

# Traffic congestion problems in colombo city



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It is a much known fact nowadays that the traffic congestion in Colombo has increased to a level that most of the personnel operating in Colombo city limits get disturbed in their day to day activities. Further it has come to the light that the traffic accidents in Colombo city area also have been increased during the recent past to a considerable amount mainly due to this congestion. Out of the overall number of traffic accidents reported within the country the most numbers are reported from Colombo city limits. Number of lives lost due to these accidents cannot be considered in light whilst minor scale accidents reported stands at large. Unreported numbers of minor scale accidents are not known but would be as double as the number of reported.

Difficulties faced by the motorists, pedestrians, traffic police officials and generally the public in Colombo area due to this traffic congestion are very high. The day to day life of the general public such as attending their office duties, attending children to schools, attending other domestic affairs are getting disturbed heavily due to the unforeseen delays they are compelled to experience at roads caused by traffic congestion blocking the smooth vehicle movements in Colombo city. This is generally wastage of innumerable number of man-hours of working people, losing billions of rupees of income to the Gross National Product.

It is a known fact that the highest number of vehicles, comparative to the other cities in Sri Lanka, operating in Colombo city. Reason for the same is Colombo is the main city in Sri Lanka to where large number of people travel daily to do their jobs, send most number of children to the large number of leading schools located within the city. Further the Colombo harbour is situated within the Colombo city limits resulting a large number of vehicle

movements for transportation of goods. Most number of star class tourists hotels located in a single city is Colombo resulting large number of vehicle movements in between Bandaranayke International Airport, Katunayaka and Colombo. Generally the main commercial city of Sri Lanka is Colombo and as a result of that almost all the personnel living at wherever the country are compelled to come to Colombo for some reason which increase the vehicle congestion in Colombo city limits.

4. When a large number of vehicles are operating within a limited area in Colombo city, it is obvious that the number of traffic accidents could be at a higher rate comparative to the number of accidents happened in other cities in Sri Lanka. But in this context what is important to be researched is the reasons for those large number of accidents. The amount of vehicle operating in Colombo city would not be a good reason for any of the citizen of this country to be met with a traffic accident and to get injured or to be killed. This being the situation time has come to analyze the causes contributing to the increase of traffic congestion in Colombo city and to come up with viable solutions to address this problem which will in turn be beneficial to the future prospects of Colombo city, as well as the country as a whole.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **AIM**

5. The aim of this research paper is to analyze the major causes which contributing to the traffic congestion in Colombo city limits and to come up

with feasible measures to create a smooth traffic movement in Colombo city limits as an example for the rest of the cities in the country.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

6. Increase of traffic congestion within the Colombo city limits at a drastic rate within a very short period of time has not only resulted the general public operating in the Colombo city to experience unforeseen difficulties at roads but also to be ended up at sometime with fatalities or losses of lives. The continuance in the increase of rate of traffic congestion in Colombo city would become a major burden for the motorists, pedestrians, traffic police officials and all the communities operating in Colombo city and also will bring negative impacts to the development of Colombo as well as the country unless addressed systematically. This research is to identify the major causes which have contributed for the increase of traffic congestion in Colombo city and to recommend feasible measures to reduce the same.

## **THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

7. Unlawful driving habits of the motorists who do not adhere to the traffic regulations is hypnotized as the main cause for the increase of motor traffic congestion in Colombo.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

8. The scope of the study is to confined to the motorists, pedestrians and traffic police officials operating in Colombo city limits to identify their views and attitudes towards the increased rate of traffic accidents in Colombo. The paper also concentrates much on the statistical records of traffic accidents happened in Colombo during the past decade.

## **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

9. The collection of data and information for this research will be highly based on the views and the perceptions of the motorists, pedestrians, officials of traffic police department and those who have met with road traffic accidents which will be derived through systematical interviews. A questionnaire will be distributed among 50 personnel composed with 25 drivers including heavy vehicle, light vehicle and three wheeler drivers, 10 pedestrians, 10 personnel met with traffic accidents and 5 traffic police officers. Further this research analysis will be highly based on past statistics available on all traffic accidents in Colombo.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

10. The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 - Introduction.

Chapter 2 - Methodology.

