

A Roadmap for Avoiding Bangkok’s Transportation Planning Mistakes in Yangon, Myanmar

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Introduction

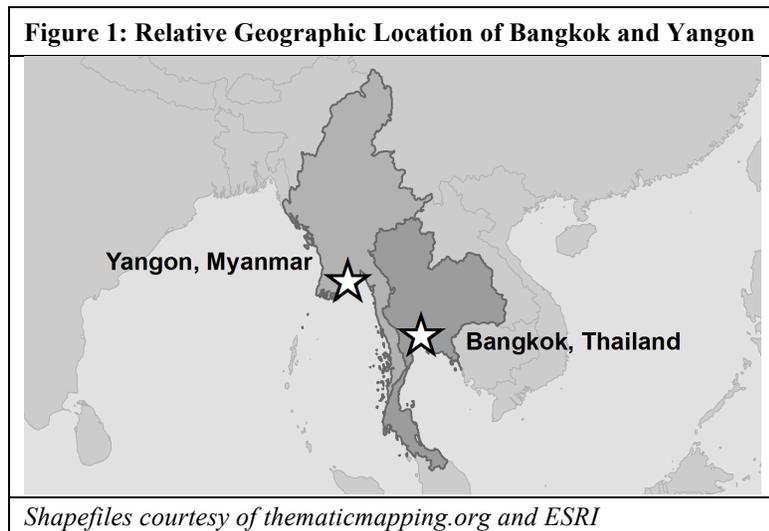
There is little doubt that if current trends continue, motorization in the developing world will lead to a mobility crisis. Current projections for population growth, increases in GDP per capita, and increasing motorization show that unless there are major interventions, many cities in the developing world will soon be paralyzed by congestion. Public transit’s mode share is expected to decline around the world over the next decade (UN-Habitat, 2013). This trend raises serious environmental, economic, and social equity concerns. A trip by personal vehicle produces on average 12 times the amount of greenhouse gases per capita compared to the same trip via bus (UN-Habitat, 2013). In Asia, time losses due to congestion are estimated to already cost the equivalent of 2-5% of the region’s GDP (LEPT, 2011). The poor stand to be the most adversely effected by the shift towards personal vehicle usage, as they overwhelmingly rely on public transit (formal and informal) for mobility. Despite the obvious negative consequences, motorization is increasing due to poor planning choices, ad hoc urban development, and a global culture that perceives the private vehicle as a status symbol. Rather than resisting the trend, “many developing countries perceive motorization as a condition for development” (UN-Habitat, 2013). Recent reports by major international institutions seek to combat this mentality. UN-Habitat’s 2013 *Global Report on Human Settlements* asserts that current urban transportation problems “are consequences of the preoccupation with the means of mobility rather than its end – which is the realization of accessibility” (UN-Habitat, 2013). *Changing Course: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Urban Transport*, a major report released by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2009, also calls for an approach “that manages demand for travel and promotes accessibility over mobility” (ADB, 2009). This report separates transportation planning problems common to most Asian cities into elements and then illustrates how the “New Paradigm” would approach each one differently:

Table 1: Asian Development Bank - Old and New Urban Transport Paradigms		
	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Goal	To provide mobility by increasing road capacity	To provide accessibility by managing demand and focusing on public transit
Content	Frequent megaprojects, building roads and expressways	Management and integration of existing transport systems, focus on public transportation, megaprojects only pursued after careful study
Implementation	Recommend best practices with little attention given to feasibility of implementation due to financial or institutional capacity	Impediments to implementation are inputs to the planning process and addressed early, financial/technical planning proceed together, focus is on possibility of implementation and operations
Governance/ Institutions	Planning process politicized, technical analysis is only used to provide justification for political decisions	Technocratic process informs political decisions, focus is on creating an enabling environment
<i>Source: Adapted from ADB, 2009</i>		

