we would have been promoting more motorized transport, recognizing the efficiencies, and the buy-in from political elites into building auto-oriented cities. But now we see the importance of mass transit. The roads aren't working in Dhaka, the buses aren't working, none of it. There are gender equality things we have to consider too around mass transit. And look, let's not forget, that these traffic jams are huge problems for exporters, they cause real concerns for investors. We cannot get Bangladesh to middle-income status, we cannot bring development and growth, if the city is at a standstill. We're going to need mass transit, to bring goods to export and to bring labour to the city, and while donor agencies are here for you for that, we will also need to crowd in private financing.



## Role 4: Bilateral Donor

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### JICA Official, M, 36

Yes so our report on the transport plan was clear: this mass transit system is absolutely necessary. Car ownership is increasing, around 3-4% now and growing, incomes are growing so it will rise faster, plus the population is growing - trips are taking longer. We all know this, every time you leave the Gulshan area, you need to budget 2, 3 hours either side of your meeting. It isn't sustainable. Living conditions are worsening, the environmental implications are terrible, there cannot be further economic growth without improving mobility in the city. That's why we need an integrated transport plan on a GIS basis. And it's absolutely clear we must rely on the private sector for financing - Dhaka cannot finance this itself. The public sector must find ways to take the risk in Public-Private Partnership arrangements, to ensure that private sector actors can be brought in to finance and develop mass transit systems. Katahira & Engineers International, who with Oriental Consultants Global, have worked on the report with us, have extensive experience in this kind of area, working on such projects with us. Yes, as you'll know, very sadly engineers working for Katahira, Oriental and JICA employees working on the transport plan were killed in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in 2016. As our country head said at the time, there was really strong resentment that engineers striving for the betterment of Bangladesh were killed in that brutal fashion. JICA extended a loan to Dhaka in 2013 to develop the elevated mass transit system from Uttara to Motijheel, and it's well on its way. Rolling stock has been shipped from Kawasaki Heavy Industries in Kobe this year. I am aware of course that the partial road closure for construction has increased congestion in some areas but this is really a small price of progress. And don't forget this is part of an *integrated* transport plan. We know poorer women especially tend to walk, and we include efforts to make streets safer for them in our plan, and the government is working on this through increased policing and law and order. And you know there are significant multiplier gains already, we have given the contract for steel and concrete construction to a local firm operating at an international standard.



## Role 5: Capital Development Authority (RAJUK)

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### RAJUK Official, M, 42

So RAJUK is the Capital Development Authority, in Bangla this is *Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha*, hence RAJUK. We are responsible for coordinating all of urban development here in Dhaka. For the mass transit system, that is run by Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited which has GOB and also JICA funding. But RAJUK also has an important role in this because it is more broadly a challenge for us to address the violation of traffic rules by rickshaw drivers, to ensure safety, to ensure that roads are free and usable for VIPs and for export vehicles, and also to have an overview of the plan for the city as a whole. We are growing, land is so expensive as you know. How can we continue to grow, have a bigger population, but get slower and slower moving across the city all of the time? It is our data that has shown that in 2015, for daily breakdown of trips taken was 38% rickshaws, 7% car, 17 % foot and 37% public bus. Now so many trips on rickshaws is really inefficient and the majority are unlicensed. In fact in 1979 the City stopped issuing licenses when there were around 80,000 rickshaws. So how are there now more than 1 million rickshaws? Of course the rickshaw bans in certain areas are necessary to ensure that traffic can flow, that cars can move, that goods can move and people can work. And we are dealing with this traffic problem all the while people are developing housing on illegally claimed land. Actually we have also been in this situation where we have filled in water bodies for housing development though it is not strictly encouraged. Perhaps this kind of rational mass transit system will provide an easier city to plan for and plan around. The truth is as well many of the rickshaw drivers live in unregulated areas, and it is true we have not catered much development solely to these low income groups. But actually you know many of our schemes are initially targeted for these low-income groups, though they end up becoming expensive neighbourhoods. Partly you know this is because we are always forced to hire expensive external consultants who do not understand the needs of these slum dwellers, where they would need to live in low-income housing. Then we have to recover the investment we made in planning (including these consultant salaries), and so obviously what can we do but develop higher income housing?

