

## **Social Impact Assessment and Mitigation of the Negative Impacts in the Light Rail Transit Projects in Colombo Metropolitan Region of Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Conducting a comprehensive Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is an essential and integral part during the planning stage of any infrastructural development project in today's world. Sri Lanka is planning its first Light Rail Transit (LRT) project in the Colombo Metropolitan Region (CMR) which covers 14 Divisional Secretariate Divisions (DSDs) in Colombo and Gampaha Districts. The core area of Colombo is mainly considered as the Central Business Development (CBD) area, while Sri Jayawardenapura is considered as the Administrative area of the country. Other suburban areas (Dehiwala, Rathmalana, Moratuwa, Piliyandala, Maharagama, Nugegoda, Kaduwela in Colombo Districts and Biyagama, Mahara, Kelaniya, and Wattala in Gampaha District) are considered as future segments of CMR as per the Urban Development Authority (UDA). Gampaha district is having the highest number of population in the country. The CBD, administrative capital and aforesaid segments in Colombo district are also having a high population density. The current transportation system prevailing in these areas of both districts are having very high traffic congestions in all trunk road networks towards Colombo. The LRT is a choice of UDA to reduce traffic congestions in the metropolitan area.

The LRT system is in its planning stage and there are four lines already been selected and prioritized by the UDA. There are three lines named Red, Blue, and Green are models identified as Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) implementation and the planning of this PPP model is focused on this research paper. The objective of the research is to identify the effectiveness of using the practical approach of SIA in terms of mitigating the negative impacts of the project toward the community in the project influenced area of LRT. The methodology of this research paper is constituted with the case study method and the ethnographic method. The techniques of data collection are interviews, discussions, and participant observation. The SIA is conducted in late 2018 to mid of 2019 and presented to the Western Region Transport Development Project under the UDA. The entire process of preparation of the SIA is considered as the platform of current research and the author was the team leader who conducted and prepared the SIA and Resettlement Action Plan for the project.

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The findings of the research show that there is a significant avenue to reduce the overall project cost if there is a comprehensive SIA conducted. Especially, SIA helped to identify hotspots and sensitive issues in LRT. Further, it resulted in amendments in individual route designs and mitigate adverse social impacts. Also, it helped to reduce the length of the individual route. The public and stakeholder consultation process that needs to be conducted during the SIA data collection process is the key to the identification of the negative social impacts of the project. Also, it helps to minimize the impact on buildings and lands through finding less inhabited areas. Moreover, stakeholder consultation makes positive sense among the key trade and business community to invest in the LRT project. Finally, SIA inputs made sound awareness on all positive and negative impacts among the key officials and designers.

**Key Words:** *SIA, LRT, CMR, Mitigation of impacts*

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