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Assessing Passengers’ Satisfaction Level on Bus Services in Selected Urban and Rural Centres of Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

This research highlights the urban-rural bus services passenger’s satisfaction level in the selected settlements in Peninsular Malaysia. Johor is to represent the southern states while Penang is to represent the northern states. For eastern-coast states, Pahang is selected while Perak is to represent a still developing state, which is yet to reach the advanced level of large conurbations. The main objectives are to evaluate the bus service quality through passengers’ satisfaction survey. A total of 1130 survey questionnaire forms are collected. The result shows socio-demographic and trip characteristics influenced the satisfaction level and passengers’ expectation of future bus services improvements.

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Keywords: Public bus service; passengers’ characteristics; passengers’ preference; on-board survey

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1. Introduction

Public bus services are the most popular, affordable and widely provided public transport modes in many urban and rural areas of many countries. An excellent public bus service is important to support the economic growth, the growing population and the expansion of urban or rural activities (Bachok, Osman, & Ponrahono, 2014). The current bus systems adopted by many towns and cities; especially those in Malaysia are not appropriate and equipped to address needs of the settlement forms, socio-demographic and trip characteristic of good urbanization process. Thus, these systems portray a bad image to the overall connectivity and mobility in the urban or rural areas of Malaysia. A public bus service should provide a good accessibility that leads to reliable, safe, intelligent, convenience and effective of transportation system (Amiril, Nawawi, Takim, & Latif, 2014). Apart from that, an efficient public bus service enhances personal economic opportunities, saves fuel, saves money and reduces the environmental impacts. In reality, however, if the quality of services is poor and unreliable, the public bus services tend to contribute to the worsening of the transportation system. There are a number of issues relating to public bus services such as the limitation of facilities, the use of low quality of public bus facilities and interchanges, inconvenience fleet, dispatching low passenger trips and long waiting time (Rohani, Wijeyesekera, & Karim, 2013). Hence, in order to facilitate high quality delivery of existing bus services, some measures to examine the current performance of bus system should be imposed. An assessment of the quality of bus services can be rendered from the aspect of standard Level of Service (LOS) of public bus operation or passengers satisfaction level (Ismail, Hafezi, Nor, & Ambak, 2012; Kamaruddin, Osman, Anizaliana, & Pei, 2012; Noor, Nasrudin, & Foo, 2014). Transport stakeholders in Malaysia must ensure the availability of resources in providing effective and efficient public transport systems. These are to maintain the current passenger loads that will eventually increase in the future.

2. Literature review

Geographical factors such as population, environment, economics and culture are among the factors that influence the bus operation service provided. The types and features of urban bus services may differ from rural bus services where coverage routes, fare system and fleet depend on the local needs (Rohani et al., 2013; Sham, Samsudin, & Rahman, 2013; Sham, Soltani, Sham, & Mohamed, 2012). Commonly, in many urban and rural area, public transportation system deals largely with issues and problems encountered with transportation services, operation, infrastructure and facilities (Ariffin & Zahari, 2013). The state capital city and rural centres in Malaysia are no exceptions in facing the same issue. Contrary to urban areas, public bus system in rural areas, for example, is good and more functioning as a mode assisting in reducing automobile dependency to preserve the geo-culture and sustaining the regions (Patrick & Roseland, 2005). Determinants of service levels in rural areas are not driven by factors such as income level and trips pattern compared to those of urban areas, because services in rurality are more of social obligation in nature (Ismail et al., 2012; Noor et al., 2014). Although an extensive approach of transformation programs in urban public bus services is very much needed, the situation may be different for rural areas, with a small population and diverse activity locations (Ariffin & Zahari, 2013). Any attempt to provide a new bus operation in the rural area to increase the ridership would be a challenge. Besides the ridership issue, there is also occurrences of an issue on operation and management such as limited capital to upgrade the service system among the operator. This scenario may be common to any urban and rural public bus service in Malaysia. Low ridership and the old system of public bus service may exist for many years servicing interdistrict or door to door routes to the rural passengers. In this research, the factors influencing the satisfaction of the services will be studied to identify the difference or similarity between urban and rural public bus passengers' preferences in Malaysia. It is an aim of this research to analyze the level of service quality of public bus services through a passengers' satisfaction survey before generalizing the issues existing in the system.

3. Research aim and objectives

This study is aimed at assessing the current public bus services in selected urban and rural centres of Peninsular Malaysia and devising the framework for sustainable urban-rural public bus system. The research objectives are:

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