

Integrating Transport as A Human Right: Addressing Accessibility and Equity in Public Transportation Systems

Isatou Jallow¹ | I Nyoman Aji Duranegara Payuse^{2*} | . I Made Suwitra² | I Ketut Sukadana²

1. Executive Director of The Neneh Bah Foundation (NB), U.S.A

2. Fakultas Hukum Universitas Warmadewa, Indonesia

Corespondence:

I Nyoman Aji Duranegara Payuse, Fakultas Hukum Universitas Warmadewa, Indonesia
ajiduranegara@gmail.com

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Abstract—The recognition of transport as a fundamental human right has gained increasing attention in policy and academic discourse. Access to reliable and equitable public transportation is crucial for promoting social inclusion, economic opportunity, and sustainable development. However, many urban centers, particularly in developing countries, face significant challenges related to accessibility and equity in public transport systems. This research examines the legal and policy frameworks supporting transport as a human right and explores global best practices in achieving accessible public transport. Using a normative juridical method, this study analyzes international human rights treaties, national regulations, and urban transport policies. Comparative case studies of cities such as Bogotá, Curitiba, and Jakarta provide insights into the successes and challenges in integrating transport as a human right. Findings indicate that robust public transport infrastructure, political commitment, community participation, and integration with land-use planning are essential for ensuring accessibility and equity. However, barriers such as inadequate funding and policy fragmentation continue to hinder progress in many regions. The study concludes that recognizing transport as a human right requires legal and institutional reforms that prioritize marginalized communities, enhance investment in inclusive infrastructure, and foster participatory urban planning. Lessons from successful cities offer a roadmap for policymakers to develop equitable and sustainable transport systems that uphold human rights and social justice.

Keywords: accessibility; equity; human right; public transportation; social inclusion.

Introduction

In recent years, the recognition of transport as a fundamental human right has gained significant traction among policymakers, urban planners, and human rights advocates. This perspective acknowledges that access to reliable and efficient public transportation is not merely a matter of convenience but a crucial factor in promoting social equity and inclusion. As urban populations continue to expand, the challenges associated with transportation accessibility and equity have become more pronounced, particularly in developing countries. Marginalized groups—including low-income individuals, the elderly, and persons with disabilities—are disproportionately affected by inadequate transport systems, limiting their access to essential ser-

vices such as education, healthcare, and employment. This article explores the integration of transport as a human right, emphasizing the need to address accessibility and equity in public transportation systems.

Public transportation plays a vital role in urban mobility, serving as the backbone of economic and social activities. However, in many cities, public transport systems remain underfunded, poorly maintained, and inadequately designed to meet the diverse needs of the population. The lack of accessible and affordable transportation options perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion, preventing many individuals from fully participating in society. This is particularly evident in rapidly urbanizing areas, where transport infrastructure often fails to keep pace with growing demand, further exacerbating issues of congestion, pollution, and inequality. The United Nations recognizes the importance of transport in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11, which seeks to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores the necessity of equitable access to safe and affordable transport systems for all, positioning public transportation as a critical tool for fostering social justice and environmental sustainability. By framing transport as a human right, governments and policymakers can prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations, ensuring that public transportation systems are designed with inclusivity at their core.

Several cities worldwide have successfully integrated transport as a human right, demonstrating that equitable and efficient public transportation is achievable with the right policies and investments. For instance, Bogotá, Colombia, and Curitiba, Brazil, have implemented innovative public transport solutions that prioritize accessibility and affordability. Bogotá's TransMilenio bus rapid transit (BRT) system has become a global model, offering a cost-effective and efficient alternative to private car usage while addressing the mobility needs of low-income residents. Similarly, Curitiba's integrated transport system connects various modes of transportation, ensuring that all citizens can access essential services regardless of their socioeconomic status. The success of these cities can be attributed to several key factors. First, strong political will and community engagement play a critical role in shaping inclusive transport policies. In both Bogotá and Curitiba, local governments have actively involved citizens in the planning process, ensuring that the perspectives of marginalized groups are heard and incorporated. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among residents and leads to more effective, user-centered transport solutions.

