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Evaluating the requirement of new rules and regulations for three-wheelers to improve safety and reduce traffic congestion

T.W.K.I.M. Dias* and M.M.L. Madurapperuma

Department of Civil Engineering, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University

Today, three-wheelers (TWs) have become a popular mode of transport in Sri Lanka due to reasons such as the poor public transport system and parking problems in central business areas and major cities in Sri Lanka. While being a significant proportion of the daily traffic volume on urban roads, their effect on road congestion and road safety is significant as well. According to the National Road Safety Council, TWs contributed to 357 fatal crashes in 2017, 13% of the total fatal crashes in that year. When the Sri Lanka police crash database is considered this number is continuously increasing since 2008. However, complete removal of the TW population from Colombo or any city center would only create social issues. A common public view on TWs is that they are the most undisciplined drivers on road. As the first step, this study attempted to explore the current rules and regulations in Sri Lanka for TWs and find ways to minimize the effect from TWs to improve road safety. Then a questionnaire survey was carried out among the public. The responses were categorized into two groups: Group 1: passengers/ police officers/other vehicle drivers, and Group 2: TW drivers. Although the proposed regulation on TW driver age was not implemented, almost all respondents say there should be an age restriction on TW drivers. Their responses lay between age 25 and 50. While the TW drivers said that transporting school children in TWs is good, the other group did not agree. 80% of Group1 said there need to be special regulations controlling the TW drivers who transport school children, whereas only 52% of the TW drivers agreed. A majority of the respondents stated that a separate lane for TWs would result in less road congestion. However, when they were questioned further, 40% from each group said it is fine to share the buslane. Requirement of wearing seat belts for TW users were agreed by 73% in Group1 and only 38% of TW drivers. However, both parties agreed that the seat belts should be worn by both drivers and passengers. It was also found that picking up passengers on any location in main roads creates a disturbance to other traffic. When questioned about charging a price to enter the cities, both groups did not agree to that. Hence it seems that controlling the entrance of TWs to city centers is not an option. Almost all agreed that there should be a special speed limit for TWs. Based on the results, authors suggest followings: i. Considering implementing regulations on TW driver age limit and an acquired license to transport school children, ii. Evaluating the feasibility of providing a separate lane for TWs (which may be shared with motorbikes/mopeds), iii. Studying further on the safety aspects of seat belt wearing for TW users, iv. Identifying locations for drop off and pick up points only in main roads to prevent disturbance, and v. Studying the best suitable speed limit for TWs. With the improving nature of TW culture by emerging companies like Uber and Pickme, society is shifting more and more from public buses and trains to TWs. Hence, it is the responsibility of the relevant authorities to facilitate this trend with better rules and regulations to improve road safety and reduce traffic congestion.

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E-mail: ishanidias@kdu.ac.lk