

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation: A Story of Successful Turnaround

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Introduction:

Transport is very vital to the activities of households and economic growth. Improving transport service promotes welfare of people and ushers economic growth. Because by reducing the efforts and time to do business or to commute work, it enhances the productivity of users. Further, Road Transport is more popular in India because of its easy availability to individual needs, door to door service and reliability. Generally it acts as a feeder service to road, post and air traffic.

As we all know, transport is an important index of social, cultural and economic development of any society. It is the means by which citizens get together and develop social relations with each other. Therefore, providing a transport service that effectively and efficiently meets the demands of the people is one of the major challenges of Economic Development.

Why Road Transport Undertakings (RTU's)

Keeping in view the importance of transport in the overall strategy of economic development (as we all know infrastructure, which includes transport as well, is vital in this regard) Government of India passed Road Transport Corporation's Act, 1950 to facilitate setting up of

Road Transport undertakings (RTU's) at the state level. The principle objective defined in this Act makes it obligatory on the part of the state transport undertakings to provide an efficient, adequate, economical and properly coordinated system of road transport system within their jurisdiction. However, it is to be noted that though the passengers transport is a business for public transport, it is very difficult to run these organizations under the strict business principle of 'no-profit-no-loss' since they are run more as social services than business.

The privatization policy, initiated as part of economic reforms, was intended to include in its sweep the State Road Transport Corporations as well. These corporations have been provided with un-optimal capital structure, uneconomical routes (especially in rural areas) and have to face considerable onslaught on their autonomy in terms of purchase of inputs, appointment of professionals and acquisition of buses. The root cause of their losses is connected

to their onus of fulfilling social obligations. For instance, in a study by Prof. R K Mishra it was pointed out that in the State of Andhra Pradesh the social obligations costed the APSRTC about Rs.250 crore whereas their net losses were in the range of Rs.150-200 crores.

Our Study - Methodology

In the above background it will be interesting to study how KnSRTC has shown an exceptional performance even after complying fully with the constraints of social service.

1. Prof. R.K.Mishra, B Navin & P Geeta, "Public Enterprise" Alternative Economic Survey 2001-02, Rainbow Publishers

For the purpose of study detailed discussions were held with some of the senior officials of the corporation including trade unions leaders to ascertain the required data regarding turnaround strategy adopted by KnSRTC. Further, published sources of data too, such as Annual Reports, Brochures, were made use of and for knowing the perception of passengers, especially with regard to the service offered, a quick sample survey too was conducted at Bangalore.

Now before looking into the turnaround strategy of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KnSRTC) let's have a quick look at the profile of KnSRTC

