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Here's the solution

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Is there any hope left for the capital's Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) project after it's been rogered beyond belief? Or, are the people who shoved it up our streets now destined to do damage control for the rest of their days? Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Pune, Indore, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Jaipur and Rajkot which are also initiating BRT projects had better pay attention. That's because as far as a lot of Indian cities in the future are concerned, a perfect and permanent solution still exists.

Yet, it's amazing how the concerned experts in Delhi hadn't thought of it earlier. All they had to do was turn their gaze upwards to see one of the smoothest running mass rapid transport systems in the country operating virtually on top of their heads: the Metro Rail which is also being constructed along several identical BRT routes. The trouble is, the experts at the 'Integrated Multi-Modal Transit Systems' here didn't ever think of implementing their own multimodality model.

For if they had, they would have realised the reason the Metro ticks over so sweetly is because it doesn't take up precious road space. Instead, for the most part, it rakes run on elevated concrete corridors. Not only that, the on- and off-boarding points have been precisely planned and, thus, do not involve masses of commuters making suicidal sprints across traffic in order to entrain.

If the BRT really wants to multimodalise its operations even now, the simplest way would be to reverse-integrate the rail and bus corridors into a single-movement sector. Meaning, if the rapid transport vehicles also were to run overhead on the same platform as the Metro trains, it would take care of the whole mess in a jiffy. Consider for example the following three facts: (1) The Metro corridors are almost exactly the same width as the exclusive bus lanes; (2) They too use inner-city arterial conduits for optimal inter-connectivity; (3) They never interact with traffic on the ground. Isn't that just what BRT needs?

Of course (having trains and buses

moving along the same dedicated access strips could be dangerous — especially since buses are not grooved to rails like trains and tend to swerve from side to side depending on drive characteristics. Therefore, the chances of a head-on collision between a Metro coming from the opposite direction can never be ruled out. But this problem can be easily addressed. If all bus tyres were removed and their rims replaced with steel rail-wheels, they, too, could utilise the tracks)

Also, if such marginally retrofitted buses could then be coupled to existing Metro trains — perhaps as last coaches attached to the rear — three more problems facing the BRT would be solved. Firstly, cost overheads (over Rs 60 crore and counting) would be drastically

cut because fuel would no longer be needed as they would be pulled along by electric Metros. Secondly, scheduling would not be a logistical nightmare. Normally two modes of transport running on the same

platform require careful fine-tuning of movement schedules. However, once the buses become tethered to the trains, they would automatically have to follow Metro timings which are much better calibrated, superior and dependable.

And thirdly, by fastening its buses to Metro trains, the existing and proposed BRT projects would not be restricted to just a few privileged sectors in Delhi.

Of course one would still have to deal with monumental nitpickers. The Delhi Urban Arts Commission for instance might, as usual, complain that the attached buses somehow don't look aesthetically pleasing. But no problem again. This merely needs a cosmetic fix. Replace each bus body with an empty outer shell of a Metro coach, along with its seating fixtures and internal fittings, and no one would ever know the difference.

In years to come people would forget that a BRT which could have ruined their commuting careers ever existed. Yet, to the vast relief of the transport authorities, it would be right there among them all the time, covertly functioning as a multimodalised module of the Metro system.