Current challenges in Asian cities are a result of decision makers historically approaching transportation planning from the perspective of the “Old Paradigm.” Unfortunately, once a city has become sprawling, congested, and automobile dependent, it is extremely difficult to undo previous mistakes. However, for cities that are in earlier stages of development, the New Paradigm presents a valuable opportunity to learn from the past and promote accessibility over mobility by investing in sustainable modes of transport instead of infrastructure projects that encourage private vehicle usage. This paper will examine two Southeast Asian cities through the lens of the ADB Old/New Paradigms, critiquing past policies and making recommendations for the future. Bangkok is widely regarded as one of the most congested cities in the world for variety of reasons including a lack of coordinated long-term planning, heavy focus on expressway projects at the expense of public transit, and deeply systemic institutional and political mismanagement. Yangon, the former capital and largest city in Myanmar (Burma), is in the early stages of a period of rapid economic growth that will determine the livability of the city for decades to come. Currently, it enjoys a high public transit modal share and low personal vehicle ownership, but unless decisive steps are taken to promote transit accessibility and manage travel demand, as incomes rise and the population explodes, the city’s captive transit riders will begin a shift towards personal vehicle usage that will be extremely difficult to reverse. Although Bangkok and Yangon are at different stages of development, they are similar in many other ways. As primate cities both are economic and population centers, enjoying GDP per capita rates multiple times than that of their countries. Both are situated in a geographically similar location within their respective countries and have dense central business districts where most economic activity occurs, surrounded by sprawling suburban peripheries. Both have expanded

into the surrounding regions, forming continuous metropolitan areas that extend beyond their municipal boundaries.

In this paper, Bangkok will be presented as the “worst case” scenario. The city faces crippling congestion today because institutional failures led the political elite to routinely ignore recommendations from transportation planners, blindly focusing on large expressway projects and motorization policies



	Bangkok, Thailand	Yangon, Myanmar
Population	8.2 million (2010)	5.7 million (2013)
Percent of National Population	15% (2009)	14.3% (2014)
Population Growth Rate	2.33% (2000-2010)	2.58% (1998-2011)
GDP/Capita	\$8,135 (2009)	\$1,465 (2011)
Pop Density (persons/sq km)	5,227 (2010)	4,500 (2013)
Vehicle Ownership (per 1000 people)	559 (2007)	36.5 (2013)

Source: (Tulyasuwan, 2013), (JICA, 2013), (Union of Myanmar, 2015)

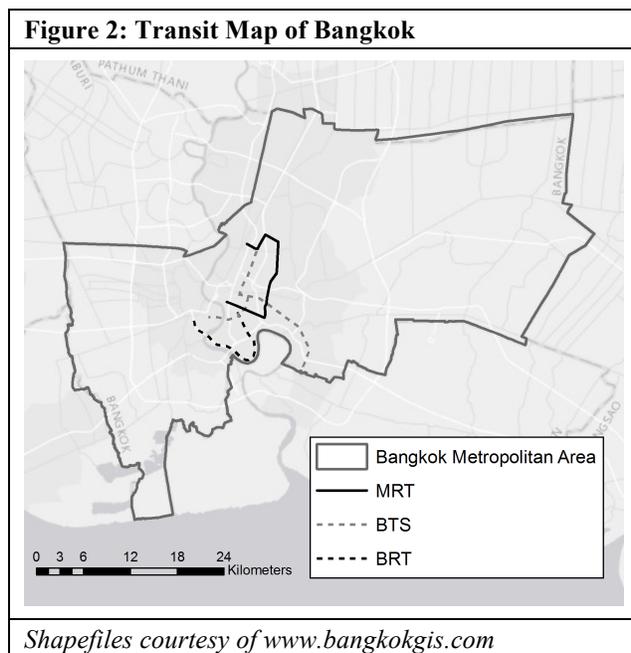
that in hindsight can be described as a perfect example of the ADB Old Paradigm. Now that the city is already auto dependent, sprawling, and congested, the policies, infrastructure changes, and institutional restructuring necessary to achieve sustainable transport and improve accessibility face enormous barriers to implementation. Yangon, because it is at an earlier stage of development, stands at a crossroads. The city's first modern transportation plan, prepared by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), is a shining example of the ADB New Paradigm for Sustainable Urban Transport. However, comprehensive implementation of the plan depends on Yangon's political will to commit to the institutional restructuring and smart infrastructure investments necessary to avoid Bangkok's current predicament.