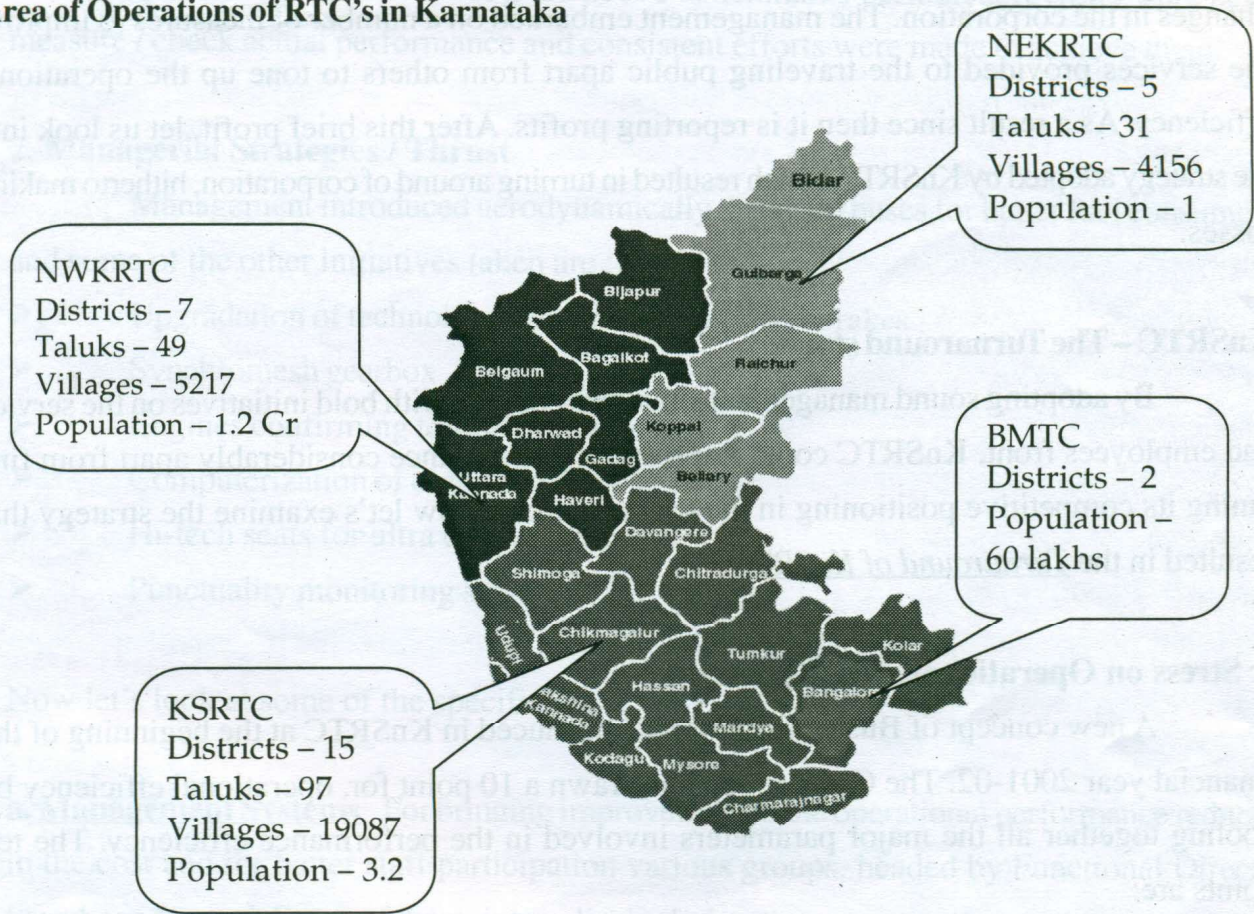
KnSRTC – A Profile:

KnSRTC which was established in August, 1961, has been catering to the needs of the traveling public in the state in pursuance of its objectives, viz., providing adequate, efficient, economic and properly co-ordinated road transport services to the commuters. KnSRTC was operating its services in the entire state till 1996-97. During the year 1997-98 the State Government divided KnSRTC and carved out from the organization two new Corporations viz, Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC), Bangalore and North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation, Hubli. The Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, which caters exclusively to the city of Bangalore, came into being on 15th Aug, 1997 and North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC) came into being on 1st Nov, 1997.

The Karnataka Government further bifurcated KnSRTC and formed North East Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NEKRTC) with effect from 1st October, 2000. However, KnSRTC continues as pivot and facilitates for functions such as staffing at executive levels, major purchases for the corporation, and integrated traffic management. The present KnSRTC has its operations in over 15 districts of the State in the Southern part of Karnataka excluding the city service segment in Bangalore. It has a fleet strength of over 5100 buses (4th biggest

among RTC's) and operates about 500 bus schedules everyday covering a total distance of about 18 lakh kms and carrying 25 lakh passengers.

Area of Operations of RTC's in Karnataka



Now, let's look at the overall Karnataka, SYUs performance before getting into specifically KnSRTCs performance:

Overall Karnataka STU's performance Highlights

Year	Effective KM's (Crores)	Percentage Cancellations	Gross Revenue (Rs. In Cr)	Margin (Rs in Cr)
2000-01	129.30	4.5	1678.17	-32.96
2001-02	137.21	3.5	1756.85	43.31
2002-03	143.38	3.9	1912.60	58.19
2003-04	154.74	1.8	2185.02	91.88
2004-05	159.64	3.0	2407.50	82.64

The Corporation as a whole was incurring losses till 2000-2001. The year 2001-2002 was a turning point for Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation. It was an year of eventful changes in the corporation. The management embarked on a number of measures to improve the services provided to the traveling public apart from others to tone up the operational efficiency. As a result since then it is reporting profits. After this brief profit, let us look into the strategy adopted by KnSRTC which resulted in turning around of corporation, hitherto making losses.

KnSRTC – The Turnaround story

By adopting sound management strategies coupled with bold initiatives on the service and employees front, KnSRTC could improve its performance considerably apart from fine tuning its competitive positioning in the traffic market. Now let’s examine the strategy that resulted in the Turnaround of KnSRTC.

