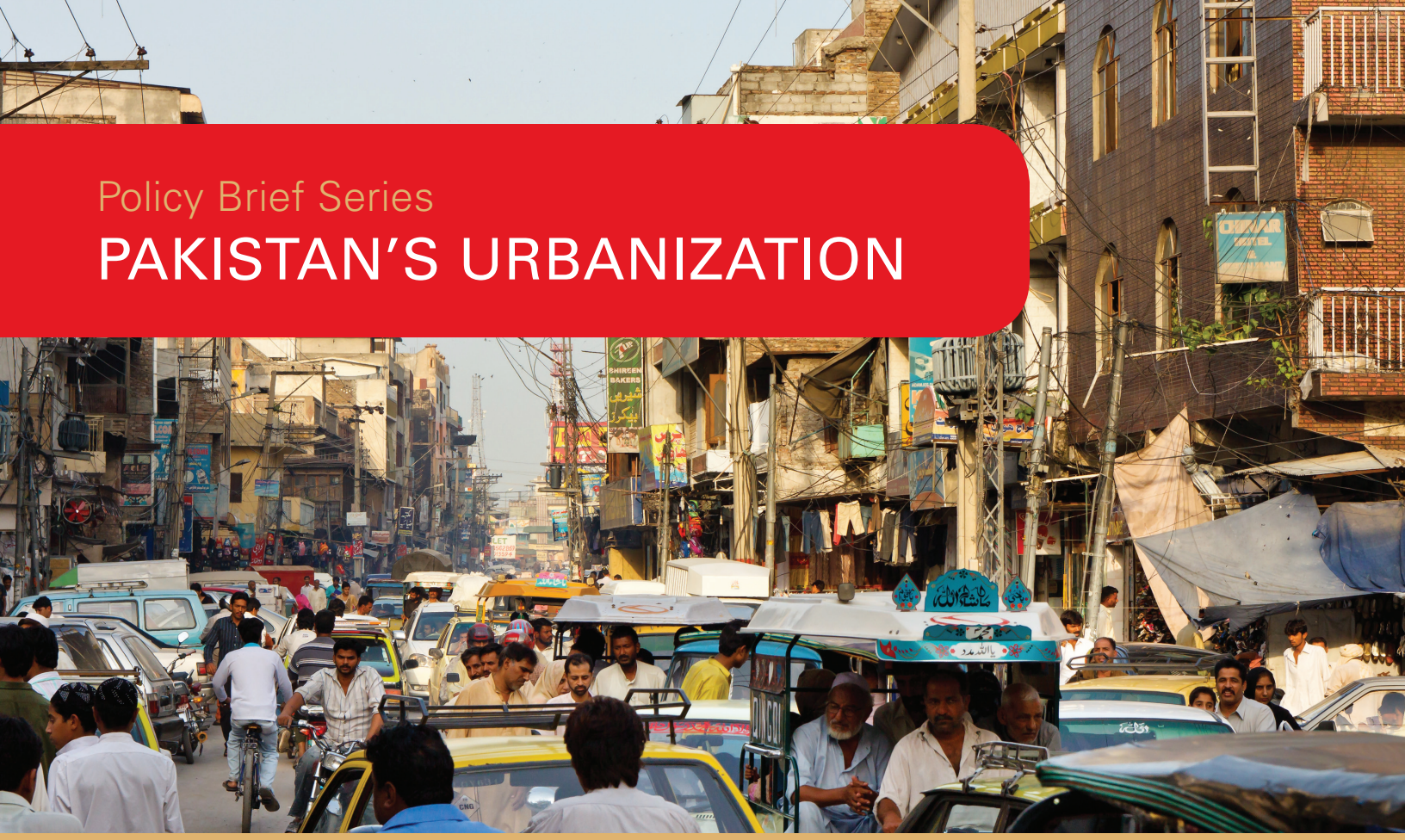
Policy Brief Series

PAKISTAN'S URBANIZATION



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URBAN TRANSPORT PLANNING: MOVING PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMY

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Policy Recommendations

- Learn from past failures in urban transit planning, which has been plagued by untested technologies, high costs, poor implementation, and the elimination of affordable transport services.
- Address the varied transport needs of the middle class. The upper middle class seeks comfortable public transit and is willing to pay higher prices, while the lower middle class prefers lower-cost, less luxurious transit. Transit planners should not force standardized transit services on commuters whose willingness to pay varies considerably.
- Reduce the disproportionate level of transport infrastructure spending allocated to automobiles, and dedicate more funding to public transport, walking paths, bicycle lanes, and other areas where needs are greatest. In Pakistan, most urban transport needs have little to do with automobiles.

Recommendations continued on next page

This policy brief series seeks to share with a wider audience the proceedings of a November conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center that explored the challenges presented by Pakistan's rapid urbanization. The Wilson Center's Asia Program takes great pleasure in acknowledging support provided by the *Fellowship Fund for Pakistan* for the conference, this policy brief series, and the longer volume of essays to be published in 2014.