Second, investment in infrastructure is essential for creating accessible public transport systems. This includes not only physical infrastructure—such as dedicated bus lanes, stations, and pedestrian-friendly environments—but also technological innovations that improve user experience. Real-time tracking systems and mobile applications provide passengers with timely information, making navigation easier and more efficient. Additionally, transport facilities must be designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, ensuring equal access for all. Moreover, integrating transport planning with land use policies is crucial for creating sustainable and equitable urban environments. By aligning transport systems with urban development strategies, cities can reduce reliance on private vehicles, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and improve overall quality of life. A holistic approach that combines transport and urban planning can help mitigate congestion, enhance environmental sustainability, and promote greater social inclusion.

Despite these successes, significant challenges remain in realizing transport as a human right on a global scale. Many cities continue to struggle with funding constraints, political instability, and weak regulatory frameworks that hinder the development of inclusive transport systems. Addressing accessibility and equity in public transportation systems is not just a matter of infrastructure—it is a fundamental issue of social justice. Recognizing transport as a human right allows for the development of policies that prioritize the needs of marginalized communities while promoting sustainable urban mobility. The experiences of successful cities offer valuable lessons, emphasizing the importance of community participation, infrastructure investment, and integrated urban planning. Moving forward, governments, policymakers, and civil society must continue advocating for inclusive transport systems that enable all individuals to access essential services and participate fully in economic and social life. By championing transport as a human right, societies can take significant steps toward achieving a more just and equitable future, where mobility is not a privilege but a fundamental right available to all.

Method

This research is grounded in the normative juridical method, which focuses on analyzing legal frameworks related to public transportation and human rights. By examining existing laws, regulations, and policies, along with international treaties and national legislation, this study seeks to identify factors that facilitate or obstruct the recognition of transport as a fundamental human right. Through this analysis, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of governmental and institutional responsibilities in ensuring fair and inclusive access to public transportation.

Result and Discussion

Public Transport and Human Rights

The right to freedom of movement is a fundamental human right enshrined in various international legal instruments, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 13 of the UDHR asserts that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state," while Article 12 of the ICCPR further elaborates that "everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own." These provisions underscore the importance of accessible transportation systems that enable individuals to exercise their right to move freely. In the context of public transportation, the ability to access reliable and efficient transport services is crucial for individuals to enjoy their freedom of movement. Without adequate public transport, many people, particularly those in marginalized communities, face significant barriers to mobility. This lack of access can lead to social exclusion, limiting individuals' ability to participate in economic, social, and cultural activities. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 11 emphasizes the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes access to essential services such as transportation. When public transport systems are inadequate, it directly impacts individuals' ability to secure employment, access healthcare, and engage in community life.

Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 9 highlights the importance of non-discrimination and accessibility in public transport. It states that "States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public." This provision emphasizes that public transport systems must be designed to accommodate the needs of all individuals, including those with disabilities. Accessibility in transport is not just a matter of convenience; it is a legal obligation that states must fulfill to ensure that all citizens can exercise their rights fully. In Indonesia, the recognition of transport as a legal right is still evolving. While the country has made strides in improving its public transport infrastructure, significant gaps remain in accessibility and equity. The Indonesian Constitution guarantees the right to a decent life, which can be interpreted to include access to public services, including transportation. However, the implementation of this right is often inconsistent, particularly in urban areas where rapid population growth has outpaced the development of adequate transport systems.

Countries like Germany and Finland have made notable progress in integrating transport as a human right within their legal frameworks. For instance, Germany's Public Transport Act emphasizes the importance of accessibility in public transport, mandating that all new transport projects consider the needs of individuals with disabilities. Similarly, Finland's Transport Code includes provisions that ensure public transport services are accessible to all citizens, reflecting a commitment to uphold the principles of non-discrimination and equality. In contrast, Indonesia's public transport systems often reflect a lack of comprehensive legal frameworks that prioritize accessibility and equity. The Jakarta Transportation Master Plan aims to improve public transport services, but challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of coordination among various transport modes hinder progress. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in Jakarta, while a step forward, still faces criticism for its limited coverage and accessibility issues,

particularly for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) outlines goals for improving transportation infrastructure, yet the focus on equitable access remains insufficient. The integration of transport as a human right requires a paradigm shift in policy-making, where accessibility and equity are prioritized in all transport-related decisions. This includes not only physical access to transport services but also the affordability and reliability of these services.