1. Stress on Operational effectiveness:

A new concept of Business Plan was introduced in KnSRTC at the beginning of the financial year 2001-02. The Corporation has drawn a 10 point for, operational efficiency by pooling together all the major parameters involved in the performance efficiency. The ten points are:

- Zero cancellation in schedules and rationalization of schedules
- Improvement in regularity of services
- Vehicle utilization – Increase by 10% in daily km/bus
- Daily revenue increase by 20% over the previous year
- Reduction in cost to less than 10% over previous year
- Margin improvement by 5% every month
- Bus stand cleanliness
- Business plan for each division
- Harmonious employee relations for improved productivity

A Management Steering Committee consisting of Functional Directors and Heads of Departments (HOD’s) was formed under the Chairmanship of Vice-Chairman and Managing Director (VC&MD) of the corporation to review, periodically, the performance of various divisions. Further, the HOD’s were made overseeing officers of the divisions to carry out the

decisions taken during the review meetings and get them implemented. In return, there overseeing officers would also address the problems of divisions by liasoning with central officers.

In other words after setting the above benchmarks periodical reviews were held to measure / check actual performance and consistent efforts were made to achieve them.

2. Managerial Strategies / Thrust

Management introduced aerodynamically designed buses for better fuel consumption and some of the other initiatives taken are :

- Upgradation of technology by introducing power brakes
- Synchromesh gearbox
- Engines conforming to Euro ii norms
- Computerization of depot activities
- Hi-tech seats for ultra deluxe buses
- Punctuality monitoring system etc

Now let's look at some of the specific ones:

a. Management Systems: For bringing improvement in the operational performance reduction in the cost and for better staff participation various groups, headed by Functional Directors have been formed. Some of them, inter-alia, include

1. Technical – This group will focus on the fleet, fuel, pollution control and depot level engineering matters. Since buses are the key or central to the performance of corporation, they need to be put in prime operational condition with minimum break downs. Further, fuel efficiency has to be improved, inventory management practices have to be streamlined while taking all the care, that is required, for safety through reduction of accidents. Because all these factors have a crucial bearing on the performance and efficiency of the corporation.

2. Staff motivation and development: Employees are viewed as assets at KnSRTC. The excellent corporate climate has created a healthy relationship between the management and staff. For instance, during the last 6 years there have been no strikes, an exceptional event in the history of a government undertaking. However, some allege that interests of workers is suppressed and their rights not respected at KnSRTC. During the interaction with union leaders it is formed that though there could be an iota of truth in this by and large workers seem to be

happy with management initiatives for their development. For instance, in 1999 KnSRTC introduced the Workplace Alcohol Prevention Program and Activity Act (WAPPA) specially for alcohol addicted employees.

Under the WAPPA, a unique & much appreciated initiative by the International Labour Organization (ILO), so far a total of 1903 employees have been treated out of which 884 are drivers, 514 conductors, 333 mechanical staff and others 172. This pro-active welfare program has resulted in remarkable improvement in productivity / behaviour of such employees. Further, incentive schemes, house building loans, children's scholarships and counselling form a part of the agenda.

Staff training programs are held periodically to enhance and augment the working skills of its employees. KnSRTC has three training centres (Bangalore, Hassan and Mysore) and has trained 9420 employees during the year 2004-05. Further, a unique objective Driver Testing system – the first of its kind in the country – at KnSRTC makes the entire process of appointing drivers transparent and clear cut

3. Revenue Mechanization – The task of this group will be to examine the ways and the means for improving the traffic and commercial revenue of the corporation in the short and long term. This will include evaluation of the schedules being operated, reduction of dead kilometers and other traffic related matters, optimizing use of commercial space and facilities, review of line checking and route follow arrangements and general awareness on the need to step up daily revenue and minimize short falls.

b. On Line Seat Reservation System : KnSRTC has established computerized passenger seat reservation systems at all its Divisional Head Quarters bus stations. All the major bus stations are established with LAN/WAN facilities. Further, private agents have been appointed and given on-line connectivity to the central database server. At Bangalore, over 106 remote counters are located at various extensions which has provided good connectivity to the general public for the services provided by KnSRTC besides increasing the traffic revenues of the corporation. Corporation also operates a special service called KB3S for picking up passengers from the reservation counters to Kempegowda bus station, which facilitates the passengers to carry their luggage free of cost.

c. Webpage of KnSRTC: KnSRTC has its webpage www.ksrtc.kar.nic.in All the important information about the corporation is hosted on this website. The information on facilities like, casual contracts, seasonal passes, tender details, contact phone numbers etc are made available to the general public on this webpage. Further, a dynamic time-table and fare details of some of the prime services are also provided over the internet.

d. Transparency in Procurement : The corporation has implemented the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act, 2002 in its purchases. In order to implement the Act effectively a Contract Management Group (CMG) has been formed with MD, BMTC, different directors and the internal auditor. The CMG would finalize the pre-qualifications, evaluation criteria and other tender conditions for all purchase schedules for which the annual purchase value is above five lakhs. As a result the corporation has achieved a substantial savings of Rs.7 crore.

