

# Service Delivery and Consumer's Satisfaction under Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC)



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**Abstract:** So far as the hostile geographical locations such as hilly mountains, large forest, remotest of the remote areas and flood affected regions are concerned, passengers are heavily reliant on Road Transport Sector. Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) is a Public Sector Road Transport Corporation which has been providing bus services to the people of Assam and its connected regions but many studies and reports show that the corporation fails to provide quality services to the passengers in the regions. Infact consumer's satisfaction is more and more dependent on quality of services produced by an organization. Thus, this study attempts to understand the issue of service delivery and consumer's satisfaction under the ASTC following certain indicators. On the basis of field observation and data collected from 200 respondents, the study finds that ASTC fails to provide quality services to the passengers with regard to different issues such as addressing technical problems, availability of A/C connection in bus, availability of push back system, availability of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), quality of shelter during halt etc. The study suggests that the issue of consumer's satisfaction should be taken care of seriously by the corporation and it is only possible if quality of services is improved under ASTC concerning different issues such as adherence to bus time table, availability of alarm used by passengers, cleanness of bus stop, availability of road safety guide book etc. The prime need of the time is to handle the matter in a strict hand.

**Index Terms:** Pubic Road Transport Sector, Service Delivery, Consumer's Satisfaction

## I. INTRODUCTION

Transport communication plays a vital role in the development process of a country or a state. Now-a-days, more and more thrust has been put on transport communication so that commodities and services can be provided to the remotest of the remote locations. So far as the issue of transport communication is concerned, road transport plays a vital role in moving goods and people from one place to another. Priyanka Vasudevan (Vasudevan et.al. 2014) mentions that while comparing the future demand for buses and other modes of travel, the demand for buses is more than that for other modes. The author has also stated that availability of adequate, safe and comfortable passenger transport facility is a very important index of economic development of any country. India has reformed transport sector in the wave of Liberalization, Privatization and

Globalization (LPG) and, the new model of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) has replaced the old state-owned governing system in the country.

Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) provides bus services for carrying goods and passengers. The corporation covers the state of Assam and in its connected states. To improve the quality of service as well as to increasing efficiency of the corporation, the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model has been introduced in the sector so that passengers can enjoy comfort journey under ASTC.

Delivery of quality services to the consumers is dependent on its structural and functional efficiency of any kind of organization. It is very essential to create efficient, effective and scientific model to run works of an organization to satisfy the need of the consumers. It gives opportunity for smooth functioning in the organizations. It also helps in providing quality services to the consumers. Maria Morfoulaki opines (Morfoulaki et.al, 2007) that customer's satisfaction can be considered as the overall level of attainment of a customer's expectations. According to Industrial & Investment Policy of Assam, 2014, there is approximately a total road length of 69,000 km in the state. The policy also provides that except road transportation, other sectors of transportation recorded a positive growth over the performance. On the other hand, there is heavy reliance on road sector by the people of Assam because of hostile geographical location with hilly mountains and large forest. Simultaneously, a major part of the state is affected by flood every year. Thus, service providers of Road Transport Sector have played a crucial role in proving bus services to the consumers. But, many reports and studies have stated that ASTC has been providing services with many obstacles which have hampered in producing quality services.

Sanjay Kumar Singh (2017) provides that achieving financial sustainability is the biggest challenge for STUs in the current scenario in India. It is also stated that the main hurdles for improving financial health of India's State Transport Undertakings (STUs) are lack of competitiveness and market-orientation, lack of skilled and specialized workforce etc. It can be said that this situation affects in providing quality services to the consumers in different regards. Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) is also a STU, Government of Assam which has provided bus services to the people of different regions. So far as the ASTC is concerned, many causes of poor performance of ASTC have been indicated in COFR Report such as imbalance ratio of bus and employee (1:40 in against of national ratio 1:8 and Assam Private Transport Sector ratio is 1:4), failure in management, lack of proper maintenance of buses etc (cited in COFR, 2001).