Policy Recommendations (continued)

- Implement targeted subsidies for affordable transit fares—only those who cannot afford to pay market fare should be subsidized. Transit fares should be set by commissions comprised of transit operators, civil society representatives, and city transit planners.
- Strengthen enforcement of traffic, parking, and land use regulations. Establish independent commissions to enforce regulations, and institute more robust penalties for violators.
- Improve urban transport planning capacity by adding appropriate courses to university-level transport engineering curricula, and by staffing transport planning agencies with experienced professionals who can monitor and analyze transport and land use developments.

Cities in Pakistan face severe challenges in mobility and accessibility. Roads are congested with vehicular traffic, while public transit is sparse, inadequate, and unsafe. In addition, transit service is unaffordable to most of the urban poor. At the same time, infrastructure for the most common modes of travel in urban Pakistan—such as walking and biking—either does not exist or is encroached upon by street vendors.

Since 1988, various civil and military governments have introduced pilot projects to improve mobility and accessibility in urban Pakistan. However, most of these projects failed to meet their intended objectives because of poor planning and/or execution. Recent elections in Pakistan have led to the return of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party at the federal level and in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province. The newly elected governments in the center and provinces have an opportunity to improve transport and land use planning in urban centers. These improvements are critical, as they would enable cities to become engines of economic growth and to better support sustainable and prosperous urban communities.

Past PML-N governments have championed transport projects. These include an intercity motorway project, a subsidized taxicab scheme, and a rapid transit bus project in Lahore. The heavy mandate enjoyed by the PML-N on the federal level and in provincial Punjab allows the present government to take bold steps to strengthen the socioeconomic well-being of Pakistan's large urban centers by improving mobility and accessibility for all urban dwellers. This will require, first, that the government avoid past mistakes. Second, the government must recognize that improving mobility for all urban dwellers requires one to think beyond automobiles. It must also respond to the mobility needs of those who walk—which is how people most frequently travel in urban Pakistan. The government should make provisions for a differentiated transit supply to meet the differentiated needs for public transit generated by the urban poor and middle class commuters. Central and provincial governments must also strengthen institutional frameworks needed for effective transport and land use planning and enforcement in urban Pakistan.

THE CHALLENGE

The sustained increase in urbanization and rapid motorization has created traffic gridlock across Pakistan. The increase in travel by private automobiles and by motorized two-wheelers (M2W) is contributing the most to traffic congestion. New infrastructure has been provided to address this challenge, largely in the form of road

widenings, grade separation of opposing traffic, and building bypasses. Nonetheless, the rise in demand for motorized commuting has outpaced the supply of transport infrastructure. Meanwhile, the increase in demand for efficient, reliable, and safe public transit has largely remained unmet. Neither the private nor the public sector has responded adequately to meet the large demand for mobility via public transit. The lack of adequate transit supply has further accelerated the rate of motorization that contributes to even more traffic congestion.

Also contributing to the increase in motorized travel is the lack of, or poor enforcement of, land use policies. New urban development has emerged either as gated communities for the very rich, or as slums for the very poor. This development has come into being without any regard for city-wide planning for effective delivery of municipal services, such as water supply, sanitation, and public transit. Most new high-income communities have no provisions for public transit. The urban rich thus rely on motorized travel and the urban poor are left to fend for themselves. The result is an increase in traffic congestion for the urban rich, and a lack of mobility for the urban poor. Mobility outcomes are less than desirable for the urban poor and rich alike.

The urban middle class, which is sandwiched between the very rich and the very poor, is also facing unique mobility challenges and a lack of adequate choices. The middle class can afford M2Ws for one or two members of the household, but the rest depend on reliable transit service. Unlike the urban poor, the upper middle class can afford to pay market fares. Still, the inadequate transit supply in urban Pakistan fails to meet the travel demand in a transport market even where the middle class demonstrates the willingness to pay.

Mobility challenges in urban Pakistan have a predominant gender dimension. In urban households, motorized vehicles are often controlled by males. Women are driven around as passengers in automobiles or on M2Ws by males in the household, or else, women must rely on public transit, which does a poor job of servicing their mobility needs. Also, most transit vehicles do not board women. Transit vehicles usually do not come to a full stop at designated stops and commuters have to run and board the vehicle, which most women find difficult to accomplish. At the same time, the lack of reserved seats for women implies that women are not encouraged by transit operators to board the vehicle. Thus, when male members of the household are not available to facilitate a trip, women have to forgo the necessary trip to school or a healthcare facility. Therefore, it is imperative to improve public transit supply, particularly in order to improve women's welfare.

Transit funding poses another challenge. Here, as is the case with actual projects meant to address mobility challenges, history is mired with false starts, missed opportunities, and embarrassing failures. Consider that at one point, General Pervez Musharraf's government contemplated building a magnetically levitated transit system in Karachi with complete disregard for the fact that the technology had not been widely tested, was not feasible for urban transit, and was extremely expensive to build and operate. Similarly, a franchised bus transit system scheme ended up being a misstep because of the way it was implemented. While transit provision leaves much to be desired, the provision of infrastructure for non-motorized modes of mobility is even worse. For instance, one is hard pressed to find evidence of any construction of dedicated bike lanes or functional sidewalks.