3. State Government Support: Patronage of passengers and government support should be there for any public transport utility to run smoothly. This is what the performance of the State Road Transport Corporations in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu indicate (see the Table below)

Parameter	AP	Karnataka	Tamil Nadu
Occupancy ratio	62%	72%	82%
Motor Vehicle tax	City - 10% Rural - 12.55	City - 5% Rural - 7.0%	City - 2% Rural - 4.6%
Concession	50%	100%	75 to 100%
Fleet	19,00	15122	16861
Outlay/employees	1.18 lakh	79,000	1.14 lakh
Staff ratio/bus	6.2	5.4	6.84

Source: Times of India dated 15th Aug, 2005

In Tamil Nadu the motor vehicle tax is 2% on buses running in the city and 4.6% on rural areas. Karnataka charges five and seven per cent on city and rural services respectively. Further, the Karnataka Government also exempted one of its loss loss-making region, North East Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NEKRTC) from Motor Vehicle Tax till it makes profit.

Further, for both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu corporations the government is reimbursing the expenditure incurred by it in extending concessions to various sections. However, the

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reimbursement of concessions to APSRTC started only from 1996 and that too only 50%. After recent strike by employees of APSRTC in July/Oct 2005 government of Andhra Pradesh have agreed to reduce motor vehicle tax and reimburse 100%. So government of Karnataka is very much considerate to the requirements of KnSRTC and supporting the corporation in all its endeavours;

- Be it in the form of reduction in motor vehicle tax
- Or permitting the corporation to revise fares as and when warranted by compulsions like hike in price of diesel.
- Or in reimbursement of concessions extended to various sections by KnSRTC.

1. Focus on Marketing and Commuters service/relations All of us are aware that to survive in a turbulent environment, it is necessary to take a close look at the customers and their needs and retain them by providing them service of desired quality. Now let's see the initiatives taken by the KnSRTC in this regard.

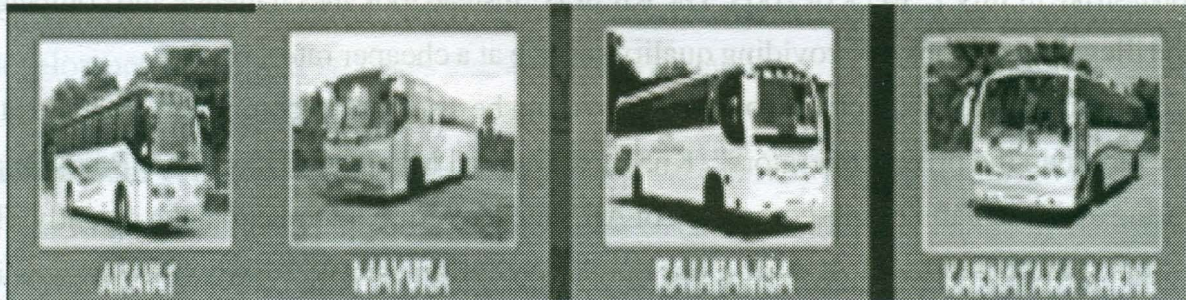
a. Online Reservation: Keeping the convenience of the customer's in mind KnSRTC has introduced online seat reservation counters. 106 online reservation counters serve customers all over Bangalore city in addition to the reservation counters at Kempegowda bus station, important district headquarters, prominent places in neighboring and bus station in Bangalore city. Further, KnSRTC has launched a user friendly system of advance booking of tickets through their website: www.ksrtc.org through email: bookings@ksrtc.org

b. Hi-tech Pass Identification and Ticket Issuing technology : Since its launch in August 2004, KnSRTC has provided 50% of its conductors with electronic ticketing machines (ETMs). This is one of the many initiatives by KnSRTC, that noother corporation is offering such high-tech services in South Asia. Instead of the paper card passes, students will be issued RFID plastic card passes. These cards need to be flashed on the ETM's to record the card number through RF signal. This will be facilitated with KnSRTC introducing state-of-the-art Radio Frequency Identification Technology (RFID) Further, the exact whereabouts of the bus and expected time of arrival at destinations can also be tracked using a CDMA mobile phone, because of RFID.