Chapter 3 - Increase of vehicle population in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 4 - Reasons contributing to the traffic congestion in Colombo.

Chapter 5 - Observations made by the Researcher.

Chapter 6 - Analysis of data.

Chapter 7 - Recommendations.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion.

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## CHAPTER 3

### INCREASE OF VEHICLE POPULATION IN SRI LANKA

11. It is a known fact that the vehicle population of Sri Lanka was very minimal before 1980s and wonder whether a word called traffic congestion was heard at that time. However with the influx of the concepts of open economy to the country, the vehicle population was increased but at a moderate rate during 80s and 90s. So that the road network in the country, though not developed much, was sufficient to accommodate the transportation in the country without traffic congestion. But within the last decade the vehicle population of the country was expanded at a drastic rate and almost doubled within a period of eight years. The following statistics at Table 3. 1[1] gives a clear picture of the vehicle population of the country and the composition of the same.

12. Table 3. 2[2] shows the rate of increasing of vehicles in the country with the new registrations per year. From year 2002 onwards the new registrations per year exceeds 200, 000. In this context what we have to identify is whether the road network has been expanded comparatively to accommodate this number of vehicles.

13. When it comes to Colombo city, it has been revealed that approximately 400, 000 vehicles move in and out of Colombo daily basis, which is approximately 15% of the total vehicle population of the country. Though the road network of the main city of the country has been extensively expanded as well, the traffic congestion due to different contributing factors could not have been avoided. It has been come to light that following are the main

contributing factors for the traffic congestion in Colombo city and its suburbs.

High volume of vehicle movements within the city.

Not having a proper traffic plan in the city.

Closure of certain roads for security reasons.

Bad driving habits of drivers violating traffic rules.

Improper parking habits of drivers interrupting smooth vehicle movements due to non availability sufficient parking facilities.

Poor traffic controlling duties of traffic police officials.

Use of old vehicles not road worthy.

Increase of vehicle accidents due to high volume of vehicle movements blocking the smooth vehicle movements.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **REASONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE TRAFFIC CONGESTION IN COLOMBO**

14. Colombo City is the most populated city in Sri Lanka and the living standards of the people living in Colombo is comparatively high resulting a considerable number of people out of those living in Colombo are in possession of a kind of personal vehicles. Further a huge number of people moves in and out of the Colombo city daily basis making the number of vehicles moving in and out on daily basis is very high. As per the statistics

available at Traffic Branch of the Police Department, approximately 400, 000 vehicles of different categories move in Colombo city daily.

15. Due to this large number of vehicles moving in and out of the Colombo city the average number of accidents reported within the Colombo city is 200 out of which 6 are fatal. It is important to have an idea of the general perception towards the contributing factors for the traffic congestion in Colombo city.

## **GENERAL PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

16. Based on the outcome of the ideas obtained from a cross section of drivers and non-drivers operating in Colombo city through a distribution of a questionnaire attached as Annex “ A”, the following factors were revealed out of which some are identified as the contributing factors for the traffic congestion in Colombo city.

### **Chart 4. 1 – Possession of valid driving license**

17. It was revealed through a distribution of questionnaires among 50 personnel driving different types of vehicles in Colombo city area only 80% are with valid driving license whilst others drive different categories of vehicles without driving or riding license as elaborated in Chart 4. 1.

### **Chart 4. 2 – Knowledge on Traffic Rules**

18. Percentage of the personnel who are driving vehicles and having an average knowledge on traffic rules and regulations is 60% whilst both the categories of those with very good knowledge and poor stands at 20% each as displayed in Chart 4. 2.



### **Chart 4. 3 – Adherence of Traffic Rules**

19. Adherence to traffic rules plays a major role in the context of traffic congestion of any where on the road so do at the Colombo city area and the composition of the same with regard to Colombo city area is as per above Chart 4. 3. As per the statistical data received in this regard only 5% of the personnel drive vehicles in Colombo city adhering 100% to the traffic rules and regulations. 70% adhere traffic rules but sometimes violating. 20% adhere traffic rules only when they feel it is required to do so whilst 5% adhere only when traffic police are expected or to be seen on the road.