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Departmentally Related Standing Committee (DRSC), Transport Department, Govt. of Assam (2000-2001) provides that sufficient budget provisions are necessary to avail different passengers amenities at the various bus stations such as toilet, rest house, clock room, waiting room, bus shed etc. The DRSC, 2013-2014 also provides that fund under plan head is required to repair and upgrade the old bus stations with a purpose to provide basic facilities and quality services to the passengers. Arvind Chaudhari (2015) has used different indicators such as cleaning at bus stops, drinking water facility, light and fan facility, seating arrangement at platform etc. to assess the quality of services at bus stations provided by Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) and he finds that the facilities have been provided for the comfort of passengers but due to some obstacles, the corporation is unable to serve the passengers to the extent possible. Arvind Chaudhari has blamed both parties i.e. consumers and service provider for emergence of such adverse situation because both of them are irresponsible of their duties. It can be said that passengers are responsible because many of them misuse public properties. On the other hand, it can be also assumed that service providers are responsible because they have failed to handle the cases in a strict hand. The main purpose of constituting ASTC is to providing quality services to the passengers and to deliver bus services to the people at reasonable prices. So far as the Public Sector Road Transport Corporation (PSRTC) is concerned, it is also expected that the ASTC would contribute to the development of the state of Assam where the only reliable mode of transport communication is road considering the inaccessible remotest of the remote areas, flood affected regions and hilly terrain and it has drawn the attention to investigate on the question to what extent the purpose of establishing ASTC has been fulfilled. Thus, this study attempts to understand the issue of service delivery including level of consumer's satisfaction and factors related to service delivery has been discussed on the basis of mainly on primary data. The study would help the Bus Service Providers (BSP) and policy makers to improve the quality of services. Simultaneously, it would also help Governments to take necessary steps to develop the Public Road Transport Corporations (PRTCs).

### II. METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were collected from books, journals, government reports etc. and primary data were collected from passengers travelled by ASTC's buses. There are total eight divisions of ASTC. Out of them, Guwahati and Lakhimpur divisions have been purposively selected for field study. Purposive sampling has been used because it helps to cover both rural as well as urban bus services under ASTC. Guwahati is the biggest city of Assam. On the other hand, Lakhimpur division covers two districts of Assam (Lakhimpur and Dhemaji) where majority of the people are living in rural areas. Four stations (two from each division) have been randomly selected to collect primary data. They are-Dhakuakhana station and Dhemaji station(Lakhimpur Division) and Paltanbazar station and Rupnagar Urban Service (Guwahati Division). Number of stations is finite and thus, random sampling method has been used to select the divisions and sub-stations. The data were collected through interview schedule. A total number of 200 respondents (50 passengers from each station) were contacted on the basis of

purposive sampling. Purposive sampling has been used because number of passengers travelled by ASTC's buses is infinite. The responses collected from the passengers from both rural as well as city areas help to understand overall quality of services provided by ASTC and level of satisfaction received by passengers under ASTC. Following section deals with the indicators of the study.

### III. CLASSIFICATION ON THE SERVICE QUALITY INDICATORS

**Facilities Available in ASTC's Buses:** The indicators such as quality of seat of the buses, availability of push back system, availability of A/C connection in bus, availability of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), availability of Light Emitting Diode (LED) Monitors, entertainment provided to the passengers, condition of the body/engine of the bus, emergency exit, availability of safety measures, availability of road safety guide book, availability of equipments to control fire, availability of alarm used by passengers would help to see the availability/unavailability as well as quality of services in ASTC's buses. These indicators also help to assess the issue of proving quality services at reasonable prices to all sections of the society which is the prime objective of constitution of ASTC.

**Emergency Service:** The indicators such as availability of emergency medical service, time taken for addressing technical problems, handling of unforeseen situations, handling of unsocial consumers would help to assess the quality of emergency services provided by ASTC. The issues such as emergency medical service, time taken to address technical problems etc. influence a lot in customer's satisfaction on services delivered by Bus Corporations. Thus, these indicators would reveal the emergency service quality and consumer's satisfaction under ASTC.

**Services Related to Bus Timing and Ticketing:** The indicators such as availability of Electronic-Ticketing System (ETS), the manner of bus cancellations are handled, refund of money if bus cancelled, midway ticketing adherence to bus time table and prior information on re-scheduling of bus would help to highlight the availability/unavailability and quality of services related to bus timing and ticketing system under ASTC. At present days, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) impacts a lot in service delivery such as ETS. Similarly reimbursement of money through electronic system, using ICT in highlighting bus time schedule as well as providing prior information on re-scheduling of buses help the institutions to produce quicker services to the consumers and it satisfies the service recipients at large which motivates them to receive services from those institutions which have delivered services through Electronic modes to the consumers in different regards. Thus, these indicators would help to see the capability of ASTC to satisfy the needs of the passengers regarding the same.

