

Circling back to sustainability

Sustainable Urban Mobility – Air Quality, Climate Action, Accessibility (SUM-ACA)



Commissioned by: Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)



Project partner: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)



Project timeline: July 2022 – June 2026



Budget: EUR 10 million



Locations: Gujarat, Kerala, Odisha, Karnataka and Meghalaya

SDGs addressed:



It is afternoon, but Unnikrishnan’s bus is full.

He raises his eyebrows, still impressed by the number of passengers, as more commuters climb into the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) vehicle he has been driving all morning without a break.

“Since the City Circular Route System was launched, I have seen such a large influx of passengers. It is as if people have just discovered that state transport buses exist,” says Unnikrishnan. “Regular passengers have expressed their appreciation for the greater connectivity between routes, but what is amazing is that we are seeing people who would have earlier taken taxis, autos or driven themselves, come to the bus stop and make an effort to discover a route that works for them.”

The City Circular Route System is not entirely new to Kerala. A similar circular route system had been in effect in Thiruvananthapuram since the last 50 years, but it suffered from certain drawbacks. “The Thiruvananthapuram city transport bus routes needed modernisation. Some areas were not being served adequately, while others experienced low ridership,” explains Mr. Josho Bennet John (KAS), General Manager, IT and Solutions, KSRTC. “Routes were long winding, and commuters would prefer to take their own vehicles or hail an autorickshaw to save time.”



“The Thiruvananthapuram city transport bus routes needed modernisation. Some areas were not being served adequately, while others experienced low ridership,” explains Mr. Josho Bennet John (KAS), General Manager, IT and Solutions, KSRTC.



The new City Circular Route System, developed and proposed by the KSRTC and supported by technical experts from GIZ, was based on extensive research with the aim of encouraging commuters to choose a more sustainable mode of transportation. Launched in Thiruvananthapuram in 2022, the City Circular Route System was designed to cover areas previously underserved by public transport and to build connections between routes that even the most suburban locations would become easily accessible. With easy interchange points and any bus stop accessible within 30 minutes, the new system has significantly boosted the uptake of public transport.

“Passengers can no longer afford to waste time waiting at bus stops, but the new system makes sure that there is a bus along the route every ten minutes. Since passengers are assured of reaching their destination on time, every trip is packed,” says Mr. John. “The most notable contribution of the City Circular Routes System was in making the state transport service reliable and viable as an alternative to personal transport. To do this, KSRTC and GIZ worked hard to develop a route system with a simple yet comprehensive structure, with direct connections, maximum coverage and high frequency of service. The impact of this initiative is clearly visible: ridership has increased by 1.5 times since the circular route system was introduced.” The City Circular Route System is also complemented by a rationalised fare system, with a flat rate of just ₹10 per ticket, making public transport in Thiruvananthapuram more affordable than ever.





Kerala's commitment to sustainability, reflected in its #1 rank in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index by Niti Aayog, has been immensely furthered by the City Circular Route System, encouraging commuters to return to eco-friendly modes of transport.

“Buses have always been the most environmentally-friendly mode of transportation. This system is a new twist to an old solution. The fare rationalisation, the increased frequency, and the broader coverage have made the buses more attractive to riders. It is good for the passengers, good for us drivers, and good for the environment. I have never seen anything like this in my years on the road. People who never used the bus before are now regulars. It is not just about getting from point A to B; it is about connecting communities,” smiles Unnikrishnan.