

# Metro Phase 2, New MTC Buses Hold Out New Promise

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For a city whose commuters were used to getting stuck in slow-moving traffic on arterial roads and where autorickshaws seldom plied with meters, 2019 offered a ray of hope in the form of metro rail.

Metrorail's 45km line (phase 1) became fully functional this year, marking the beginning of a new era in public commute. A quicker and cleaner alternative to travel was finally here. Metrorail is scheduled to extend its network to 118.9km connecting the northern and southern suburbs. The commuter has many options now: Metro rail, app-based cabs, bike taxis, new MTC buses, MRTS and suburban trains.

Former Chennai Metrorail director R Ramanathan said, "When Phase 2 comes up and more neighbouring districts such as Chengalpeta, Kancheepuram and Arakkonam are linked with a double suburban line in the next 10 years, it is not only going to create an asset but also an employment opportunity and an efficient public transport system that everyone would use."

So far, a little more than a lakh people use metro rail every day, and the patronage has to go up. To make commute seamless, the government has to provide common multimodal mobility cards, manage demand and supply of app-based cabs and regulate auto fares.

Adding a new dimension to city commute are the latest entrants — bike taxis. Chennai started travelling at just ₹3 per kilometre this year, courtesy bike taxis. A short ride costs less than 30. Not many people would have believed this was possible until three months ago, when bike taxis were launched in the city for the first time. App-based aggregators like Rapido were present in Bengaluru and Vizag for a while, but this was something new for Chennai.

The state government was hesitant on the safety aspects but the Madras high court al-



**LIKE A BREEZE** With Metrorail and bike taxi, commuting in the city has turned inexpensive and faster than earlier

**METORAIL | PHASE-1** Total distance **45.1km** Corridors **2** Stations **32**

**Corridor 1** | Washermenpet to Airport | **Corridor 2** | Chennai Central to St Thomas Mount

Estimated cost

₹20,000cr

Average daily ridership | 1.16 lakh (Was estimated at 7.76 lakh for 45km)

Construction began | June 2009

Last leg of metro became operational | Feb 2019

**PHASE-2** Total distance **118.9km** Corridors **3** Stations **128**

**Corridor 3** | Madhavaram to SIPCOT (45.8km) | **Corridor 4**- Lighthouse to Poonamallee (26.1km) | **Corridor 5** | Madhavaram to Sholinganallur (47.0km)

Estimated cost

₹69,000cr

Estimated daily ridership | 19.2 lakh by 2025

Construction to begin | June 2020

Deadline | 52km to be ready by 2024-25

## STAGNATION IN GROWTH OF TAXIS



2018-19	17,376
2017-18	21,393
2016-17	16,218
2015-14	11,275

## MTC'S HIGHER FOOTFALLS

New red-coloured buses with better design and more space | **800**  
Last A/C bus

junked  
Average footfall stabilises at 33 lakh per day from around 30 lakh/day in 2018



TN's first electric bus launched

lowed bike taxis, providing a leg-up to inexpensive last-mile connectivity.

There are, however, some safety concerns which the government needs to address. "Drivers of bike taxis might drive faster to do more trips, making it dangerous," said a transport department official. About 40% of accidents in Chennai involved a two-wheeler, he pointed out. Rapido allows anyone with a driving licence to register as a 'captain'

to offer rides. With bike taxis finding more takers, cab aggregators have joined the bandwagon.

There's a flipside too. The annual growth rate of cabs and taxis has seen a dip in Chennai. After the arrival of Ola and Uber in first half of the decade, taxi registrations went up by 30%. But the annual registration figures have now dropped from 21,300 in 2017-18 to 17,300 in 2018-19. While cab drivers complain of exploitation by ag-

gregators, commuters are unhappy with surge charges.

This has come as a blessing in disguise for MTC. The corporation, which lost 10 lakh passengers to local trains and share autos in 2018 after a fare hike, has stabilised this year. Its 800 new red buses with better design and more leg room are finding more takers. For a city that grappled with ever-expensive autorickshaws and dilapidated MTC buses, the journey ahead looks better.