

The National Inland Transport Policy of Sri Lanka – 2026

Effective Date: (To be announced upon Cabinet/ Parliamentary approval)

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT, HIGHWAYS, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
https://www.transport.gov.lk

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Government of Sri Lanka is responsible for formulating national policies in key sectors, including transport, as per the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, while institutions under the central government are tasked with national-level transport policy. Provincial Councils hold responsibility for regulating intra-provincial passenger and goods transport.

This policy applies to passenger and freight transport services operating on land and inland waterbodies within the country, as well as to all categories of roads and thoroughfares, excluding the international maritime and aviation sectors.

1.2 Rationale

The primary objective of this policy is to achieve integrated and sustainable physical, social, and economic development by positioning transport as a fundamental driver of urban and rural development. The policy recognizes that an efficient, interconnected, and multimodal transport system—supported by a well-planned domestic road network and comprehensive transport facilities—is essential for shaping land use, enhancing accessibility and mobility, promoting economic growth, strengthening social inclusion, and guiding sustainable physical development. Accordingly, transport integration shall be a core consideration in all urban and rural planning processes to ensure coordinated, resilient, and people-centered development outcomes. The National Inland Transport Policy of Sri Lanka – 2026 shall be the foundation for all transport related sub-sector policies and plans.

The transport sector shall facilitate seamless connectivity through integrated transport planning. The Sri Lankan land transport system faces growing congestion, rising public dissatisfaction, fuel inefficiency, environmental degradation, and unaffordable infrastructure debt. A public transport service with stakeholder feedback-oriented, socially inclusive, and economically viable policy is crucial for correcting inefficiencies, promoting equitable access, and facilitating cost-effective mobility for all, thereby focusing on social upliftment and economic enhancement. As mobility demand continues to expand with urbanization, economic transition, and technological change, the sector must evolve from a supply-driven model to one that is demand-driven and sustainable. Ensuring public participatory, promoting community-based organizations and targeting the attainment of benefits through professional development are identified as the key components of this framework.

The utilization of water-based transport in Sri Lanka remains limited. However, when considering the historical context and geographical setting, it is apparent that Sri Lanka possesses the potential to utilize water-based public transport in an optimal manner. Therefore, it is recognized that due attention should be directed towards promoting water-based transport services at suitable locations.

An efficient freight transport and logistics system is essential for national economic growth, export competitiveness, regional development, and supply chain resilience. Particular attention

shall be given to reducing logistic costs, improving freight mobility, minimizing delays, and strengthening hinterland connectivity to support domestic and international trade.

1.3 Policy Context

This policy builds on the framework introduced in 2009. It responds to emerging socio-economic realities, evolving stakeholder expectations, and global sustainability commitments. The National Inland Transport Policy of Sri Lanka – 2026 provides a comprehensive framework to formulate sustainable transformations in the transport sector. It enables people-centric transport decisions, while ensuring that every intervention is driven through research and innovation that contributes to inclusive, safe, efficient, affordable, and sustainable transport systems.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.1 Equity and social justice

This principle ensures that all segments of society, including marginalized and displaced communities, are covered and resource allocations are being provided with cross-subsidies and public service obligations where necessary. This principle ensures that transport systems serve a public function and that should prioritize social outcomes.

2.2 Accessibility and inclusion

Every citizen should have equal access to transport services by removing physical, economic, digital, or institutional barriers, while ensuring that both general and specific public needs are addressed.

2.3 Affordability and efficiency

Transport must be affordable for users and national resources should be utilized efficiently to maximize cost-effectiveness in operations and infrastructure while preventing transport from becoming a financial burden on users.

2.4 Safety and Security

Transport systems must be designed, implemented, and regulated to ensure a safe and secure service, thereby maintaining the confidence of the public with minimal risk to life, health, or property.

2.5 Reliability and Quality of Service

Transport systems should be based on the qualities of punctuality, comfort, cleanliness, with major alignment with public transport development. Integration and interconnection between and within transport modes and systems should be considered as a fundamental principle in transport planning.

2.6 Environmental Sustainability
This principle aligns with global and national climate goals and intergenerational responsibility. Transitioning to electric mobility is one of the main strategies against climate change where priority needs to be given to electrifying passenger and freight transportation.

2.7 Modernization and Technology
The overall transport system shall integrate technology while focusing on improving efficiency, quality, safety, and transparency, while being open to future innovations and local industrial developments.

2.8 Systems Development for Mobility Demand and Traffic Management
Transport services and infrastructure should be developed to provide a seamless system with smooth, efficient, and user-friendly mobility, ensuring multimodal connectivity considering distance and population density.

2.9 Systems and Institutional Reforms
The existing arrangements of institutions engaged in providing transport services shall be reformed to minimize overlapping and inadequate institutional mandate while ensuring efficiency, quality improvement, development, and transparency.

2.10 Freight Mobility and Logistics Efficiency
This principle recognizes freight transport and logistics as an essential component of the national transport system. Freight transport networks and services shall be developed and integrated to improve connectivity, operational efficiency, trade competitiveness, regional development, and supply chain resilience while facilitating the cost-effective movement of goods.