Worst Case: Bangkok

Two reoccurring themes are present in Bangkok's urban planning history; 1) the failure to implement recommended best practices due to institutional problems and 2) a selfish political elite obsessed with modernizing the city for their benefit. Bangkok became a major city in 1782 when King Rama I moved the capital from nearby Ayutthaya. For the first eighty years of its existence, Bangkok relied on water-based transport, which led to denser settlement along canals and waterways. In response to a petition by European residents, who wished to ride in carriages instead of boats, the city started building modern roads in 1861 (Hanaoka, 2007). The Thai elite, acutely aware that western powers "evaluated the civilization of other countries by using their own standards and technology" pursued the western development model as a way to ward off colonization (Hanaoka, 2007). This strategy of adopting western technologies for show started an insidious trend where little critical thought went into the usefulness or suitability of infrastructure projects as long as they appeared modern. Bangkok's first railway was built in 1891, but automobiles began to invade the city's roads by 1902 (Rujopakarn, 2003). With little thought to long-term land-use, Bangkok's authorities built new roads to accommodate their own desire for mobility via personal vehicles (Hanaoka, 2007). In 1915, canal construction ended and new development occurred along roadways, leading to the ribbon development that plagues the city today (Rujopakarn, 2003). During the first half of the twentieth century, a flood of foreign aid and decades of political instability continued the trend of unplanned growth.

Starting in 1962, Thailand began preparing National Plans every five years. Despite increasingly large budget allocations for transportation projects, Bangkok's congestion only got worse. The first three plans (1962-1976) focused on increasing road capacity to facilitate mobility in the already sprawling capital with no thought given to long-term land use, further encouraging auto dependency (Rujopakarn, 2003). Bangkok's tram system was closed in 1968 (Hanaoka, 2007), leaving buses as the only form of public transit. German consultants developed Bangkok's first transportation plan in 1975, which recommended a public transit-oriented policy and the restriction of vehicle ownership (Danieri, 1995), but the Fourth and Fifth National Plans (1977-1986) ignored this advice in favor of investing in expressway projects in central Bangkok to immediately alleviate congestion (Rujopakarn, 2003). The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority was established in 1976 to manage the city's buses, but even with high ridership among low-income residents, the system operated at a loss almost immediately and improvements were deprioritized in favor of expressway megaprojects (Hanaoka, 2007). The Sixth and Seventh National Plans (1987-1996) incorporated the recommendations of three other transportation studies—the Short

Term Urban Transport Review (1985), the Medium and Long Term Improvement Plan (1989), and the Seventh Plan Urban and Regional Transport Study (SPURT) (1991). These reports unanimously recommended coordination with land-use planning, demand management strategies, building of segregated mass transit, and an overall of the bus system (Daniere, 1995). Unfortunately, inclusion in the National Plans was no guarantee of implementation, as they are not legally binding, and “many agencies, depending on the relative power of their director or minister, feel quite free to ignore or deliberately contradict the priorities and recommendations of the plans” (Daniere, 1995). The SPURT attempted to address the lack of progress in implementing solutions widely agreed on by the previous studies. It proposed creating a single “metropolitan development authority with the power to control land-use and transportation strategies in the entire region” (Daniere, 1995) but this key recommendation was ignored by government officials because it would have required an extensive restructuring and transfers of power between several separate agencies. The bureaucratic mess of agencies responsible for transportation in Bangkok carried on with expressway projects while politically difficult measures, such as restructuring the bus system and road pricing, were ignored.



