

## **Review of “Sisu Saeriya” School Bus Service**

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### **Abstract**

Transport, although it is considered to have derived demand, plays a crucial role in the economic, social, and cultural development of a country. The development of a country is directly attributable to efficient and effective transport systems. School transportation is an area to which a society should pay particular attention as it concerns an especially important cohort of future society.

This abstract presents a case study on the Sri Lankan school bus service “Sisu Saeriya” initiated in 2005 with the intention of providing State assistance for school transport through a sustainable, reliable, and safe mechanism. It was introduced in response to mounting social pressure pertaining to the drawbacks of the pre-existing system in terms of reliability, quality and safety. “Sisu Saeriya” provides bus services at a concessionary rate through a State subsidy to school children across the country and contracts with both public and private bus operators to engage in regular scheduled services through a separate set of regulatory and safety conditions.

Inaugurated by the National Transport Commission on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2005 with 180 buses at Temple Trees in Colombo, Sisu Saeriya currently engages over 1,400 buses serving more than 100,000 school children daily. International practices have been reviewed to understand global best practices to benchmark the features of the “Sisu Saeriya” program. Reliability, security, affordability, ownership, continuity, quality, and monitoring are key features in the system. Reliability is ensured by imposing penalties for non-operations of buses and delays; thereby compelling regular operations. Security is ensured by stipulating that two teachers are carried free of charge and the issuance of safety guidelines to operators. Charging passengers only 50% while allowing the use of existing concessionary monthly payment schemes

has resulted in a more affordable service. School Transport Committees (STCs) made up of teachers and students have been set up and delegated ownership of the system. Reimbursing estimated operator losses through a dedicated budget allocation for “Sisu Saeriya” and incorporation of both State and private operators has assured continuity of operations. Quality is maintained by specifying standards required for safe and convenient carriage of children including minimum age for bus crews, uniforms, EPF/ETF etc. in the contract and its termination clauses. The STCs and the regulatory agencies (Provincial Transport Authorities (PTAs), National Transport Commission (NTC)) monitor compliance and certification is mandatory before payments are made.

“Sisu Saeriya” has many notable features - especially for a developing middle-income country like Sri Lanka - which enable it to be compared to other leading global school transport systems. The design that integrates the SLTB and private providers in routine schedule services to deliver this service without conflict or loss of existing operations is a key attribute. The demand driven process and setting up STCs and empowering them has ensured several key success parameters: namely, (a) ownership, (b) certification of services, and (c) continuity. The distinctive features of the system have formulated a fruitful and sustainable solution despite Sri Lanka’s financial and resource constraints.

**Keywords:** *Sisu Saeriya, Transport, School Children, Dedicated, Concession, Sri Lanka*