

Fare-Free Election Bribery vs Good Public Transport

July 10, 2023

July 8, 2023: CNN published a story, evaluating European and US cities, which had offered free public transit service. CNN found that 'making the service free' did not attract car-owners to the public transit systems. It also found that even those, who were taking advantage of the free service, preferred a better transit system than a free system. (Reference: <https://tinyurl.com/2p9h6dsn>)

July 7, 2023: Bangalore, Karnataka State, India: Siddaramaiah, the Chief Minister of Karnataka, presented his budget, which included funds for **free bus rides for women**. Offer of five **freebies** - free bus travel for women, 200 units of free electricity, 10 kilograms of free foodgrains to the poor, Rs 2,000 per month for the woman head of the house and unemployment benefit of up to Rs 3,000 per month – won for Indian National Congress (INC) 135 seats in the 224 -member assembly on 10th May 2023.



Siddaramaiah said the five key freebies will benefit **13 million families** in Karnataka (with a population of 71.7 million).

Similar efforts have been taken up in some cities in USA.

TransitCenter, a transit advocacy group of USA, found in a 2018 survey of riders with household incomes below \$35,000 in eight major cities that **frequency**,

safety, crowding and reliability were higher priorities than bus fare. (Reference: <https://transitcenter.org/should-transit-be-free-part-two/>)

Fare-free policies are a “blunt instrument” to address public transit affordability, the **International Association of Public Transport (IAPT)** said in a 2020 Policy Brief (<https://cms.uitp.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Policy-Brief-FullFreeFarePT-DEF-web.pdf>) on cities that eliminated fares, “ **More targeted measures may be both more effective and manageable,**” such as **fare discounts** for people making below a certain income.”

Mohamed Mezghani, the Secretary General of IAPT, said, “ By offering free public transport, we are not really attracting car drivers in large volumes.”

In Richmond, USA, the public bus service system, called **Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC)**, decided in March 2020 to implement free service till June 2025. A passenger survey just before the pandemic showed that 64% of GRTC riders were Afro-Americans, while their population in Richmond is about 46%. On the whole, free bus service **has not attracted many car riders to switch to public transport.**

Fares, realized from passengers, are a critical source of funding for Transit Systems. Fare-free policies could jeopardize future service and infrastructure investments.

FURTHER STUDIES: The World Economic Forum has also been studying the Urban Transit Systems. (The 2023 Summary is available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/cities-mobility-urban-public-transport-challenges/> .
