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Determinants of Policy Failure in Mataram Metro and Implications for the Sustainability of Trans Mataram

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Abstract

The rapid urban expansion of Mataram City as a National Activity Center has intensified transportation challenges, particularly traffic congestion caused by high dependence on private vehicles and the limited effectiveness of public transportation services. This study aims to analyze the determinants of policy failure in the implementation of the Mataram Metro Bus program and to examine the strategic adaptation measures introduced through the Trans Mataram 2026 initiative. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The analytical framework is based on William N. Dunn's policy evaluation theory, focusing on effectiveness, responsiveness, and policy sustainability. The findings reveal that the failure of the Mataram Metro Bus was primarily driven by the incompatibility between large bus dimensions and existing urban road infrastructure, irregular waiting times that reduced service reliability, and the absence of comprehensive supporting regulations and institutional coordination. In response, the Trans Mataram 2026 program introduced adaptive reforms, including the deployment of smaller and more flexible fleets, the integration of real-time digital tracking systems to improve service responsiveness, and the implementation of a zero-fare policy for vulnerable groups to enhance accessibility and social inclusion. The study concludes that the sustainability of urban mass transit systems in medium-sized cities depends significantly on contextual policy design, technological integration, and user-centered service innovation. These findings contribute to the development of more adaptive and inclusive public transportation policy models.

Abstrak

Pertumbuhan pesat Kota Mataram sebagai Pusat Kegiatan Nasional telah memunculkan tantangan transportasi yang semakin kompleks, terutama kemacetan lalu lintas akibat tingginya ketergantungan masyarakat

terhadap kendaraan pribadi serta belum optimalnya layanan transportasi publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor penyebab kegagalan kebijakan dalam implementasi program Bus Metro Mataram serta mengkaji langkah-langkah adaptasi strategis yang diterapkan melalui program Trans Mataram 2026. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan teori evaluasi kebijakan William N. Dunn dengan menitikberatkan pada dimensi efektivitas, responsivitas, dan keberlanjutan kebijakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegagalan Bus Metro Mataram disebabkan oleh ketidaksesuaian ukuran armada besar dengan kondisi infrastruktur jalan perkotaan, ketidakpastian waktu tunggu yang menurunkan keandalan layanan, serta belum adanya regulasi pendukung dan koordinasi kelembagaan yang memadai. Sebagai bentuk adaptasi, program Trans Mataram 2026 melakukan reformasi melalui penggunaan armada yang lebih kecil dan fleksibel, integrasi teknologi pelacakan digital secara real-time untuk meningkatkan responsivitas layanan, serta penerapan kebijakan tarif gratis bagi kelompok rentan guna memperluas aksesibilitas dan inklusi sosial. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberlanjutan transportasi massal di kota menengah sangat bergantung pada desain kebijakan yang kontekstual, integrasi teknologi, dan inovasi layanan yang berorientasi pada kebutuhan pengguna.

Introduction

The need for an adequate mass transportation system has become increasingly significant in response to the current urban dynamics of Mataram City. According to the Regional Spatial Plan, Mataram holds a strategic role as it has been designated both as a National Activity Center (Pusat Kegiatan Nasional/PKN) and a Strategic Development Area (Kawasan Strategis/KPS). This designation positions the city as a critical gateway and a central transportation hub within the region (Adi & Safitri, 2022). Alongside this strategic function, Mataram has experienced rapid urban growth, characterized by increasing population density and expanding socio-economic activities (H. Idris et al., 2019). These developments have contributed to emerging urban challenges, particularly traffic congestion and the declining quality of urban life (Rangkuti et al., 2019). Such congestion is largely attributed to the inadequacy of the existing public transportation system in meeting community mobility demands, which has consequently intensified reliance on private vehicles, especially motorcycles.

In response to these transportation challenges, the central government, through the Ministry of Transportation, initiated a public mass transit development program aimed at improving urban mobility. This initiative materialized through the implementation of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and the Buy-the-Service (BTS) scheme, commonly known as Teman Bus. One of the practical manifestations of this policy was the deployment of the Trans Mataram Metro Bus fleet, operating across Mataram City and its surrounding areas

(H. Idris et al., 2019). As a strategic intervention to address the crisis of inadequate conventional public transport and accommodate increasingly dynamic urban mobility demands, the Trans Mataram Metro Bus officially commenced operations on November 21, 2016, serving four primary routes (Idris et al., 2019). The introduction of this BRT system was grounded in the expectation that it would provide an efficient, safe, comfortable, and affordable public transportation alternative aligned with the purchasing capacity of local residents (Idris et al., 2019).