**struggling with congestion- leads to rising prices in housing- in favour of mass transit plan**

## **Role 6: Academic Architect based in Dhaka**

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### **Architect & Writer, M, 45**

There is so much injustice in Dhaka. And so much possibility. You know there is a history of poor planning, as well as of vested interests. Only in 1959 in the Pakistan period was there a first master plan. Obviously this became redundant after Independence in 1971. The 1959 plan was reinvigorated by the UK consultants Mott MacDonald in 1995 and became the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan. The Detailed Area Plan which was gazetted by government in 2009 has deviated too much, and has become more about converting agricultural and flood plain lands for real-estate speculation. The initial National Urban Sector Policy in 2006 is so generic! There is nothing in there about Dhaka's unique geological and hydrological history. We should not be thinking Dhaka's city from the centre - which is how even the mass transit plan thinks of it. We should think of it from the *edge*, where the city meets the wetlands, flood plains, canals and fields. Too much planning starts from these ideas about 'land use' - like land is there, is developed, waiting to be used. But Dhaka is a liquid landscape: we need to think about 'land-water use' around fluctuating edges. We need a new planning and architectural language for these liquid edges. And that then needs to come into the city, how we think about movement, about transport. Dhaka is a child of the river Buriganga - almost an island framed by Buriganga, Turag, Balu? You know people think Dhanmondi Lake is a Lake - it was a part of a channel system linking Turag river. We need to restore the river, restore the canals, work with the river. Dhaka is deltaic. You will hear people say you need mass transit instead of cars because of climate change. But can we be serious about tackling climate change, about listening to the angry earth, if we do not recall that Dhaka is an island?

Sketch for a water-side development: [Kazi Khaleed Ashraf](#).



*Classic case of frustrated knowledge owner who is not at the decision taking level – ANONYMOUS*

## **Role 7: International Design Consultancy**

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### **Consultant, M, 31**

So this is my first time in Dhaka, but I'm struck by the vibrancy of the city. To be honest, I've found the rickshaws in Gulshan quite orderly, with the yellow jackets and the fare charts. This trip out here to Kawran Bazaar is my first time using a 'regular' rickshaw. It's obvious this system isn't working - the traffic was appalling and I'm not totally sure how safe I felt! It was an experience though, and I love the rickshaw art! I'm not sure if the rickshaw driver I was with owned his rickshaw but someone had definitely put a lot of effort into decorating it - it's great to see that there is already 'design-thinking' at work here in a way! So anyway, yes I'm not familiar with the context as much as you, but what I'm here to bring is a focus on human centred design, which as you know donor agencies are using a lot for thinking about transport. What we've done elsewhere has sometimes been around innovation 'hackathons', and getting different transport user groups together to solve problems around comfort, trust, and particularly women's experience of harassment and safety, which I know is also at the centre of JICA's document on the transport plan. Here obviously there are major changes happening, so what we are trying to do is see if we can find a way to think about the urban mobility system in terms of linking: *travel patterns* shaped by people's needs, where they live, where they work, how it's socially acceptable to travel; the *travel market* where people have various options; and the *travel infrastructure* which shapes those options. You know, what decisions will people who are rickshaw users *now* make when the rail is here? Will they still want to buy a car? Does it depend on age, on gender?

## Role 8: National NGO

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### Senior NGO Officer, F, 56

You know I'm here to try and ensure that we do hear about the concerns of these rickshaw pullers. We need to ensure some kind of employment. Many will lose their income from this mass transit, especially from maybe lower-middle class people who would take rickshaws longer distances. And then they already have lost their income from these bans. At my organization as you know we make these micro-loans available to slum dwellers including these rickshaw pullers, but how can we continue to make these loans to people in these areas if their family members who worked with rickshaws are losing income? Is there any kind of employment to be associated with rickshaw pullers if they are losing income from these transport changes? Many of them will I'm sure you know move back to rural areas if there is no work pulling the rickshaws here in Dhaka. We know from our rural micro-credit branches as I'm sure you do that most of these fellows driving rickshaws do not have land at home. One quarter of farmers are landless as you know, and this is less rural landless than before but surely it will become worse if rickshaw drivers and others in slums even have to maybe return to their village areas? I want to know how you will consider this in your plans.

*Image: Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS) organised a landless protest rally to observe the Day of the Landless 2019*



## Role 9: Qualitative Researcher

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### Dhaka-based Anthropology Graduate, F, 27

I have been hired for this purpose by World Bank and JICA to gain evidence from different stakeholders, and produce a report which documents the different views and issues at this meeting. I am also a rickshaw user - no I couldn't own a private car! Actually for my part I'm not sure about the mass transit, it has been really disruptive of the City and I'm concerned for who can afford to use it. And will it be safe? But also, I am here really to ask questions of other people, to try and find out if the rickshaw representatives are being heard, to try and ensure that local and international policymakers have a shared understanding afterwards. So I have a role in asking for clarifications, but also in noting down all of the issues that I think have not really been explained or explored properly so I can report on unanswered questions and what needs to be followed up.

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