**Facilities at Bus Stops:** Passenger's satisfaction is also related to available facilities and quality of services at bus stops.

The indicators such as cleanness of bus stop, quality of shelter during halt, quality of seats at stations, availability of fan and availability of safe drinking water would help to highlight the availability/unavailability and quality of services in ASTC's bus stations. Data collected from passengers would reveal the level of satisfaction received by them at the same.

Responses of the passengers on those issues would reveal the status of services provided by ASTC and would also reveal the level of satisfaction received by passengers under the corporation. Following section deals with the issue of quality of services under ASTC.

**IV. PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS**

Public Sector Transport Corporation (PSTC) provides bus services to fulfil the demand for bus services at fair and reasonable prices. It is more and more relevant in the welfare states like India. In case of State of Assam (India), the concerned authority has established ASTC to provide quality bus services to the people of the regions. Thus, it is quite interesting to see the responses of the target group on the issues related to services provided by the ASTC. Following table provides the views of respondents on certain issues related to services provided by ASTC:

**Table 1: Respondent's View on Certain Common Issues With Regard to Services Provided by ASTC**

Sl. No	Issues	Availability (In%)		Responses (In%)		
		Yes	No	Satisfactory	Manageable	Unsatisfactory
1	Technical problems addressed	92	08	30	58	12
2	Buses keeping time schedule	95	05	30	59	11
3	Cleanness of bus stop	NA	NA	7	63	30
4	E-ticketing system	52	48	--	84	16

Source: Field Data

Table no. 1 shows the respondent's view on certain services provided by ASTC. With regard to the issue of technical problems addressed by ASTC, 92% of the respondents have viewed that ASTC has addressed technical problems but 58% of the respondents have mentioned that it is only manageable and for 12% of the respondents, it is unsatisfactory. It can be said that though the majority of passengers are manageable with the issue but they are not fully satisfied. Majority of the passengers are manageable but not satisfied because field observation shows that it is time consuming and not up to the level of passenger's demand.

On the other hand, field observation highlights many obstacles with regard to addressing the technical problems like poor infrastructure, rigid official procedures, non introduction of modern technologies and so and so forth.

Therefore, many a time, concerned authority cannot address the arising technical problems at proper time effectively.

With regard to the issue of availability of time schedule for running buses, 95% of the respondents have mentioned that ASTC has time schedule for running buses while 05% of the respondents viewed that the corporation does not have any time schedule for the same. Here, 30% of the respondents have stated that they are satisfied regarding the issue of availability of time schedule for running buses under ASTC. On the other hand, 59% of the respondents have stated that it is only manageable and for 11% of the respondents, it is unsatisfactory. Thus, it can be said that time-schedule has been maintained by ASTC but it is only manageable for the majority of the passengers.

Here, 95% of the respondents find existence of time schedule for running buses but majority are manageable because it is mentioned that many a time, buses are not moved as per predetermined time schedule. However, majority of the respondents mention that after getting reasonable passengers, buses are moved from the concerned stations. Thus, it can be said that buses are run with little time variation based on number of passengers available at time.

With regard to the issue of cleanliness of bus stop, 7% of the respondents have mentioned that they are satisfied whereas for 63% of the respondents, it is only manageable and other 30% of the respondents have said that they are dissatisfied on the issue. Field observation also finds that bus stations are unhygienic and not convenient for passengers.

Majority of the passengers are manageable because though cleanness of bus stations are not up to the demand of the passengers but certain facilities are their such as seats, fan etc. which are normally not available outside the station for strangers. However, it is understood that majority of the respondents are not happy on the issue because they are either dissatisfied or manageable on the issue and it is seen that only a few respondents are happy with the service provided by the corporation. With regard to the issue of E-ticking system, 52% of the respondents have mentioned that the service is not available under ASTC whereas 48% of the respondents have opined that E-ticking facility is available under the corporation. Here, 84% of the respondents are manageable and 16% of the respondents are dissatisfied on the issue. It is noticed that none of the respondents is satisfied on the issue.