### **Chart 4. 4 – Ratio of Drivers met with Accidents whilst driving in Colombo**

The Chart 4. 4 shows how rare we can find a person driving a kind of vehicle but not have met with an accident whilst driving in Colombo. 80% of the drivers have met with some kind of traffic accident whilst driving in Colombo. It is important to identify the main reasons behind those accidents and Chart 4. 5 elaborates the same. 30% have met with accidents due to the fact that they have not adhering to the traffic rules, at the time of meeting the accident whilst 50% have met with the accidents as a result of the violation of traffic rules by the another party. 15% have met with accident due to the congestion of traffic in Colombo, whilst only 5% due to some other reasons.

### **Chart 4. 5 – Reasons for the Accidents in Colombo City**

21. It is a known fact that use of mobile phones by the drivers whilst driving is one of the major reasons contributing for the traffic accidents so do for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. The research reveals as highlighted at Chart 4. 6 that 80% personnel uses mobile phones whilst driving. It was also

revealed that 10 % don't use mobile phones whilst driving and the balance 10% uses mobile phones however after parking the vehicle by side of the road.

### **Chart 4. 6 – Usage of Mobile Phones Whilst Driving**

22. Parking vehicles at unauthorized places by side of the roads increase the traffic congestion in Colombo city very much. Reason for that type of illegal parking varies from person to person and the Chart 4. 7 shows the percentage of drivers doing illegal parking whilst Chart 4. 8 shows the reason for them to do so.

### **Chart 4. 7 – Trend of Illegal Vehicle Parking**

### **Chart 4. 8 – Trend of Illegal Vehicle Parking**

23. Driving vehicles in accordance to the stipulated speed limits is also a fact required to be adhered to in order to minimize the disturbance to the other vehicles and the commuters as well. The research reveals that, almost all the drivers are operating in Colombo violate the speed limits even in sometimes.

### **Chart 4. 9 – Adhere to speed limits**

24. The general perception of those who are driving a kind of vehicle in Colombo city, towards the reasons for the traffic congestion in Colombo city is emphasized in The Chart 4. 10 Though the traffic congestion in Colombo city is a result of combination of different factors, the most contributing factor was identified as the unlawful driving habits of the drivers which stands at 60%. The next main factor which stands at 20% is the huge number of vehicles entering in to Colombo city.

## **Chart 4. 10 – Reasons for traffic congestion**

### **TRAFFIC POLICE OFFICIALS PERCEPTION**

25. Traffic Police officials performing traffic duties are one of the main resource personnel from whom an unbiased opinion towards the traffic congestion in Colombo city, could be obtained. A specifically designed questionnaire as at Annex “ B” was distributed among 25 traffic police officials and the outcome of the same is as follows.

26. The very first question was to find whether they see or experience a traffic congestion in Colombo city for which the answer was 100% positive and all the police officials accept the excessive traffic congestion in Colombo.

27. The traffic police officials being the most competent personnel with their observations and experience to list out the factors contributing the traffic congestion in Colombo city were tasked to list out those factors according to the precedence and the outcome is as enumerated at Chart 5. 11 Majority of them are in the view of that the bad driving habits of the drivers violating the traffic rules and regulations, come first cause for the present day traffic congestion in Colombo city

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### **Chart 5. 11 – Reasons for Traffic Congestion as per the precedence**

28. The order of precedence explained above at Paragraph 27 was further substantiated based on the factual details of the traffic police officials as shown below at Chart 5. 12 The number of personnel getting caught to police net daily for violating traffic rules in Colombo city stands above all the

other offenders. Those who are driving vehicles over speeding, though taken as a separate attribute, is again an unlawful driving habit violating the traffic rules. So that the percentage of those who are driving with unlawful driving habits and getting caught to police is 60%.

### **Chart 5. 12 – Reasons for Traffic Congestion as per the precedence**

29. Views of the traffic police officials were expected to find out the most viable solution to the traffic congestion in Colombo city. Though different opinions were found as shown at Chart 5. 13, the most viable solutions for which 55% agreed to address this problem was to take stern disciplinary action against those offenders who violate the traffic rules and regulations.