The Impact of Inadequate Public Transport

Inadequate public transport systems can have profound and multifaceted impacts on urban environments, economies, and the overall quality of life for residents. The consequences of insufficient public transportation extend beyond mere inconvenience; they affect social equity, economic opportunities, environmental sustainability, and public health. As cities around the world grapple with increasing populations and urbanization, the need for effective public transport systems becomes ever more critical.

Social Equity and Accessibility

One of the most significant impacts of inadequate public transport is its effect on social equity. Public transportation is a vital service that enables individuals to access essential resources such as employment, education, healthcare, and social services. When public transport systems are lacking, marginalized communities—often those with lower incomes—face significant barriers to mobility. The absence of dependable public transportation disproportionately impacts low-income individuals, who often lack private vehicles and depend significantly on public transit for their daily travel needs. This reliance on public transport means that when systems are inadequate, these individuals are often left with limited options, leading to increased travel times, higher costs, and ultimately, reduced access to opportunities.

In many urban areas, inadequate public transport can exacerbate existing inequalities. For instance, residents in suburban or rural areas may find themselves isolated due to a lack of transport options, making it difficult to reach urban centers where jobs and services are concentrated. This isolation can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit social mobility, as individuals are unable to access the resources necessary for improving their circumstances.

Economic Opportunities

The economic implications of inadequate public transport are equally concerning. Efficient public transport systems are essential for facilitating the movement of people and goods, which in turn supports local economies. When public transport is unreliable or insufficient, it can hinder economic growth by limiting access to jobs and reducing the overall productivity of the workforce. Cities with well-developed public transportation networks generally see increased economic activity, as they provide a greater number of workers with access to job opportunities.

Moreover, inadequate public transport can lead to increased traffic congestion as more individuals resort to using private vehicles. This congestion not only affects travel times but also has economic costs associated with lost productivity and increased fuel consumption. The document notes that "traffic congestion in cities with poor public transport can lead to billions of dollars in economic losses annually." As such, investing in public transport infrastructure is not merely a matter of improving convenience; it is a strategic economic decision that can yield significant returns.

Environmental Sustainability

The environmental impact of inadequate public transport systems is another critical concern. Public transportation is generally more environmentally friendly than private vehicle use, as it reduces the number of cars on the road and lowers greenhouse gas emissions per capita. When public transport options are limited, more individuals are likely to rely on personal vehicles, contributing to increased air pollution and carbon emissions. Cities with efficient public transportation systems can greatly lower their carbon emissions and support global initiatives to mitigate climate change.

Furthermore, inadequate public transport can lead to urban sprawl, as individuals seek housing in areas that are more accessible by car but may be far from urban centers. This sprawl can result in the loss of green spaces and increased reliance on fossil fuels, further exacerbating environmental degradation. By contrast, effective public transport systems can promote sustainable urban development by encouraging higher density living and reducing the need for extensive road networks.

Public Health

Finally, the impact of inadequate public transport on public health cannot be overlooked. Poor public transport systems can lead to increased reliance on private vehicles, which contributes to higher levels of air pollution and associated health problems, such as respiratory diseases and cardiovascular issues. Communities with inadequate public transportation access frequently face greater health disparities, as residents may have difficulty reaching medical facilities.

Additionally, inadequate public transport can discourage physical activity, as individuals may be less likely to walk or cycle to transit stops if they are not easily accessible. This lack of physical activity can contribute to obesity and other health-related issues. Conversely, well-designed public transport systems can promote healthier lifestyles by encouraging walking and cycling as part of the commuting process.

Case Studies and Comparative Analysis

Indonesia faces significant transport challenges, particularly in its major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bali. These urban centers are characterized by severe traffic congestion, inadequate public transport systems, and a lack of accessibility for marginalized populations. Jakarta, the capital city, is notorious for its traffic jams, which are exacerbated by a rapidly growing population and an increasing number of private vehicles. According to recent studies, Jakarta's traffic congestion costs the economy approximately \$7 billion annually, highlighting the urgent need for effective transport solutions.