Here, majority of the respondents are manageable because it is mentioned that if tickets cannot be booked through online system, it can be done in specific counters situated in different places. Thus, for these passengers, this is manageable task for them. Field observation reveals that poor network is a major hindrance in this regard specifically in rural areas. On the other hand, it is also found that web portal of ASTC is hardly worked in case of booking tickets. Therefore, a section of consumers are dissatisfied on the issue specifically in those areas where network is convenient for browsing internet. It is also noticed that a large number of passengers does not have adequate knowledge on the E-services such as E-ticketing. Following table provides the opinions of the respondents on certain passenger's safety related issues:



**Table 2: Respondent's View on Certain Passenger's Safety Related Matters of Service Quality Provided by ASTC**

Sl. No.	Issues	Availability (In%)		Response (In%)		
		Yes	No	Satisfactory	Manageable	Unsatisfactory
1	Safety measures	88	12	09	60	31
2	road safety guide book	70	30	7	77	16

Source: Field Data

In the above table, 88% of the respondents have mentioned that safety measures are available in ASTC's buses. On the other hand, 12% of the respondents have mentioned that these are not available in the buses of ASTC. Out of the total respondents, 09% of the respondents have satisfied on the issue but for 60% of the respondents, it is only manageable and 31% of the respondents have mentioned that they are dissatisfied on the same. The table reveals that though the majority of the respondents are manageable but they are not fully satisfied on the issue.

Here, 88% of the respondents mention that it is available in ASTC buses but majority is manageable with the same because the equipments such as emergency door, fire extinguishers etc. are in worse condition. Through the field observation, it is also noticed that periodical check of these equipments are not done by concerned authority. Thus, usability of these equipments is questionable and it can be said that these are only kept to fulfill the terms and conditions.

The table shows that according to 70% of the respondents, road safety guidebook is available in ASTC's buses whereas 32% of the respondents have mentioned that it is not available in the buses. Out of the total respondents, 7% of the respondents have mentioned that they are satisfied on the issue but majority of the respondents (77%) are manageable and 16% of the respondents are dissatisfied with the same. Thus, the table reveals that though the safety measures are available under ASTC, passengers are not fully satisfied because for the majority of the respondents, it is only manageable. Field observation provides that in majority of the buses, road safety guidebook is unavailable. On the other hand, it is also noticed that a huge number of respondents don't have adequate knowledge on road safety guide book. Following table provides the opinion of the respondents on the issue of availability of certain facilities in ASTC's buses:

**Table 3: Responses of the Passengers on the Issue of availability and Quality of Certain Facilities in ASTC's Buses**

Sl. No	Issues	Availability (In%)	Responses (In%)
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		Yes	No	Satisfactory	Manageable	Unsatisfactory
1	Audio & Video	66	34	10	65	25
2	A/C Connection	72	28	6	85	9
3	Complaint box	53	47	9	60	31
4	equipments to control fire	93	07	13	82	05
5	CCTV	42	58	16	49	35
6	LED Monitors	38	62	11	56	33
7	Emergency Exit	92	08	5	85	10

Source: Field Data

Table no. 3 shows that majority of the respondents have found certain enlisted facilities in the table in ASTC's buses such as complaint box, audio & video, A/C connection, equipment to control fire and emergency exit. With regard to LED monitor and CCTV, majority of the respondents have opined that these facilities are not available in buses of ASTC. It is also noticed in the table that a large number of the respondents are only manageable and they are not fully satisfied on the issues. Even many respondents are dissatisfied with the available facilities in the buses of ASTC. The field observation reveals that LED monitor, CCTV and A/C connection have been made available in city services but these have been rarely found in rural bus services under ASTC. With regard to audio and video facilities, the field observation provides that these are available in certain ASTC's buses which have been used for carrying passengers for long distance. The filed observation also reveals that available facilities are in worse conditions and in certain cases it is found that these are either inactivated or unable to provide required services. With regard to the facilities such as CCTV and LED Monitor, field observation shows that these are hardly available in rural services. In city areas, these facilities are available in certain buses but not in all cases. Following table highlights respondent's view on certain personal issues of services provided by ASTC