### **Chart 5. 13 – Reasons for Traffic Congestion as per the precedence**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **OBSERVATIONS MADE BY THE RESEARCHER**

30. Further to the facts gathered through the distribution of questionnaires among general public, those who are driving vehicles in Colombo city areas, and the traffic police officials performing duties in Colombo area, the following facts were revealed through visual observations and sporadic interviews of the people hanging around in Colombo area. These were included with bus drivers, three wheel drivers, police officers, pedestrians; personnel using public transport etc. and the following observations were made.

a. It was observed that the maximum number of vehicles move in Colombo city area during the following rush hours.

0730 hrs to 0900 hrs - During this period the maximum numbers of vehicles moves in Colombo city creating a traffic congestion and the reason is the influx of people to Colombo for employments, businesses, and to attend schools etc

1330 hrs to 1430 hrs - This is the time period during when schools are getting closed and a large number of vehicles move in the Colombo city for school services. Due to the fact that a considerable number of leading schools are located in Colombo city itself, the number of light vehicles operating for school services is extremely high resulting the traffic congestion.

1630 hrs to 1830 hrs - Soon after the office hours the outward vehicle movements from the Colombo city are very high similar to the morning session creating a traffic congestion.

b. The competition of the bus drivers makes havocs in the smooth flow of vehicle movements in Colombo city. Though the buses as well as the other heavy vehicles are to drive in the leftmost lane it is being practiced only for stopping the busses at bus halts to board or alight the passengers. Almost all the bus drivers make their fullest effort to disturb the other buses to make a big catch of passengers which in turn disturb all the vehicles on the roads creating traffic congestions. However not a single bus driver is ready to accept that they are experimenting unlawful driving habits violating the traffic rules.

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c. Habitual violation of traffic rules by the three wheel drivers are one of the main contributing factors for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. The number of three wheelers in Colombo city is extremely high. Easy maneuverability of three wheelers is being used by most of the drivers to get an extra advantage of reaching their destinations as quickly as possible however violating all the kinds of traffic rules. They do not bother about the difficulties faced by the other motorists and drivers due to their unethical driving patterns ultimately creating unnecessary traffic congestions.

d. Parking vehicles by sides of the roads blocking the other free vehicle movement is also a contributing factor for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. Sometimes may be due to the non availability of parking facilities, drivers are used to park the vehicles by side of the roads disturbing the other vehicles.

e. Role of the pedestrians too contributes much for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. The extremely poor road discipline of the pedestrians creates unnecessary disturbance to the smooth movement of vehicles. Even at the places where overhead or underground pedestrian crossings are there, most of the pedestrians do not and reluctant to use those facilities but used to cross the road at the shortest way which ends up not only with traffic congestions but also accidents with fatalities.

f. Less attention of most of the motorists towards the disturbances for the other vehicles due to the way they are driving also contributes for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. The classic example in this context is the use of

mobile phones whilst driving creating unnecessary disturbance for the other vehicles whilst not being aware of it.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

31. When the data collected through the systematical interviews, visual observations and distribution of questionnaires were analyzed, it was proven that the following contributory factors have resulted that the traffic congestion in Colombo city and suburbs.

High volume of vehicle movements within the city.

Not having a proper traffic plan in the city.

Closure of certain roads for security reasons.

Bad driving habits of drivers violating traffic rules.

Improper parking habits of drivers interrupting smooth vehicle movements due to non availability of sufficient parking facilities.

Poor traffic controlling duties of traffic police officials.

Use of old vehicles not road worthy.

Increase of vehicle accidents due to high volume of vehicle movements blocking the smooth vehicle movements.

Bad road discipline of pedestrians.

32. The high volume of vehicles of approximately 400, 000 are operating in Colombo city daily is undoubtedly is one of the main reasons for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. Number of accidents, as mach as 200 per day consolidates this fact further. But the number of vehicles alone wouldn't have created this much of traffic congestion in Colombo city unless the other contributing factors have popped up as a result of the high volume of the vehicles. All the endeavors have been taken to reduce the effects caused by the other factors such as reducing the violation of traffic rules, unauthorized parking etc. Since those factors play a major role than the volume of the vehicles.