The population of Bangkok had reached over 6 million before the city successfully built its first segregated mass transit system, the Bangkok Sky Train (BTS), in 1999. Today the BTS consists of 2 lines with 24 stations, totaling 36.45 km and enjoys a daily ridership of over 600,000 (The Nation, 2013). The MRT, an underground metro system, opened in 2004 and consists of 1 line with 18 stations totaling 20 km, with a daily ridership of over 240,000 (Deboonme, 2011). Several extensions are planned or under construction. One bus rapid transit (BRT) line was introduced in 2010.

By the time these mass transit megaprojects were completed, personal vehicle ownership was already high (Tulyasuwan, 2013). The BTS, MRT, and BRT did little to slow growth in vehicle ownership because these systems do not serve communities on the periphery or the adjacent cities that make up the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. Little attention was paid to the traditional bus system, which was the only form of public transit until the BTS opened in 1999. The state run monopoly has historically operated at a loss by a wide margin, and the 15,000 buses that make up the system are now on average 16 years old (Tulyasuwan, 2013). Poor service and frequent delays due to traffic led many bus riders to purchase motorcycles or cars as incomes rose (Hanaoka, 2007). In 1995, 48% of all trips were by bus, compared to 27% by personal vehicle. A decade later, bus trips had shrunk to 37% and personal vehicle trips had risen to 46% (Tulyasuwan, 2013). In 1960 there were just 6 motorcycles per 1000 residents (Tulyasuwan, 2013), but by 2007 this number rose to 221 (WB & NESDB, 2009). During the period 2003-2010, personal vehicle ownership increased 26% per year (Tulyasuwan, 2013). In 2007, vehicle ownership in Bangkok reached 559 per 1000

residents (Tulyasuwan, 2013), a rate higher than many European countries, including the UK (WB, 2014). This trend was exacerbated by an incredibly shortsighted 2011 policy meant to boost Thailand's auto industry in which first-time car buyers were given a large tax break. This policy alone was responsible for over 300,000 new vehicle registrations in Bangkok that year (Suriyan, 2012).

Lessons Learned: Where Bangkok Went Wrong

With several large mass transit projects and modern flyovers, Bangkok “looks modern and seems superficially like many developed cities in the western world” (Rujopakarn, 2003) but the system cannot satisfy demand and the flashy improvements are not part of a coherent long-term strategy. In retrospect, Bangkok's mistakes are a perfect example of the ADB Old Paradigm. Decision makers prioritized megaprojects that were intended to improve mobility for personal vehicles while allowing the city's transit mode share to slip away. Even now, with a new emphasis on mass transit, the focus is still on accommodating travel demand rather than managing it through integration with land-use planning (Ativitavas, 2012). The transit megaprojects by themselves have little hope of solving Bangkok's congestion crisis (Hanaoka, 2007). The BTS, MRT, and BRT are too expensive for low-income residents and are inaccessible to those living in the periphery. The less glamorous traditional bus system has been ignored, leaving the rail systems without adequate feeder services (Ativitavas, 2012).

Bangkok's litany of transportation mistakes are a symptom of the country's larger deeply rooted institutional and political problems, which led government officials to ignore the recommendations of various transportation plans for decades. These plans were never implemented because they were “directly at odds with the interests of the Thai bureaucratic elite” (Daniere, 1995). Since the 1930s, Thailand has been ruled by a “bureaucratic-military coalition” which uses higher education, restricted by income and social class, as a “screening device” to prevent others from entering government service, ensuring that the bureaucracy “acts in ways which will preserve its power and prestige” (Daniere, 1995). The results are shortsighted and self-serving policies, such as the 1991 decision to relax the import tax on foreign vehicles from 150% to 50%, enabling rich Bangkok residents to flood the streets with luxury vehicles (Daniere, 1995). This also explains the historic focus on expressways and expensive mass transit projects that benefit the elite while ignoring sidewalk improvements and the bus system used by the poor.