Given the reality of urban mobility constraints, newly elected governments in Pakistan have an opportunity to address these through a series of strategic infrastructure investments, capacity building in public sector institutions responsible for transport and urban planning, and improvements in the enforcement of land use, traffic, and parking regulations.

URBAN TRANSPORT PLANNING IMPERATIVES FOR PAKISTAN

Addressing urban mobility changes in Pakistan requires enhancing policy frameworks at the three tiers of government—federal, provincial, and local (municipal). The fundamental change in transport policymaking in Pakistan requires planners to acknowledge that urban travel demand is dominated by non-motorized trips. For instance, according to a recent Japanese government study of transport in Lahore, Pakistan's second largest city, 84 percent of households do not own a car. At the same time, 40 percent of all trips in Lahore are walking trips. Automobile drivers and passengers accounted for only 8.4 percent of trips. However, transport infrastructure spending is heavily biased in favor of the private automobile. This misalignment between resources and demand should cease in the future.

Pakistan's new governments can and must learn from past failures in urban transit planning. There is a need to understand the heterogeneity in public transit demand, which largely originates with the middle class in Pakistan. The urban rich are accustomed to auto-based mobility and the urban poor cannot afford the market transit fare. Thus, it is largely the middle class that generates the demand for transit services. Still, the demand for transit is differentiated by affordability. The upper middle class in Pakistan demands efficient, reliable, and comfortable transit service that matches the transit service quality found in the developed world. This means punctual, courteous service in air-conditioned vehicles. On the other end of the spectrum are the lower middle class commuters who can only afford a cheaper, no-frills transit service featuring basic transit vehicles. Governments—again, federal and provincial—should acknowledge this differentiated demand, and not force standardized transit services on commuters whose willingness to pay varies significantly.

In the past, government officials have eliminated para-transit (cheaper transit) service from routes used by improved (franchised and more expensive) transit service. This resulted in retaliation by para-transit operators who were forced out of business by the government. Low-income commuters, who preferred affordable rather than efficient transit, also complained against the improved yet expensive system. One such dispute made its way to the Supreme Court, which agreed with para-transit operators who had challenged the cancellation of their route permits. The Supreme Court verdict effectively ended transit franchising in Pakistan.

Recognizing that transit demand in urban Pakistan is differentiated, the supply should also be differentiated so that it caters both to the mobility needs of the upper middle class, which has the willingness to pay for improved transit service, and the mobility needs of low-income households, which prefer the cheapest mode available—often a variation on para-transit.

The provision of affordable transit is a huge challenge for the government and transit operators. The transit fare deemed affordable by low-income households falls short of the fare that secures operating profits for operators. The gap between affordable fare and market fare has to be covered by the government. In the past, governments have subsidized transit operators directly so that they may charge lower fares to all. This resulted in the inefficient use of subsidies, where even those who did not necessarily require subsidies ended up receiving them. The newly elected governments should consider developing targeted subsidies so that only those low-income commuters who are in need of subsidy are subsidized, while other commuters are required to pay market fares.

Setting transit fares has been a source of contention between transit operators and commuters in Pakistan. Commuters expect transit fares to stay constant even during times when fuel prices—the most expensive component of operating expenses—fluctuate widely. Governments in the past have done little to address the discontent of commuters and transit operators. For example, transit fares are set by the government with no input from commuters. Governments can address transit fare disputes by setting up commissions to set transit fares. These commissions should comprise representatives of transit operators, members of civil society, and municipal transit planners.

Additionally, little has been done over the past few decades to build transport planning capacity in Pakistan. Travel demand forecasting, transport planning, and urban transit analysis have not been part of the transport engineering curriculum in Pakistan; only recently have these subjects been added to the curriculum in urban planning programs. Pakistani officials may want to encourage planning and engineering programs to improve transport planning curricula. At the same time, the government should consider staffing transport planning secretariats with experienced transport and land use planners who could monitor and analyze transport and land use developments and advise decision-makers to respond accordingly. Capacity building at almost-defunct institutions, such as the National Transport Research Center, is the need of the hour.

Finally, enforcement of traffic, parking, and land use regulations has been a challenge in Pakistan. Blatant disregard for regulations further exacerbates the challenge of mitigating traffic congestion. Pakistan needs to introduce stronger penalties for violations and formulate independent commissions with secured tenures, which could enforce regulations and address violations by influential segments of society.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan's urban population continues to grow at a fast rate. The rate of urbanization is likely to hold for another few decades. This will result in millions more making their way to Pakistan's large urban centers. Newly elected governments at the center and in the provinces must tackle urbanization challenges head-on—and immediately.

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This policy brief marks the second in a series of four on Pakistan's urbanization. The first brief in the series, "Housing for the Low-Income," by Tasneem Siddiqui, can be accessed from the Asia Program webpage at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication-series/pakistans-urbanization-policy-brief-series