2.11 Research for Transport Sector Development
Development of transport systems should be driven by integrated research and development initiatives and data-driven decisions, while focusing on efficiency, quality of service, economic feasibility, and technological competence.

3. POLICY OBJECTIVES

3.1 Ensure equitable, affordable, regional disparity-reduced and inclusive mobility for all citizens by prioritizing underserved regions, people requiring special attention including women and children, vulnerable communities, and essential social and economic services.

3.2 Enhance the efficiency and reliability of transport services through system optimization, demand management, and improved operational standards across all modes of transport, including road and water-based transport through the development, maintenance, and control of properly designed, interconnected, efficient, and safe facilities.

3.3 Promote financially sustainable and socially responsible investment through ensuring a high-quality transport experience through the planning of cost-efficient systems capable of delivering

high average speeds and quality of driving, cross-subsidization frameworks, and strategic public-private participation.

3.4 Strengthen public safety and security by adopting acceptable global and national standards, modern technologies, and institutional mechanisms to minimize risks to passengers, operators, and freight.

3.5 Promote environmentally sustainable mobility for reducing emissions, encouraging low-carbon mobility, and aligning with national and global climate targets

3.6 Modernize and integrate internal transport infrastructure and services, including road, rail, inland water transport, and freight logistics systems, to create seamless, multimodal, investment-friendly, and technologically enabled mobility networks that enhance economic productivity, trade competitiveness, supply chain efficiency, and national resilience.

3.7 Integrate transport planning with urban, regional, and physical development planning to ensure that land use decisions, settlement patterns, economic activities, and infrastructure investments are aligned with sustainable mobility principles.

3.8 Support local industrial development and technological innovation to strengthen local industries, digital systems, research, and knowledge-driven transport solutions.

3.9 Reform institutions and governance structures to ensure transparency, accountability, coordination, and efficiency in transport planning, regulation, and service delivery.

3.10 Strengthen freight transport and logistics connectivity by improving access between production centres, logistics facilities, industrial zones, ports, airports, and other trade gateways through efficient multimodal transport systems.

3.11 Improve data-driven planning and research capacity to ensure evidence-based decision making, continuous performance monitoring, and adaptive policy formulation.

4. THRUST AREA FRAMEWORK

4.1 Social Equity and Inclusive Access

1. Establishing common accessibility standards across all modes and networks
2. Improving targeted services for rural, hill-country, marginalized groups and low-income communities.
3. Establishing cross-subsidy and public service obligation frameworks to ensure essential mobility.
4. Ensuring safe and harassment-free transport for all.
5. Recognizing the state’s responsibility to ensure that the public benefits from the positive outcomes of competitive service provision by preventing adverse situations.

6. Safeguard the public from inconvenience by ensuring the effective delivery of services through relevant parallel state service networks whenever necessary.

4.2 Public Transport Development and Service Quality

1. Modernizing the integrated road network and bus, rail, and inland water transport service systems to provide reliable, comfortable, punctual, clean, and continuous transport services
2. Establishing an integrated transport service system aligned with national development goals.
3. Transform to an integrated service model from fragmented operations.
4. Establishing national service quality benchmarks.
5. Strengthening institutions, contractors and all relevant internal and external stakeholders to ensure the effective delivery of transport services that achieve desirable level of service standards
6. Empowerment and enforcement of relevant legal framework.
7. Establishing mechanisms to ensure and enhance public consultation and participatory approach in all development activities.
8. Development of human resource by providing continuous professional training and capacity building within the transport sector.

4.3 Multimodal Integration and Mobility Management

1. Improving seamless connections between bus, rail, paratransit modes, non-motorized transport, and emerging modes.
2. Establishing Unified ticketing systems, real-time information services, and integrated timetables.
3. Developing Traffic demand management, congestion mitigation, and formulation of urban mobility management plans.
4. Establishing planned asset management and maintenance procedures for inland transportation infrastructure.
5. Ensuring first and last mile connectivity.
6. Improving multimodal freight transport systems and strengthening connectivity between economic centres, logistics hubs, ports, airports, railway freight terminals, and other trade gateways.

4.4 Safety, Security, and Passenger Protection

1. Strengthening safety audits to ensure the safety aspects of land transportation, enforcement, and driver training.
2. Safety technologies for vehicles, rail systems, and public spaces.
3. Emergency preparedness and disaster-resilient transport systems.
4. Compulsory training, periodic development programmes and feedback mechanisms for passenger and freight transport service crews.
5. Improving resting and other necessary on-duty facilities for passenger and freight transport service crews.

6. Strengthening transport safety mechanisms and actively deploying awareness campaigns, promotional programmes, and legal enforcement measures to improve user discipline, including pedestrians.

4.5 Sustainable and Low-Carbon Transport

1. Prioritizing electric mobility, alternative fuels, and green transport modes.
2. Shifting from private vehicle dependency towards public and active transportation.
3. Integrating environmental assessments into transport planning as required.

