

NEW
Newsletters

Subscribe
To Epaper

[Home](#) / [City](#) / Prepaid as 'auto' option

Prepaid as 'auto' option

Auto rickshaws still queue up but quote their own fare, demolishing the very concept of 'pre-paid'



Rasheed Kappan, JUL 29 2022, 21:33 IST | UPDATED: JUL 30 2022, 09:08 IST



Metro commuters have often found the counters either shut or not enough autorickshaws lining up. Credit: DH Photo

For decades, the rickshaw was our 'auto'matic first-mile, last-mile choice. Wrangling with the drivers had a strong reference: The ubiquitous auto meter. Bargain rates rarely ventured beyond the one-and-half or twice the meter charge. Today, the meter sticks out like a redundant bone, a vestige of an era long gone. So, are prepaid auto rickshaws the way ahead?

But wait. Have we not tried these prepaid counters before, ask the harried commuters in unison. Still a rarity, the counters are anything but perfect. Most have shut due to apparent lack of personnel. Auto rickshaws still queue up but quote their own fare, demolishing the very concept of 'pre-paid.'

Metro, traffic police plan

So, what is new? Moves are now afoot to boost the functionality of the existing prepaid counters, and start new ones at many more Metro stations. The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) and the city traffic police have a plan.

Strictly manned, enforced and regulated, the prepaid counters could work. As Adarsha Auto and Taxi Drivers Union General Secretary C Sampath points out, the counters will also help drivers get trips, irrespective of the distance. But there is a problem of reliability.

Metro commuters have often found the counters either shut or not enough autorickshaws lining up. Enforcement is key with the active participation of the city traffic police.

Ease accessibility

"Besides, BMRCL should identify areas where they need autos as good first mile and last mile options. Give them prominent spaces in the premises of Metro stations to ease accessibility. A bit of planning is required," notes Ashish Varma, a transportation engineering expert from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

How about integrating the auto rickshaw as part of an end-to-end commute option in a technology platform that involves both the BMRCL and the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCL) buses?

This can work as a win-win for all stakeholders. Notes Varma, "BMRCL wants to boost ridership, and the Metro cannot go to every nook and corner. While Metro coaches may be comfortable, what happens when you get out of the station? From a commuter perspective, the end-to-end journey, total travel time and total travel cost, needs to be competitive."

Auto in Metro App?

The big idea is this: If an autorickshaw can be booked on an App as a first mile and last mile option for a Metro/bus commute, the shift to public transport can work. "There is a need to integrate these first and last mile modes into Metro's App and other tech platforms. This way, the total price will become competitive."

Drivers, who get attached to the platform, could get dedicated passengers. If regulated and enforced well, the reliability will improve. Structured and organised well, the autorickshaws could morph well into a complementary role.

One-time chance

But, as Sampath reminds, the prepaid counters can work well only if the larger problem with auto rickshaws is addressed. "In many cases, drivers don't have licenses, permits, or insurance. That's why these drivers refuse to come on line. The police should identify those without documents, give them one chance to renew the permits and get other documents," he suggests.

Many drivers, he points out, are fleeced by middlemen and insurance agents who overprice the premium. Since they run into debt, they often pass on this burden to the passengers. "The Transport Department says there are 1.45 lakh autos in the city, but the Legal Metrology Department will tell you there are only 45,000 vehicles."

The rest, inevitably, are without proper documents. "Drivers are scared the police will catch them. That is why they refuse to come on hire. If someone claims to be a driver, he should have DL, route permit, RC book with fitness certificate and insurance."

BBMP, get involved

Former State Director General of Police Ajai Kumar Singh, who had overseen the city traffic in an earlier posting, recalls how prepaid auto rickshaws were common in Bengaluru decades ago. "It is an extremely useful and much needed system. But the present system is awfully inadequate," he notes.

Besides BMRCL and the Traffic Police, he says, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) too should actively collaborate to reintroduce the system. "There were prepaid counters in M G Road, Commercial Street. Former City Police Commissioner had introduced it decades back in City Railway Station. All the stakeholders should take it seriously and introduce it in as many places as possible."