The self-serving nature of the Thai bureaucracy is also to blame for the absurd level of institutional fragmentation and incapacity to implement any coherent long term plans. During the 80s and 90s, there were 11 agencies responsible for transportation planning in Bangkok, including four involved in building roads, five providing or regulating public transit, and three responsible for traffic management (Daniere, 1995). Just within the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (one of the 11 agencies), four departments with eight separate divisions held decision-making power over transit projects (Daniere, 1995). Any attempt at streamlining or restructuring is met with heavy opposition from within the bureaucracy because it requires individual losses of prestige and transfers of power. The result is a paralyzing mess of red tape involved in developing, authorizing, or implementing projects. At any point in the process one department may purposefully dig in its heels or simply lack the technical capacity to carry out its

role (Rujopakarn, 2003). Competition between agencies for political power means that “a number of agencies have clung to their own plans and priorities” (Danieri, 1995), explaining why it took more than two decades after it was recommended in the National Plan for Bangkok to switch from building expressways to investing in mass transit. This intergovernmental competition sets the city up for massive failures. In 1990 the state Railway of Thailand decided to start building a light rail system in Bangkok without any input from other agencies. The project was never tested for feasibility and the route was redundant with other planned projects. Construction was halted in 1992 and the project was officially ended in 1997 at around 10% completion (Harris, Hodges, & Schur, 2003). The inability to coordinate plans is equally embarrassing. For example, Bangkok’s Second Land-Use Plan (1999) directly contradicted the 8th National Plan (1997-2011) (Rujopakarn, 2003). More recently, the land development strategy produced by Bangkok’s Department of City Planning called for decentralizing employment and commercial activities into ten sub centers serviced by three transit hubs while the Office of Transport Planning created a separate plan consisting of 12 transit lines connecting the periphery to the central business district (Ativitavas, 2012).

	Old Paradigm	Bangkok
Goal	To provide mobility by increasing road capacity	Until the late 90s, obsession with large expressway projects for use by personal vehicles, and no attention paid to demand management.
Content	Frequent megaprojects, building roads and expressways	Transit megaprojects such as the BTS, MRT, and BRT trumped interest in improving the bus system, feeder services, sidewalks, etc.
Implementation	Recommend best practices with little attention given to feasibility of implementation due to financial or institutional capacity	National plans and consultant studies prescribed best practices but rarely addressed institutional problems or feasibility.
Governance/ Institutions	Planning process politicized, technical analysis is only used to provide justification for political decisions	Megaprojects pursued unilaterally for political purposes, institutional fragmentation led to paralysis.

