

Original Research Article

Path to improving the quality of urban public transportation services from the perspective of public management

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Abstract: As the backbone of urban functionality, public transportation serves as a vital platform for safeguarding citizens' mobility rights and demonstrating urban governance capabilities. Its service quality directly impacts the realization of public interests and sustainable urban development. From a public management perspective, enhancing transportation service quality involves not only upgrading infrastructure but also standardizing service processes, innovating governance mechanisms, and balancing supply-demand relationships. By optimizing governance systems, strengthening collaborative mechanisms, and precisely addressing needs, this paper proposes strategies to transform urban public transportation services from mere availability to excellence, better aligning with citizens' travel demands and urban development objectives.

Keywords: public administration; urban public transport; service quality; improvement path

1. Introduction

While urban public transportation infrastructure has made significant progress in recent years, the fundamental gap between service quality and citizens' expectations persists. The 2004 concept of a "service-oriented government" aligns with the New Public Service Theory's principles of prioritizing public welfare and citizen needs. This philosophy elevates public services to a central position, driving the development of efficient, convenient, and high-quality urban transit systems. From a public management perspective, analyzing the essence of service quality, assessing current developments, and identifying targeted improvement strategies not only expands the application of public management theories in transportation but also provides practical guidance for optimizing urban transit services. Such efforts will help build safer, more efficient, accessible, and inclusive public transportation systems, ultimately fueling high-quality urban development.

2. The core connotation of the quality of urban public transport service

Urban public transportation service quality is a comprehensive concept that evaluates the alignment between public transport supply and citizens' travel needs, based on public transport facilities and operational systems while incorporating the inclusive nature of public services. It encompasses multiple core elements including hardware infrastructure, service processes, safety assurance, and rights protection, possessing both objective and subjective attributes. From an objective perspective, it primarily manifests in the completeness of facility supply, operational efficiency, and reliability of safety measures. This includes the adequacy of hardware components such as bus terminals, route networks, and vehicle equipment, compliance with operational indicators like frequency, speed, and punctuality, as well as the maturity of safety systems including fire prevention and emergency response. Subjectively, it focuses on citizen satisfaction with travel experiences, covering aspects such as service personnel's professional competence, convenience of service procedures, rationality of fare mechanisms, and timeliness of complaint feedback. As a vital component of public services, urban public transportation service quality also highlights its public and equitable characteristics. It requires balancing the travel needs of different groups, ensuring the travel rights of special populations including the elderly, disabled, and those with medical conditions, and achieving balanced development of service quality across regions and routes^[1].

3. The development status of urban public transport service quality from the perspective of public management

3.1. Upgrading governance philosophy

In recent years, as public governance modernization advances, a citizen-centric governance philosophy has been progressively established. The government, as the core governance entity, has begun to focus on accurately capturing citizens' travel needs through methods such as field research, public opinion surveys, and big data analysis, thereby optimizing route layouts, adjusting service frequencies, and improving facilities. Meanwhile, the concept of equalized public services has deeply permeated, with increased allocation of transportation resources to underdeveloped areas like suburbs and urban-rural fringe zones, aiming to narrow regional service gaps and safeguard the travel rights of diverse groups. However, the conceptual transformation has not been fully implemented, with some regions still prioritizing infrastructure over services, and there remains room for improvement in the precision and timeliness of demand-responsive services.

3.2. Multiple governance subjects

Public sector entities undertake core functions including strategic planning, policy formulation, and regulatory oversight, driving service quality enhancement through measures such as establishing industry standards, optimizing regulatory frameworks, and increasing fiscal investments. Public transport operators, as primary service providers, are responsible for facility management, service delivery, and process optimization, progressively strengthening their service consciousness and accountability. The participation of the public and third-party institutions continues to grow, with quality improvements being driven through complaint feedback, satisfaction evaluations, and industry supervision. The collaborative involvement of multiple stakeholders has broken the closed nature of traditional governance models, creating a synergistic governance force characterized by vertical coordination and internal-external collaboration. However, the collaborative governance mechanism remains imperfect, with unclear delineation of responsibilities between government and enterprises, communication barriers, insufficient public participation channels, and inadequate independence and authority of third-party evaluations, resulting in underutilized collaborative governance effectiveness^[2].

