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Riyadh Transportation History and Developing Vision

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Abstract

Riyadh is the capital city of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is both a rapidly moving microcosm of worldwide trends in transportation, and a unique case study. The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons behind rising car ownership and its impact on public transportation. This paper charts the historical development of the city and presents the key factors that have shaped the transport network, including governmental motivation, urban planning and financial and demographic aspects. The study reviewed the history of the Riyadh transportation system and either component during the last five decades and the factors that have made Riyadh's situation unique. From oasis to Metropolis there are many pressing issues. Resolving these requires much more than narrow technical solutions. Instead, consideration of a much broader range of factors is needed. Riyadh is presented as a city case study and the key challenges are illuminated.

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1. Introduction

Since early this decade the planning authority of Riyadh has begun to devote serious consideration to providing an alternative to the private car and reducing automobile dependency, despite the fact that neither oil supply nor funding for extra roads are issues for the city (ADA 1999, 2003). Due to increasing car ownership, traffic congestion is becoming a serious problem and introducing public transport is being considered by the planning authority as a way of reducing traffic congestion and meeting the future travel requirements of the city (ADA 1999, 2003, 2004). This paper will present the key factors that have contributed to the city of Riyadh's current situation. However, Riyadh's Islamic culture and conventions regarding privacy have had a profound effect on the development of the transport system. Furthermore, the government has invested in huge projects and redevelopment of the city. An analysis follows of the impact of urban planning stages, key government plans and the vision underlying planning organizations in Saudi Arabia.

1.1. From oasis to metropolis

Files Within 50 years Saudi Arabia's capital city Riyadh has developed from a walled town into a metropolis of 5.5 million people. Riyadh has become a car-oriented city since the 1950s and the economic boom compounded this in the 1970s. Riyadh has witnessed tremendous growth in automobile dependence in the last few decades. According to Al-Mosaind (2001:4) between 1968 and 1996 the total number of automobiles in use increased from 26,880 to an estimated 670,300. The average vehicle ownership per household also increased nearly two and a half times during the same period (Al-Dubikhi 2007).

“For example, forty years ago the population of the city of Riyadh was just 100,000. Now it is 7 million, 61 per cent of which are Saudi citizens (Al-Hathloul 2002). The majority of expatriates living and working in the city are from Asian countries. There are also workers from Arab countries including Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon and Syria. Moreover, European, North American, South Africans, Russian, Antipodeans and Chinese foreign personnels are engaged in a vast range of new infrastructure projects. Riyadh has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Arab world. A wide range of cuisines can be found in the city's many eateries”

2. Public Transportation and car ownership history

2.1. Public transportation

The Saudi Arabian Public Transport Company (SAPTCO) was established in 1979 as a public company, with a government subsidy. It has been the regional and national public transit operator with a monopoly on transit services within and between Saudi cities. However, in Riyadh, despite the granted monopoly, private operators still provide deregulated transit services across the city and have done so since the 1960s, creating competition for SAPTCO (Al-Dubikhi 2007). AlGadhi (1994:14) concludes that 'poor performance by SAPTCO' constitutes a greater obstacle to a more efficient transport system than the fierce competition from unregulated bus services, or jitneys as they are known locally. These vehicles operate on major roads and have a distinctive design: the chassis is white, with an orange line in the middle and a blue, green or maroon lower half (Alomran 2015).

Women constitute less than 9 percent of the total SAPTCO ridership. Service coverage and the lack of regard to privacy are two reasons for the low female ridership in SAPTCO buses. Jitneys do not carry women and the only culturally acceptable independent means of travel for women and girls is provided by the taxi service in the city (ADA 1997:86). Although it is not against the law for women to drive in Saudi Arabia, the country's Islamic establishment enforces a ban. It is the law in Saudi Arabia that every woman must have a male guardian. This is often a relative or the woman's husband. A guardian accompanies the woman everywhere and traditionally gives her permission to engage in activities such as opening a bank account (BBC 2013). The availability of private cars and drivers was one of the reasons women avoid using public transport. All businesswomen and female students depend on their own private chauffeurs or taxi drivers. It is beyond the scope of this short paper to dwell on the

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