Source: Old Paradigm Adapted from ADB, 2009

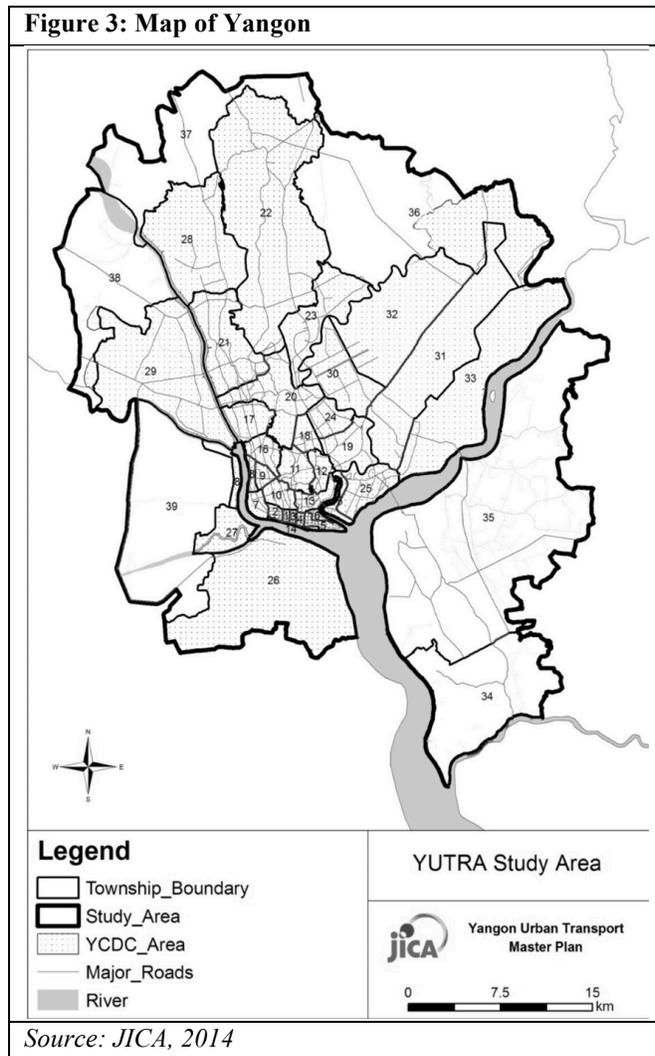
Two important lessons can be gained from Bangkok’s experience. The first is that integrating transportation with land-use planning and making sufficient public transport investment in the early stages of development is critical to addressing future traffic problems (Tulyasuwan, 2013). Some scholars have suggested a threshold of \$5,000 GDP per capita after which personal vehicle ownership takes off (Vasconcellos, 2002). In Bangkok this occurred in the mid 80s, 15 years before the city finally completed a mass transit project. Early investments increased mobility for private vehicles while ignoring the bus system, which could have helped stave off auto dependency. The ADB New Paradigm for Sustainable Urban Transport suggests that cities should focus on managing and integrating existing transportation systems and only pursue megaprojects after careful study (ADB, 2009). The second lesson is that plans that do not directly address feasibility (institutionally, politically, financially, or otherwise) are of little use in the developing world. In Bangkok, politics and institutional incapacity routinely trumped quality plans, but the planners themselves also failed because they did not address these barriers adequately, prescribing recommendations that had no hope of being implemented. According to

the New Paradigm, impediments to implementation should be inputs to the planning process and the focus of transportation plans themselves should be on the possibility of implementation. Unfortunately for Bangkok, these are lessons learned in hindsight and the city's mistakes are already solidified in both the bureaucratic structure and the built environment.

Opportunity Case: Yangon

Yangon is at an earlier stage of development and stands at a transportation planning crossroads. A recent spike in economic growth due to changes in the national political climate presents new opportunities, but also new challenges. The city currently enjoys a high public transit mode share, but poor service plus rising incomes and rapid population growth threaten to flood the city with cars (Kojima, 2015). Until recently very little attention was paid to long term urban planning, but this is changing. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) recently aided Yangon in developing a Strategic Urban Development Plan and a complementary

Comprehensive Urban Transportation Plan (YUTRA). The transportation plan, currently in draft form and expected to be finalized in 2016, exemplifies the approach recommended by the ADB New Paradigm. It is imperative that Yangon's decision makers muster the political will and institutional capacity to follow this plan, or else the city will become another Bangkok.



Source: JICA, 2014

Yangon was founded in 1752 by King Alaungphaya and made the capital of colonial Burma by the British in 1852. They planned the city for 50,000 inhabitants, laying out a central business district with a grid pattern of wide streets and public spaces. After the country became independent in 1948, a massive influx of migrants led to overcrowding. Rivers to the south, east, and west border Central Yangon, so the city grew northwards. The current population is 5.7 million, but medium growth projections predict this will increase to over 10 million by 2040 (JICA, 2014). The suburbs on the periphery are experiencing the highest population growth, with some reaching as high as 15% per year (JICA, 2014). GDP per capita was only \$1,465 in 2011, but is expected to reach \$10,000 before 2040

(JICA, 2013). This means Yangon will pass the \$5,000 threshold for widespread personal vehicle ownership (Vasconcellos, 2002) within the next 20 years.