4. The improvement path of urban public transport service quality from the perspective of public management

4.1. Conceptual reorientation: Establishing the dual-drive philosophy of precision and equity

Guided by core principles of public management, we are redefining the value orientation for enhancing urban public transportation service quality through a dual-driven governance approach of precision and equity. On one hand, we deepen demand-oriented transformation by establishing a regular mechanism for needs research and response. Leveraging big data technology to integrate citizens' travel data and complaint feedback, we accurately assess regional and demographic differences in travel demands, enabling targeted optimization of service supply. This ensures precise alignment between route planning, service frequency arrangements, and facility configurations with actual needs. On the other hand, we uphold the baseline of equitable public services by integrating this principle throughout the entire process of planning, construction, and operation. Increased investment in transportation resources is directed toward underdeveloped areas such as suburbs, urban-rural fringe zones, and old residential communities. We also improve accessibility facilities for special groups and optimize barrier-free transportation services to narrow service gaps between regions and demographics.

4.2. Mechanism improvement: Establishing a long-term multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework

Guided by the principle of multi-stakeholder collaborative governance in public administration, we will establish a sustainable framework for coordinated participation among various entities to consolidate collective efforts in service quality enhancement. The framework clearly delineates the respective responsibilities of the government, service providers, and the public. The government will focus on strategic planning, policy guidance, and performance evaluation, while streamlining administrative approval procedures, increasing fiscal support,

and formulating scientific industry standards and regulatory guidelines. Service providers will strengthen their primary accountability by implementing robust internal quality control systems, optimizing service processes, enhancing staff expertise, and proactively addressing citizen needs to improve service delivery. A multi-stakeholder communication platform will be established to facilitate regular coordination mechanisms, ensuring open channels of communication between the government and enterprises, as well as between enterprises and the public, to promptly resolve service-related conflicts ^[3].

4.3. Technology empowerment: Building intelligent service and governance systems

Leveraging digital transformation as an opportunity, we will deepen technological empowerment to build an intelligent urban public transportation service and governance system, enhancing service quality and governance efficiency. By optimizing the intelligent management platform, we will integrate data resources from traffic operations, passenger flow monitoring, and emergency response to achieve real-time monitoring, smart scheduling, and dynamic management of the entire public transportation operation process, thereby improving operational efficiency and punctuality rates. We will expand intelligent service scenarios by enhancing the smart bus APP's functionality, optimizing services such as real-time arrival queries, route planning, and mobile payments, while promoting convenient services like electronic invoices and online complaints to improve citizens' travel experience. To bridge the digital divide, we will retain traditional service methods, add manual service windows, and provide tailored services for elderly groups and special populations, achieving complementary integration of intelligent and traditional services.

4.4. Strengthening supervision to build a closed-loop supervision system for the entire process

By leveraging public management and regulatory functions, we will establish a comprehensive, multi-tiered closed-loop supervision system to ensure the improvement of public transportation service quality. The regulatory standards system will be refined by aligning with industry development realities and citizen needs, with detailed indicators covering facility allocation, operational services, safety assurance, and complaint handling, forming scientific, standardized, quantifiable, and assessable regulatory benchmarks. Innovative supervision methods will be adopted, combining "daily monitoring + targeted inspections + intelligent monitoring" through smart platforms to enable real-time service quality oversight. Targeted rectification campaigns will be launched to address weak links, enhancing the precision and effectiveness of supervision. A multi-channel complaint platform will be established to streamline feedback mechanisms, with clear timelines and procedures for complaint processing. This ensures end-to-end closed-loop management from complaint acceptance to investigation, resolution, and feedback, enabling timely responses to public concerns.

5. Conclusion

The enhancement of urban public transport service quality represents a crucial manifestation of modern urban governance and serves as a core practice in implementing public interest-oriented public management. From a public management perspective, its essence lies in addressing the imbalance between service supply and demand through conceptual rethinking, mechanism refinement, technological empowerment, and strengthened supervision, thereby establishing a diversified, collaborative, precise, efficient, and equitable service system. Moving forward, it is essential to ground efforts in public management theory, uphold the principles of precision and equity, deepen multi-stakeholder collaborative governance, enhance digital technology integration, and build a comprehensive closed-loop supervision system to drive continuous improvement in public transport service quality.

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