**Table 4: Respondent's View on Certain Personal Issues of Services Provided by ASTC**

Sl. No	Issues	Availability (In%)		Responses (In%)		
		Yes	No	Satisfactory	Manageable	Unsatisfactory
1	Cleanliness of seat	NA	NA	24	61	15
2	Emergency medical	86	14	07	87	06
3	Push back system	74	26	10	75	15
4	Handling bus cancellation	90	10	40	52	08
5	Refund of money if bus cancelled	91	09	39	45	16
6	prior information on re-scheduling of bus timing	88	12	53	39	08



7	Alarm used by passengers	42	58	06	72	22
8	Quality of shelter during halt	NA	NA	00	21	79
9	Handling of a unforeseen situations	84	16	10	84	06
10	Handling of unsocial consumers	91	09	06	86	08
11	Midway ticket	87	13	09	84	07

**Source:** Data collected from the respondents

Table no. 4 shows that the majority of the respondents are only manageable with different services provided by ASTC such as cleanness of seat, midway ticketing, emergency medical, push back system, availability of alarm for passengers and refund of money in case of cancellation of buses. It is noticed that a few numbers of the respondents are happy with the same. The table shows that majority of the respondents are also manageable on the issues such as handling of unforeseen situations and handling of unsocial consumers. On the issue of prior information on re-scheduling of bus timing, majority of the passengers have satisfied with the same. It is noticed in the table that highest numbers of the respondents are dissatisfied with the quality of shelter during halt under ASTC. Therefore, it can be said that quality of different services are yet to be improved under ASTC to satisfy the need of passengers and to compete with other road transport corporations in the region. The field observation reveals that the facilities such as push back system of the seats in old buses don't work properly. It is noticed that many a time, uncleanness of seats in old ASTC's buses dissatisfies the passengers. However, the quality of seats in new buses is comparatively better than the old buses of ASTC. Table no. 4 provides that ASTC provides different services such as emergency medical and handling of bus cancellation but majority of the passengers have not been fully satisfied with the services of ASTC. On the other hand, field observation reveals that more or less, ASTC depends on other sectors to deliver these services and thus, it affects in service delivery. Therefore, many a time, non-cooperation of other sectors such as medical service providers and emergency bus providers affects in delivering services in accurate time as well as in emergency situations. Table no. 4 provides that according to the majority of the respondents, quality of shelter during halt is not satisfactory and it is noticed that no a single respondent is satisfied with the facility. Simultaneously, the field observation also reveals that rest houses of ASTC are in worse condition and it is also noticed that the passengers cannot spend time in these rest houses. These are unhygienic and concerned authority doesn't maintain the same properly.

Table no. 4 also shows that according to 87% of the respondents, midway tickets have been provided to passengers but the table also reveals that it is only manageable for them. The field observation provides that many a time, extra charges have been demanded by the bus employees to pick up the passengers from different places of travelling routs. Thus, it can be said that malpractices are being used by bus employees to gather extra illegal money which affects in collection of revenue of the corporation. With regard to the issue of availability of alarm in ASTC's buses, the field observation reveals that alarm is available in the buses but these are rarely activated in practice and thus, these are no use. Thus, by observing the table, it is understood that passengers are not happy regarding different facilities and services provided by ASTC such as cleanliness of seat,

emergency medical facility, push back system of seats, handling bus cancellation, quality of shelter during halt and so and so forth.

## V. CONCLUSION

Being a public sector organization as well as funded from common tax payer's money, ASTC is legally and morality responsible for public and is answerable to the people. Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC), being a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU), Government of Assam has the responsibility to respond public interest and demands to the possible extent. The corporation has been established to providing quality bus services to the people at fair and reasonable price and it is expected that people of the region can travel by road at fair and reasonable prices irrespective of different classes. The corporation is deemed to be a cheaper mode of transportation for all classes of society to conveniently continuing their day to day works in the region. The result of this study has shown that ASTC has deviated from the objectives of its establishment. The investigation finds that ASTC has failed to maintain quality of services in different regards and the corporation cannot fulfill the demand of the passengers to a large extent. So far as the issue of consumer's satisfaction is concerned, the dilapidated conditions of working stations, inconvenient bus services such as poor quality rest houses, poor entertaining equipments etc. have resulted in dissatisfaction of the passengers under ASTC. It can be also said that these conditions affect in overall performance of the corporation. Therefore, based on the findings, it can be said that the parameters of consumer's satisfaction have become serious issues which are needed to be improved for survival of the corporation and to contribute to the development of public road transport sector in particular and the development of the country in general.

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