Currently, vehicle ownership in Yangon is very low at 36.5 vehicles per 1000 residents (JICA, 2014), partially due to income inequality. In a recent survey, 90% of respondents indicated that their household makes less than \$1,900 per year (Shoyama, 2014). However, vehicle ownership is high among high income families (JICA, 2014). Vehicle ownership is also kept low by two unique government policies. The first is a ban on motorcycles in Yangon, which has kept lower income families from purchasing vehicles as they have in Bangkok. The second is a national restriction on importing foreign vehicles. Interestingly, the motorcycle ban is supported by 57% of residents, with only 16% against (Shoyama, 2014). The automobile import restriction is less popular (44.1% in favor, 24.5% against) (Shoyama, 2014) and has recently been relaxed in order to promote the replacement of inefficient older vehicles (JICA, 2014). Vehicle ownership is expected to increase from 12% of households to over 32% of households by 2040, which is especially worrying because most arterial streets are already saturated during peak hours and there is little room for expansion (JICA, 2014).

The vast majority of Yangon residents who do not own a vehicle travel by walking or by bus. Over 40% of trips outside the house are by foot (Kojima, 2015). Of motorized trips within the city proper, 84% are by bus (Shoyama, 2014). Yangon's bus system is a byzantine mix of two major private bus companies and six "Bus Supervisory Committees"—cooperatives that organize individual bus owners (JICA, 2014). The government keeps the fares artificially low, which while good for low income residents, means that bus operators must struggle to remain profitable. In response, operators pay drivers based on the number of fares they collect, encouraging reckless driving and competition between drivers plying the same route (JICA, 2014). The government has also neglected to maintain bus stops and other infrastructure. As a result, most bus stops are unmarked, with no seating or shade, and no place for the bus to pull out of the way of traffic while it picks up and drops off passengers (JICA, 2014). Yangon also has a train system, the Circular Railway, but it is only responsible for 1.1% of trips (JICA, 2014). Although it is the cheapest option, dilapidated trains, poor track quality, and 25 at-grade crossings make one 47.5 km circle take over three hours (Thida, 2012). The circular route also does not match the needs of the majority of commuters, who need to travel radially out from the central business district to the suburbs in the periphery. The system is only used by the poorest of the poor or farmers bringing crops to sell (Thida, 2012). The state of Yangon's public transit makes it clear that its modal share is high because riders have no other option. With rising incomes and the relaxing of vehicle import restrictions, this is a recipe for rapid increases in vehicle ownership. As Yangon's rapid pace of development continues, the inadequacies of the current transportation system will only increase unless decisive action is taken.

Applying Lessons Learned: Moving Forward in Yangon

The Strategic Urban Development Plan of the Greater Yangon, formally adopted in 2013, and the Comprehensive Urban Transport Plan of the Greater Yangon, released in draft form in 2014, represent an unprecedented effort to tackle long-term land use and transportation problems in Yangon. JICA's plans complement each other and reflect contemporary urban planning best

practices as outlined by the ADB New Paradigm. The overarching goal of the development plan is to “decentralize the functions of the urban center” but “avoid continuous and extensive urban expansion with low density” (JICA, 2013). The transportation plan, YUTRA, seeks to “provide efficient, safe, comfortable, and environmentally friendly transport...in order to contribute to balanced, inclusive, and sustainable growth.” This includes the stated goal of developing a “public transit based city with more than 60% share of the total urban transport demand” (JICA, 2014). The YUTRA is over 1,200 pages long, with recommendations ranging from the micro level (changing the height of station platforms on the Circular Railway, changing the timing of lights at specific intersections) to the macro level (building a BRT system, travel demand pricing within the CBD). However, with so many recommendations and the reality of financial and institutional limitations, everything cannot be tackled at once

The most important recommendations contained in the YUTRA are 1) early development of attractive public transit, and 2) creation of a Yangon Urban Transport Authority. The YUTRA emphasizes that Yangon’s strength is in its already high public transit mode share. For the long term, it prescribes a hierarchical mass transit system including a metro and integrated feeder services, but it also recognizes that projects of this scale will possibly take decades to get off the ground. Therefore, “a BRT system is the only option that will allow Yangon to develop a fully integrated public transport system in the short term, which is essential to the effort to retain public transport mode share” (JICA, 2014). In addition, immediate physical and organizational improvements to the traditional bus system and the Circular Railway are recommended to improve their quality of service.

