

Addressing Baku's Congestion Problem

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Topics of discussion

Elements and specifics of urban mobility and the causes of transport problems in Baku. The factors that negatively impact traffic congestion in Baku. Challenges, best practices, and different approaches to tackling traffic congestion issues. Recommendations towards solving the congestion problem in Baku.

This document summarizes a roundtable discussion that took place on 17 November 2022 at ADA University under the auspices of the Institute for Development and Diplomacy, which was hosted by IDD Director Dr. Fariz Ismailzade. A list of participants is provided at the end of the document.

The main aim of this IDD policy roundtable was to contribute to current policymaking deliberations with a view to address various impediments to the achievement of better mobility and traffic flow in Baku. The discussion focused on the underlying causes of the transport and congestion problem in Baku and its implications on the socio-economic life of the city. The roundtable discussion also focused on possible solutions to the transport problem, which is considered crucial to improving Bakuvis' quality of life. The discussion specifically focused on measures and interventions designed to satisfy the mobility needs of the city's residents whilst also emphasizing the need to deepen effective cooperation between different local and national agencies and levels of government. This document concludes with a set of recommendations for policymakers.

Importance of Baku's Transport System

As the bulk of economic activity happens in urban areas, cities are considered as essential drivers of the economy. Thus, the transport network, as well as its safety

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and accessibility, is an important aspect of modern policy development since it is considered to have direct and indirect effects on economic development. Over the past two decades, various policies and measures have been put forward by local and national authorities, with a view to ensuring the provision of a high-quality transport network. The state has invested enormous quantities of public resources on the construction and reconstruction of transport infrastructure to tackle congestion in Baku and improve the quality of life of its residents. However, due to an increase in both population and the number of vehicles, Baku (especially its city center) suffers from an intensity of traffic flows and an increase in congestion problems.

Participants noted that solving the congestion problem in Baku is predicated on the development of a comprehensive vision for Baku's overall urban mobility system: policymakers need to become more fully aware of international best practices on the development of sustainable urban mobility so as to be able to adjust these to the local characteristics of the city through a more creative and holistic approach.

Summary of Major Points

The roundtable brought together various stakeholders and provided a platform for an intensive and insightful discussion on different aspects of Baku's congestion problem. The roundtable began with a constatation that the congestion problem is a multidimensional issue requiring a comprehensive approach that would involve the participation of all relevant actors.

Participants considered that there are multiple factors causing congestion problems in Baku. They stated that, first, we have to analyze whether the public transport in Baku is efficient and how many passengers on a daily basis are carried by public transport. In other words, the efficiency of public transport is key for the overall quality of the transport system. In retrospect, the elimination of cleaner public transport means such as trams and trolleybuses—in other words, the absence of a surface rail network—paved the way for the intensive automobilization of the populace, which, in turn, resulted in the central part of the city experiencing congestion.

Some participants mentioned the lack of a comprehensive urban mobility plan—one that would incorporate a new innovative approach and relevant policy measures—as the main reason for the mismanagement of Baku's traffic congestion problem. The efficiency of public transport, the usage of bicycles and scooters, and a pedestrianization strategy coupled with a policy of discouragement of private cars are the main principles of sustainable urban mobility. Although the number of private automobiles in Baku is not very high—140 cars per 1,000 persons—the city cannot support the number of cars and trucks entering the city daily.

While some participants noted that Baku can achieve some progress in traffic problems with incremental steps and tactical urbanism interventions, others indicated that tactical

urbanism installations are not that effective to solve traffic problems in some areas of the city. (The term “tactical urbanism” refers to a rapid and low-cost and scalable approach to making temporary changes to the urban environment, often in urban gathering areas.)

Another part of the discussion focused on the main obstacles to the development and implementation of comprehensive urban mobility. As was underlined, the following is necessary to institute an effective urban mobility plan:

- institutional cooperation with the involvement all relevant actors;
- the involvement of local residents and all interested parties in both the development and implementation phases;
- the development of a long-term strategic plan on the basis of a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of current and future circumstances;
- a plan that covers all aspects of the transportation system;
- an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The participants pointed out that to effectively tackle the lack of clarity and coordination in the responsibilities of different government divisions and policy areas, first a way to align and meet the interests of the different parties must be found. Along with ministries, local government bodies also should be involved in the process to identify and solve transport issues in the city districts.