c. Commuter Charter: KnSRTC believes in disseminating all the required information to the commuters in advance. Accordingly the corporation brought out a full-fledged Commuter's Charter which contains complete information on KnSRTC, its wide array of services, its multi-faceted customer oriented goals and the global standards it has set in the travel arena. The said charter inter-alia, seeks to inform KnSRTC patrons about:

- K.S. R.T.C and its objectives
- Facilities and kinds of services offered by KnSRTC to its commuters
- The Standards of Quality aimed by KnSRTC
- Commuters feedback and Grievances Redressal System
- The expectations of the KnSRTC from its patrons i.e, Commuters

d. Branding of Buses : To establish the identity of the buses among the travelling public and also to patronize the traveling on high density route KnSRTC has branded its ultra Deluxe and Mofussill services. Branding of services also imbibes and ensures regularity, punctuality, comfort, safety, reasonable frequency and courteous behaviour of the crew with the general public.



For instance, KnSRTC has given a brand name Mysore Mallige for the branded services run between Bangalore and Mysore and Venkatadri for Bangalore-Thirupati. The corporation gave greater emphasis to these aspects to effectively meet the challenges from private players. It is understood that after branding these services are yielding better earnings per km (EPKM)

a. Travelling in Comfort: A broad range of services are being made available by KnSRTC to enable people to travel across the state and outside it, in a seamless flow of comfort, safety and speed, within their budget. The choice of services available range from traveling in world class air-conditioned Volvo buses, Mayura A/c buses, ultra deluxe buses, semi-deluxe buses express or ordinary services, and suburban service. Each bus carries the colours scheme of the service

category it belongs to. In fact, KnSRTC enjoys the status of having the largest fleet of Volvo buses in the country.

b. Service Guarantee Schemes: From 1st Nov, 2002 KnSRTC has introduced “Service Guarantee scheme” (SGS) for its prestigious Volvo and Rajahamsa services. This scheme permits passengers using the Volvo or Rajahamsa services to obtain a fare refund should there be a delay of more than 30 minutes in the departure or arrival of the bus.

c. Accident Relief Fund: KnSRTC has introduced Accident Relief Fund which entitles dependents of passengers, who dies in a KnSRTC bus accident, for a compensation of Rs.2 lakhs. This is in addition to the compensation awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal. Every passenger buying a ticket worth Rs.100 or more only are charged Rs.1/- towards this fund.

d. Quality service to check the illicit operations: KnSRTC did not wait for the transport department or the police to crack down on the illegal operations of private vehicles. Curbing illicit operations was one of the major demands of the employees’ union at APSRTC, which went on a strike in July 1st week of 2005. The KnSRTC instead took the challenge and competed with the illegal operations by providing quality service at a cheaper rate.

“We competed with private buses in providing best service to commuters, that too at a cheaper fare than the private operators”, KnSRTC General Manager (Traffic) Mr.Raj Kumar said during a visit of cabinet sub-committee of AP State Government to Karnataka recently. He claims that (confirmed by most during our quick perception sample survey) the services in their buses match with those offered by the private vehicles and are being run to the satisfaction of the commuters.

Further, services like Mysore Mallige, Rajahamsa and Mayura are giving private operator a run for their money. Ultra modern buses have been introduced in place of earlier Red one. The KnSRTC management has given power to its regional managers to cut down prices on select routes where private operators had a strong presence.

(1. The Times of India, 14th August, 2005)

Customer feedback: KnSRTC has introduced feedback system in some of its prime services like Aravat, Mayura AC etc and one General Manager (Marketing and customer service) regularly

monitors it as well. Further, as and when required necessary action too is taken and commuter is informed of the same. This sort of action on the part of management makes the commuters feel how important they are to KnSRTC and how serious the corporation is in serving them to their full satisfaction.

Others: Besides providing comfortable and convenient bus services for the benefit of passengers, the KnSRTC has also been focusing on creation of excellent infrastructure in terms of well designed and spacious bus stations. Almost all the district headquarters and taluk headquarters in the operational area of KnSRTC have bus stations built by the corporation with all necessary facilities for the convenience of passengers.