	New Paradigm	YUTRA Recommendations
Goal	To provide accessibility by managing demand and focusing on public transit	Transportation plan is complementary with land-use/development plan. Goal of plan is to maintain high public transit ridership. Continuing the motorcycle ban and vehicle import restrictions is recommended.
Content	Management and integration of existing transport systems, focus on public transportation, megaprojects only pursued after careful study	Emphasizes importance of immediately improving existing systems (bus and circular railway) and early creation of a BRT system. Megaprojects, such as a metro or sky train, are considered and recommended, but only as long-term visions to be tackled later.
Implementation	Impediments to implementation are inputs to the planning process and addressed early, financial/technical planning proceed together, focus is on possibility of implementation and operations	Prioritization of projects is based on feasibility, so efforts to improve the system immediately are mired by trying to implement unrealistic projects.
Governance/ Institutions	Technocratic process informs political decisions, focus is on creating an enabling environment	Most important recommendation is the creation of an Urban Transport Authority, with specific instructions on how to accomplish this within the existing institutional and political framework.

Source: New Paradigm adapted from ADB, 2009

The YUTRA's other important recommendation seeks to address the institutional problems in Yangon that threaten to mire the best-intentioned plans. Like in Bangkok, the responsibility for Yangon's transportation sector is divided between several municipal, regional, and national agencies. For example, the Circular Railway is owned and managed by the Myanmar National Railway, while the bus system is regulated by the Yangon Region Central Supervisory Committee for Motor Vehicles and Vessels (JICA, 2014). Currently there is an alarming lack of coordination between agencies, with no clear lines of reporting or clarity on who has decision-making power. To remedy this situation, the YUTRA recommends the creation of a Yangon Urban Transport Authority (YUTA), which will act as a "strategic policymaking umbrella to improve coordination of urban development and transport... holding full responsibility for urban development and transport outcomes" (JICA, 2014). Unlike the plans for Bangkok that made a similar recommendation, the YUTRA dedicates an entire section to spelling out in great detail how the authority would be structured in such a way that its creation will be supported, rather than opposed, by existing transportation departments. This will be accomplished in part by including the heads of each agency responsible for implementation on its Board of Directors (JICA, 2014). The YUTRA even includes the draft version of an Urban Transport and Passenger Service Act that can be submitted to Myanmar's parliament to implement the creation of such an authority, emphasizing that this step is imperative to the subsequent implementation of the rest of the plan (JICA, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper first explored Bangkok's transportation planning experience, emphasizing how following the ADB Old Paradigm created a congested and auto dependent city. Even when transportation plans recommended policy changes in favor of public transport, political and institutional problems prevented them from being implemented. Once vehicle ownership in Bangkok had already reached high levels, the building of several transit megaprojects did little to reduce the city's congestion. The paper then turned to Yangon, which is in a much earlier stage of development and has the opportunity to implement these lessons learned. The Comprehensive Urban Transport Plan of the Greater Yangon reflects modern best practices in transportation planning as exemplified by the ADB New Paradigm, recommending immediate actions to maintain transit ridership and a detailed plan for creating a new agency to coordinate transportation and land-use planning in Yangon. Recent evidence shows that progress is already being made. In 2015 the government invested \$8 million (plus \$1 of private capital) to import state of the art buses and create dedicated lanes to pilot city's new BRT system (Win, 2015). Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy just won a landslide victory in the November 2015 elections, gaining a two-thirds majority that will end almost 50 years of military rule (Dinmore, 2015). Unlike Thailand, the political climate in Myanmar is currently favorable to institutional change, making the creation of the Yangon Urban Transport Authority a distinct possibility. Hopefully by 2040, the target date for the YUTRA, Yangon will have seized the opportunity and transformed itself into a city with an exemplary sustainable urban transportation system.

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