While discussing technical interventions, participants noted that the integration of public transport schedules and payment methods has been implemented, which is a positive development towards increasing the efficiency of the public transportation system.

Participants also noted that the planning and design of some buildings create additional problems for traffic. Although the government has already carried out measures to prioritize urban mobility; however, mobility is not fully provided in some old streets.

Another factor that impacts on the solution of the congestion problem is the lack of data, which is crucial for effective decisionmaking. Large amounts of data from diverse sources could help provide solutions for better planning and management of urban traffic. Thus, policymakers need processed and interpreted data, which may either provide added-value or be used in the decisionmaking process. The enhanced use of data could be used to improve mobility and comfort for passengers, increase efficiency, and enhance the management of the transportation system as a whole.

To sum up the factors that influences the traffic congestion Baku:

- dependence of the public transportation system on buses;
- the lack of a comprehensive urban mobility plan;
- the lack of integration and cooperation among key stakeholders;
- the lack of awareness and social responsibility among Bakuvians on traffic safety rules;
- incomplete or partly completed transport infrastructure system;
- the lack of data-driven decisionmaking.

Policy Recommendations

The participants proposed the following policy recommendations to address Baku's traffic congestion problem:

- Governance reforms with an innovative approach on the management of traffic flows that would involve all stakeholders.
- Strengthening coordination and cooperation among relevant institutions and government bodies. The establishment of a joint commission with the participation of representatives from several agencies and institutions that are dealing with different aspects of transport issues can be one of the steps towards strengthening such cooperation. Another step can be the involvement of city government bodies in the management and decisionmaking on transport issues.
- The harmonization of policies and measures in the field of city transport systems that are carried out by different ministries and government bodies on transport issues.
- The conduct of awareness-raising campaigns among residents on basic traffic and safety rules, which should be carried out by relevant institutions to enhance people's knowledge on respecting the mobility rights of all Bakuviens, with a focus on proper driving and parking habits.
- The need for Baku to commission a comprehensive urban mobility plan that covers all aspects of transport issues.

Institute for Development and Diplomacy

**Round Table discussion: Addressing Baku's Congestion Problem
November 17, 2022**

List of Participants

No:	Name, Surname	Position, Organization
1	Fariz Ismayilzade	Vice rector, ADA University; Director, Institute for Development and Diplomacy
2	Inara Yagubova	Research Fellow, Institute for Development and Diplomacy
3	Nargiz Gafarova	Research Fellow, Institute for Development and Diplomacy
4	Inara Mammadova	Coordinator, Institute for Development and Diplomacy
5	Anar Mammadov	Department of Transport Regulation, Chief Advisor of Transport Infrastructure Sector, Ministry of Digital Development and Transport
6	Anar Valiyev	Dean, ADA University
7	Arzu Suleymanov	Velo blogger
8	Bayram Akhundov	Independent researcher, Urban Development Consultant
9	Chagri Karimzade	Head of the Department of Territorial Planning Document Analysis of the Department of Urban Planning and Architecture of the Baku City Architecture and Urban Planning Department, State Urban Planning and Architecture Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan
10	Chingiz Rahimov	Deputy head of the transport and engineering support department, State Urban Planning and Architecture Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan
11	Javid Najafov	Deputy Director of the Transport Sector Regulation Department, Ministry of Digital Development and Transport
12	Joshqun Mammadov	Head of the Planning Sector of the Traffic Management Department, Baku Transport Agency
13	Dilgam Ismayilov	Architect
14	Faig Abbasov	Advisor to the Chairman of the Board of Directors, Baku Transport Agency
15	Gulshan Rzayeva	Chief of Staff, Baku Transport Agency
16	Huseyn Abdullayev	Deputy head of traffic management department, Baku Transport Agency
17	Mais Aghayev	Press Secretary, Baku Transport Agency
18	Mubariz Aghayev	Chief Inspector of the Main Traffic Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan for particularly important tasks, Lieutenant Colonel
19	Rauf Aghamirzayev	Transport expert
20	Yusif Atakishiyev	Engineer of the Department of Traffic Management of the Main Traffic Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Senior Lieutenant