In Surabaya, the second-largest city in Indonesia, public transport options are limited, with a reliance on informal transport modes such as *ojek* (motorcycle taxis) and *angkot* (minibuses). This lack of formal public transport leads to inefficiencies and safety concerns, as many residents are left without reliable options for commuting. Bali, a popular tourist destination, also struggles with transport issues, particularly during peak tourist seasons when the influx of visitors overwhelms the existing infrastructure. The island's public transport system is underdeveloped, leading to increased reliance on private vehicles, which contributes to pollution and traffic congestion.

Moreover, rural areas in Indonesia face even greater transport access challenges. Many rural communities lack adequate road infrastructure and public transport services, making it difficult for residents to access essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The World Bank has reported that approximately 40% of rural Indonesians do not have access to reliable transport, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits economic development in these regions.

Legal and policy gaps further exacerbate these transport challenges. While Indonesia has made strides in developing transport policies, there is often a disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. For instance, the National Medium-Term Development Plan emphasizes the need for improved public transport, yet many local governments lack the resources and capacity to execute these plans effectively. Additionally, existing regulations may not adequately address the needs of vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income communities, who often face barriers to accessing public transport.

Global Case Studies

In contrast to Indonesia, several countries have successfully integrated transport as a human right, demonstrating effective strategies for addressing accessibility and equity in public transportation systems. Countries like Sweden, Canada, and Germany serve as exemplary models in this regard.

Sweden, for instance, has implemented a comprehensive public transport system that prioritizes accessibility for all citizens. The Swedish government has invested heavily in public transport infrastructure, ensuring that services are available in both urban and rural areas. The Swedish Transport Administration has established policies that mandate accessibility features in all public transport systems, including low-floor buses and accessible train stations. This commitment to inclusivity has resulted in high public transport usage rates and reduced reliance on private vehicles. Similarly, Canada has made significant strides in integrating transport as a human right. The Canadian Transportation Agency enforces regulations that require public transport providers to accommodate individuals with disabilities, ensuring that all Canadians have equal access to transportation services. Cities like Toronto and Vancouver have developed extensive public transit networks that are not only efficient but also designed to meet the diverse needs of their populations.

Germany also stands out as a leader in public transport accessibility. The country's Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan emphasizes the importance of sustainable and inclusive transport systems. German cities have invested in extensive public transport networks, including trains, trams, and buses, which are well-integrated and accessible to all residents. The success of Germany's public transport system is reflected in its high ridership rates and low levels of traffic congestion compared to cities like Jakarta. However, not all developing nations have experienced success in integrating transport as a human right. Countries such as India and Brazil face similar challenges to Indonesia, including inadequate infrastructure, traffic congestion, and limited access to public transport in rural areas. These nations have struggled to implement effective policies that address the needs of their populations, often resulting in social inequities and environmental degradation. Lessons learned from these global case studies highlight the importance of comprehensive planning, investment in infrastructure, and the need for inclusive policies that prioritize the needs of all citizens. By examining the successes and failures of other countries, Indonesia can develop more effective strategies to address its transport challenges and work towards integrating transport as a fundamental human right for all its residents.

Conclusion

Integrating transport as a human right is essential for fostering social equity and ensuring that all individuals have access to the opportunities and resources necessary for a dignified life. The analysis of public transportation systems in various contexts, particularly in Indonesia, highlights the pressing need for reforms that prioritize accessibility and equity. Major cities like Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bali face significant challenges, including traffic congestion, inadequate public transport options, and a lack of access for marginalized communities. These issues not only hinder mobility but also exacerbate social inequalities, limiting economic opportunities for those who rely on public transport. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, investment in infrastructure, and the implementation of inclusive practices that consider the needs of all citizens.

Global case studies from countries such as Sweden, Canada, and Germany demonstrate successful integration of transport as a human right, showcasing how effective public transportation systems can enhance the quality of life for residents. These nations have established frameworks that prioritize accessibility, ensuring that public transport is not only available but also affordable and user-friendly for all demographics, including people with disabilities and those living in rural areas. By learning from these examples, Indonesia and other developing nations can adopt best practices and tailor them to their unique contexts, ultimately creating a more equitable and sustainable public transportation system. This shift is not merely a matter of improving transport infrastructure; it is a fundamental step towards realizing the right to mobility and fostering inclusive urban development that benefits everyone.

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