33. As enumerated and hypothesized throughout the research, the unlawful driving habits of majority of the drivers operating in Colombo city are analyzed as the main contributing factor for the traffic congestion in Colombo city. When the number of vehicles are high and certain motorists are in a hurry tend to violate traffic rules and regulations and to reach their destinations as soon as possible ultimately creating traffic jams and blocks at the roads. The competition and the habitually unlawful driving practices of the bus drivers and three wheel drivers contributes this aspect at large. This research hypothesis is further consolidated by the statistical details obtained through the distribution of questionnaire with a percentage of 60% of general public and traffic police officials in the view that the unlawful driving habits of the driver causes traffic congestion in Colombo.

34. Though there are rules and regulations to bring the offenders at the roads before the courts and to be tried, it is not being practice to a satisfactory level. Though the traffic police officials reiterated that the traffic

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congestion in Colombo city is mainly due to the unlawful driving habits of the drivers, the actions they have taken to address this problem is not visible. The avenues available for the offenders to get themselves free from the traffic violations even after getting caught to traffic police officials are at a large but undisclosed by both parties.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

35. Based on the factual details obtained through systematical means and the research analysis, it is evident that the fact of unlawful driving habits of the drivers is to be addressed timely to reduce the traffic congestion in Colombo city and its suburbs at first whilst addressing the rest of the contributing factors gradually. The following actions are recommended to be initiated in this connection.

- a. Traffic laws, rules and regulations are to be revised and to be incorporated with stern disciplinary action against the violation of traffic rules.
  - b. The traffic police officials as the law enforcing authority should be trained and handled in a more discipline way than as at present to be firm when performing their duties. Internal monitoring systems within the traffic police department are to be established and stern disciplinary action to be taken against those corrupted police officials not carrying out their duties properly.
  - c. A value to be added to the driving license from the time of issuing and it is to be ensured that only the competent and disciplined applicants are issued with driving license. In case of any kind of intentional violation of traffic rule the relevant diving license holder is to be kept under supervision for a
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standard period of time preferably one year and if found again for intentional violation the driving license is to be terminated. So that, no body will take the risk of getting their driving license terminated.

d. Parking facilities in the Colombo district to be expanded and then those who are parking vehicles at unauthorized places to be dealt accordingly.

e. Specific rules and regulations for the maintenance of discipline of bus drivers and three wheel drivers are to be brought in to force.

f. CCTV monitoring systems to be installed within the Colombo city to trace the drivers violating traffic rules and the police officials not carrying out their duties properly.

g. Island wide educational programs to be conducted to bring a behavioral change of the people driving any kind of vehicle in Sri Lanka to be disciplined at the roads and to respect the others.

h. Quality of the public transport services are to be increased to motivate the people to use public transport than their private vehicles when coming in to Colombo city which will reduce the influx of light vehicles that contributes much for the traffic congestion in the city.

i. Informing motorist about road accidents, traffic congestion and road conditions by traffic radio station which will help motorists to avoid traffic congestion. Helicopters can be use to moniter traffic.[3]

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

36. It is a known fact that the difficulties faced by the general public, the traffic police officials and the wastage of national resources due to the traffic congestion in Colombo city is utmost and unaccountable. So this is a national issue required to be addressed within the least possible delay without being waiting till the problem get aggravated. As hypothesized the main fact behind the traffic congestion in Colombo city and also in suburbs is the unlawful driving habits of the vehicle users whilst few other factors contribute to increase the problem. As identified and analyzed during the research it is important to address the main factor which is unlawful driving habits of the drivers as the initial step whilst addressing the others thereafter.

37. The outcome of this endeavor to reduce the traffic congestion in Colombo city limits and its suburbs will be an example to address the similar type of traffic congestions in other main cities in Sri Lanka as well. These types of problems cannot be addressed without the support of the general public as well as the officials who are tasked to perform duties in that respect. However with the enforcement of new law and systematical programs to make the driving community more disciplined the traffic congestion of the Colombo would be gradually reduced which will be beneficial for all the people living in this country since this is a problem pertaining to the main business and industrial city of Sri Lanka.