4.6 Modernization and network optimization of Transport infrastructure

1. Modernization of railway services, expansion of capacity and establishment of dedicated tracks for special purposes.
2. Promotion of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS), digital traffic management and smart intersections.
3. Planning of infrastructure facilities on the basis of prioritizing maintenance activities to reduce the total lifecycle costs.
4. Ensuring that urban, regional, and physical development plans are prepared in alignment with national transport policies, transport demand forecasts, public transport accessibility requirements, and multimodal mobility principles.
5. Promoting transit-oriented and decentralized urban development, integrated land-use and transport planning, and coordinated development approvals to minimize congestion, reduce travel demand, and enhance accessibility.
6. Development of quality, convenient and safe urban parking facilities with a focus on providing park and ride facilities for private vehicles at railway stations and intermodal hubs.
7. Development of quality, convenient and safe walking spaces for pedestrians and non-motorized active mobility.
8. Strengthen the sector capacity by providing staff with continuous professional training, competency development, upskilling, and capacity-building opportunities.

4.7 Economic Efficiency and Financial Sustainability

1. Prioritization of cost-effective investment based on socio-economic returns.
2. Public-private partnerships with strong safeguards for the well-being of the public.
3. Rational fare regulation supported by transparent subsidy mechanisms

4.8 Technology Adoption and Digital Transformation

1. Integrated digital platforms for Mobility as a Service (MaaS).
2. Automated fare collection, e-ticketing, and smart scheduling systems.
3. Support for technological innovations and transport-related industries.

4.9 Institutional and Regulatory Reform

1. Clarification of mandates between national and provincial institutions.
2. Independent bodies for regulating of public transport service standards.
3. Modernization and streamlining of all laws and regulations in the road and mobility sector to comply with new technologies and international standards.
4. Regulating paratransit modes.

4.10 Freight Transport and Logistics Development

1. Developing integrated national freight transport networks that support economic growth and trade competitiveness.
2. Strengthening hinterland connectivity to ports, airports, logistics parks, industrial zones, agricultural production areas, and strategic economic corridors.
3. Promoting modal shifts for freight transport, where economically and environmentally beneficial.
4. Encouraging logistics efficiency through digital technologies, intelligent transport systems, and modern freight management practices.
5. Supporting the establishment and development of multimodal logistics hubs and freight terminals.
6. Reducing freight transport costs, travel times, and supply chain bottlenecks.

4.11 Research, Innovation, and Data Systems

1. Addressing operational, economic, social, and environmental challenges related to transportation through transport research programs.
2. Establishing a centralized transport data observatory system for analytics and forecasting.
3. University/Research Institutions - Industry - Government collaboration to facilitate research and innovation to standardize transport service.

5. IMPLEMENTATION, COORDINATION AND MONITORING FRAMEWORK

5.1 Institutional Responsibilities

The Ministry responsible for Transport shall serve as the lead policy institution for the coordination, planning, implementation, and monitoring of this policy and its implementation.

5.2 Inter-Agency Coordination

A National Transport Policy Steering Committee shall be established under the chairmanship of the Secretary to the Ministry responsible for Transport. Director General (Planning) shall facilitate coordination of relevant ministries, institutions and stakeholders and act as the convener to the steering committee.

5.3 Implementation Framework

A detailed Master Plan shall be prepared, identifying specific programmes, responsible institutions, implementation timelines, funding requirements, performance indicators, and reporting arrangements.

5.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementation progress shall be monitored through measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to transportation. Bi-annual reviews shall be conducted to asses policy effectiveness and to recommend amendments as necessary.

5.5 Reporting

The Ministry responsible for Transport shall monitor periodic implementation progress and facilitate stakeholder consultations to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

6. CONCLUSION

The National Inland Transport Policy of Sri Lanka – 2026 marks a critical step toward transforming Sri Lanka's land transport sector into a modern, people-centric system that facilitates future requirements. Grounded in equity, sustainability, efficiency, and technological progress, the policy sets out a coherent framework to address long-standing structural challenges while unlocking new opportunities for national development. It emphasizes inclusive mobility, institutional reforms, environmental responsibility, and evidence-based decision making, ensuring the direct contribution of transport services to improved quality of life, economic productivity, and social inclusion.

By prioritizing public welfare, fostering collaboration across national and provincial transport authorities, and promoting innovation within local industries, this policy provides a clear pathway for creating a safer, cleaner, and more integrated transport ecosystem. Its successful implementation requires sustained political commitment, coordinated action among stakeholders, and continuous monitoring supported by research and data. Ultimately, this policy envisions a transport system that not only moves people and freight efficiently but also strengthens communities, supports sustainable economic growth, ensures environmental sustainability and safeguard Sri Lanka's long-term development aspirations. Through a collective effort and responsible governance, the National Inland Transport Policy of Sri Lanka – 2026 will serve as a foundation for shaping a resilient, accessible, and globally competitive mobility landscape for future generations.