

How São Paulo transportation is leading the way

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I lived in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, for a great part of my life, and as a native citizen, I can observe huge changes in transportation that this city has undergone throughout the years. São Paulo is always included in the lists of the largest cities in the world, no matter what criteria is used: population, territorial area, number of restaurants or number of buses in the public transportation system. What was once a small village has grown to become an enormous agglomeration of over 20 million inhabitants and the economic powerhouse of Latin America, with a local GDP that surpasses \$220 billion.

A city of this size and complexity requires an efficient set of public services, and probably the most important one is the bus transportation system, which today ranks as one of the most well-run public transportation services in the world. An astounding 15,000 buses run daily through the streets of the city to move its fast-paced population!

I remember using the buses as a kid to go to my school. Buses had to compete with cars to navigate the heavy traffic in the city, and a short ride of just a few blocks could take an hour or so. Sometimes I even needed to wait in the bus station for 30-45 minutes to catch my bus! Students could ride buses paying a reduced fare, but to do so, had to pre-pay the paper tickets that were only sold in a central location in downtown. Needless to say, it was a cumbersome process, and if you had your tickets stolen or lost, there was no way get them replaced or buy a new set of discounted passes.

Sao Paulo has come a long way since then. Today, buses run through special exclusive transit corridors – streets within the streets – that allow them to move faster than cars. Their movements are monitored in an operation control center by wirelessly connecting to the GPS units in the buses, and any accident or problem blocking the traffic in the streets is immediately identified, and corrective measures taken. Passengers can access times and arrival schedules on their mobile devices, eliminating the need to unnecessarily wait in the bus station. Fares are paid using cards that can be bought and replenished at vending machines available in most stations, and if you lose a card, you can block it and get a replacement one with no money lost. Citizens are much better-served by the efficiency the technology provides, and the City Transit Manager Authority (SPTrans) now has much better control and manageability of the overall system.

Today, when I go back to my hometown, I gladly use the public transportation system. It is efficient, easy-to-use, clean, and faster than driving my own car. The system has come a long way since my student days, and if you'd like to learn more, I invite you check out this case study with additional details on the improvements.

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