



15 Years On, Transjakarta Is Better than Ever

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Photos: ITDP Indonesia

Jakarta, a sprawling metropolis of 10 million, has been a center of trade and culture in Indonesia for centuries. Jakarta's greater metropolitan region is home to over 30 million people, a number projected to grow by 10 million within the next decade. This growth will push Jakarta's famous paralyzing gridlock to bring the city to a halt unless major changes happen. Jakarta ranks among the most congested cities worldwide. People spend hours every day in traffic as commutes from suburban areas often exceed two hours each way.

Photo: ITDP Indonesia

Fortunately, Transjakarta, the longest bus rapid transit (BRT) system in the world and one of the first in Asia, has been resurrected as the city's transit backbone. Thanks to a major integration effort, along with improved service and infrastructure, the city has more than doubled ridership in the last two years and serves around one million people a day. Transjakarta's success goes against the all-too-common narrative that change is impossible in the Global South's megacities. Thanks to the innovative approaches guided by ITDP, new transportation systems with high levels of public approval are possible because of the cultural shift that began with Transjakarta.

FORMALIZING TRANSIT FOR A DIGNIFIED RIDE

Before any public transit system existed, Jakartans traveled mostly with unregulated minibuses, known as angkots. Inefficient routes, delays, crashes, sexual harassment, and petty crimes were common occurrences, discouraging ridership and leading people to avoid public transit. International aid priorities, which only funded the building of roads, bridges for cars, and sometimes airports determined much of Jakarta's development. The lack of funding for public transport created an explosion

of car-centric infrastructure and its familiar challenges: congestion, pollution, and staggering traffic jams.

Things shifted in 2004, with the implementation of Transjakarta. The well-designed and expansive system began providing transit for hundreds of thousands of people every day but remained far from fulfilling its potential. There were maintenance issues, inconsistent operations, and suboptimal service. Neither drivers nor law enforcement honored the physically segregated bus lane, and it was a major challenge to keep cars out of it. Police officers would go so far as to wave personal vehicles into the dedicated bus lane. Another issue was that the initial system relied on closed corridors, meaning that for a passenger to change from one corridor to another, they had to get out of the bus, wait for another bus, and pay again to continue their journey. After years of



Important to Transjakarta's success has been creating and maintaining the proper BRT infrastructure, like off board ticketing and a dedicated lane.

advocacy by ITDP Indonesia for open service, Transjakarta became a formal part of the municipal transport structure, and a direct service provider in 2016. Over the next few years, Transjakarta also integrated and formalized angkots, sending ridership soaring.

Transjakarta went beyond route and fare integration and mandated changes in the angkot business model to improve reliability and customer service. Before this change, drivers were paid per passenger, which incentivized delays as they waited for buses to fill and dangerous speeds as they rushed from stop to stop. Now drivers receive salaries based on distance traveled, enabling them to keep to a set schedule and route, and follow traffic laws without risking a pay cut. They also have full access to the 13 corridors spanning over 200 kilometers of dedicated lanes. Significantly, city support



Transjakarta has been a popular mode, with ridership increasing every month, in a city riddled with traffic.



Top: Transjakarta daily ridership is about 950,000 people.

Middle and bottom: Transjakarta required people to adhere to dedicated stops and stations, a cultural shift from the former informal transit that was used by so many residents.

and increased education of police officers have kept these lanes car-free.

“For the first time, Jakarta’s residents are seeing what it means to have reliable public transportation,” says Faela Sufa, ITDP’s South East Asia Director. “The saving in time and cost are now clear, and people are embracing it. Now that passengers are familiar with public transit, they are changing their behavior to do things like wait in line, give priority seats to vulnerable groups like the elderly, pregnant, and people with disabilities, and there is a much greater awareness of things like harassment of women. It’s been an incredible change in a really short amount of time.”

These are major achievements, but Jakarta still has a long way to go. Many of Transjakarta’s 262 stations are not yet fully accessible. Around the transit stops, there are few elevators and poorly marked crosswalks, putting people with limited mobility at increased risk. Dedicated bus lanes have improved significantly, but are overdue for new barriers after years of neglect. The police must also continue to enforce the dedicated bus lanes consistently. This is particularly important for Transjakarta passengers to feel respected, raise morale and encourage more people to use the bus. There are plans to build a cycle network, integrate a citywide bike-share system with the BRT, and create the first lines of metro and light rail. The progress so far is encouraging, and the city’s leaders have much to be proud of. Transjakarta has adapted to Jakarta’s growing needs and will continue to thrive for the next 15 years as Jakarta’s population grows along with it.