The KnSRTC during the current year has taken up a major project costing Rs.30 crores for upgrading 31 bus stations at the district and taluk level to upgrade the facilities in all the bus stations of the corporation. Further, the corporation has built Mysore Road Satellite Bus Terminal at a cost of Rs.30 crores (on an area of 9 acres of land). The new satellite bus terminal has a vast area of 2,700 sq. mtrs as the waiting area for passengers and has a luxury lounge for long distance passengers traveling by premium bus services like Airavat, Mayura and Rajahamsa. It will be equipped with a restaurant and also with adequate capacity.

With its elegant architecture and beautifully landscaped ambience, the new satellite bus terminal represents a major addition to the infrastructure of the city and serves as a model for the development of similar facilities elsewhere in the country.

Intermodal Transit Centre on the Anvil: While the centrally located Kempegowda bus station in the Majestic area of Bangalore will continue to be the central bus station of Bangalore, the bus service operated in the southern districts of Mysore, Kodagu, Mandya, Bangalore, and several important inter-city services in Karnataka and outside will be shifted to the new bus terminal. The KnSRTC has already initiated a project for the development of the Kempagowda bus station jointly with BMTTC for the construction an Inter Modal Transit Centre catering to the needs of inter-city and city bus services, metro rail services and linking the major railway junction of Bangalore city.

Results are there for all of us to see:

As a result of series of initiatives taken by the management of KnSRTC, the corporation has fine tuned its competitive positioning in the traffic market and has been doing extremely well in the last couple of years which could be seen from the table given below.

KnSRTC Operations in the last 5 years

Year	Effective KM (crores)	Percentage cancellations	Gross revenue (Rs. In Cr)	Total Cost (Rs in Cr)	Margin (Rs in Cr)
01-02	52.05	2.4	685.07	669.13	16.52
02-03	53.66	2.4	730.56	697.84	32.74
03-04	56.22	1.0	790.83	764.96	25.87
04-05	58.10	0.9	895.46	868.83	26.63
Upto June - 05	16.15	1.4	522.26	240.85	17.73

Enjoying its position as India's number 1 corporation in transportation, the KnSRTC envisages the future and the present from the top. As we could see the corporation shows a determination to forge ahead and pursue new avenues towards progress. The goal in view is to provide an economic solution for the comfort, well being and convenience of the customers. It may not be out of place to mention here that no other transport corporation operates as many routes as KnSRTC. The effective fleet maintenance practices introduced by the corporation resulted in better KMPL efficiency and optimum utilization of spares, tyres and lubricants which inturn resulted in reduction in the expenditure on their items.

In recognition of KnSRTC's exceptional achievement, it won many awards and to mention a few, inter alia,

- 2nd Sept, 2002 – "Safety Award for 2001-02 by the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, India"
- 16th Feb, 2003 – "Golden Peacock Innovation Management "Runners Up" Award, 2002 in recognition of initiatives on Innovations Focussed on the Areas of Management, Technology, Customer and Human Relations" by the Institute of Directors, India
- 11th June, 2004 (2nd time) "Golden Peacock Eco Innovation Award, 2004 in recognition of the innovative efforts on the use of bio-fuel, fitment of diesel particulate filters and induction of alternative fuels to the buses.

Conclusion:

Despite various constraints like several obligations, increased wages and input costs on items, and also with a competitive fare structure with its neighboring states, KnSRTC managed to turnaround by following consciously carved out and skillfully implemented strategy with customer as its focus. In the last few years the passenger transport sector has changed rapidly particularly after the passage of the Motor Vehicle Act of 1988, which liberalized the norms for entry into passenger transport services. A few other significant changes in the environment

such as rapid growth of personal transport vehicles, access to cheap telecommunication facilities in urban and rural areas etc badly affect the performance / profitability of a RTU.

However, KnSRTC could successfully ward off these challenges by formulating and successfully implementing an effective techno-operational marketing strategy. It needs to pursue its present pro-active strategy not only to expand its market size while guarding its market share from competitors. Further, it needs to streamline its innovative and creative approach to customer service. Though it is doing extremely well thanks to the well carved out strategy, it needs to strengthen its strong customer centric culture to counter the onslaught of the more agile and fleet footed competitors. Because the prosperity and growth of KnSRTC in the coming years will be dictated by the goodwill, support and patronage of traveling public. With its present pro-active and pro-customer approach, while emphasizing techno-operational efficiency, it is fondly hoped that it will not be a stupendous task for KnSRTC.

Note: The author would like to thank the management and the staff of KnSRTC and TU Leaders for all the help and co-operation extended.

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