Despite these ideal objectives, the operational performance of the Trans Mataram Metro Bus has faced considerable challenges. Reports indicate limited public interest in utilizing the service, accompanied by concerns over its long-term sustainability, including discussions regarding service discontinuation. One of the most prominent indicators of this failure is the low level of community acceptance and ridership. Previous studies suggest that this lack of interest is primarily driven by route coverage that does not fully reach all urban areas of Mataram, as well as the considerable distance between bus stops and residential neighborhoods. Furthermore, the absence of dedicated bus lanes has reinforced public perceptions that the Trans Mataram Metro remains vulnerable to the same traffic congestion experienced by private vehicles. This reluctance to shift transportation modes is consistent with the findings of Prayogi and Satwikasari (2019), who emphasize that passengers' willingness to transition to BRT systems is highly dependent on service quality perceptions and the characteristics of the built environment surrounding transit stations.

The shortcomings of the Trans Mataram Metro policy indicate that the implementation of the transportation policy may contain substantive weaknesses requiring comprehensive evaluation. A deeper investigation is therefore necessary to identify whether the determinants of policy failure lie in service quality, route planning, operational management, or insufficient political and institutional support. Understanding these dimensions is essential not only for explaining the current challenges but also for improving future policy design and implementation.

Given the contrast between the intended vision of delivering an efficient, safe, comfortable, and affordable public transportation system (Idris et al., 2019) and the reality of operational instability, this study focuses on examining the determinants of policy failure in the Trans Mataram Metro Bus program. The findings are expected to provide important implications for the development of future urban transportation policies, while offering specific recommendations to ensure the sustainability of the renewed Trans Mataram Bus system as a vital component of Mataram City's transportation infrastructure.

Research Method

This study was conducted in Mataram City, West Nusa Tenggara, as the primary site of the Trans Mataram Bus policy implementation and the location where policy failure related to the Mataram Metro Bus has become evident. The research site was selected purposively to obtain rich and relevant information from stakeholders directly involved in

the policy process. The study was scheduled to take place over a one-month period, beginning in January 2026. To generate comprehensive, in-depth, and credible insights into the determinants of policy failure, data collection methods were categorized into two main sources: primary and secondary data.

Primary data were obtained directly from first-hand sources through in-depth interviews and field observations. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with purposively selected informants representing key stakeholders, including officials from the Mataram City Transportation Agency, the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), bus operators, and members of the public who use or are affected by the transportation service. Meanwhile, field observations were carried out at bus operational sites to assess the condition of transportation infrastructure and facilities, as well as to observe the behavior and responses of both policy implementers and the community toward the policy implementation (Putri & Rahmilah, 2025).

To complement the primary data, secondary data were collected through documentation analysis. These included official archives and policy-related documents such as local government regulations (Peraturan Daerah), standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to policy implementation, and reports on public transportation budgeting. These documentary sources were essential for understanding the institutional and regulatory context surrounding the Trans Mataram Metro policy.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted through an interactive and continuous process until data saturation was achieved, following the three-stage analytical framework proposed by Putri and Rahmilah (2025). The first stage involved data reduction, which consisted of summarizing, selecting, and focusing on the most relevant aspects of the collected information. This process enabled the identification of key themes and recurring patterns while eliminating irrelevant or redundant data, thereby producing a clearer and more structured analytical foundation.

The second stage involved data display, in which the organized information was presented in the form of narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic charts to facilitate interpretation. In this study, the data were specifically categorized according to the analytical components of William N. Dunn's policy analysis model. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, which involved formulating preliminary findings and continuously validating them throughout the research process to ensure their reliability and accuracy. The final conclusions are expected to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions, particularly concerning the determinants of policy failure and their broader implications for urban transportation policy development.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Determinants of Mataram Metro Policy Failure

Based on field observations and historical evidence, the failure of the Mataram Metro system can be understood as a systemic policy failure when assessed through William N.

Dunn's policy evaluation criteria, particularly appropriateness and responsiveness. The first major determinant concerns the selection of large-capacity buses designed to accommodate up to 75 passengers. In the context of Mataram City, the geometric conditions of both primary and peripheral road networks are not consistently compatible with the operational requirements of large buses. This mismatch has resulted in traffic flow disruptions and reduced operational efficiency. The technical incompatibility of the selected fleet represents a clear failure in choosing policy instruments suited to local conditions (Tentua et al., 2026). Policies that fail to account for the physical characteristics of urban infrastructure are often difficult to sustain over time (Rachman et al., 2025).

The second determinant relates to the system's limited responsiveness to one of passengers' most fundamental needs, namely time reliability. The Mataram Metro was characterized by unpredictable service intervals (headway), which generated concerns among users regarding potential delays (Susianti et al., 2023). Within Dunn's evaluative framework, responsiveness refers to the extent to which a policy addresses the needs and expectations of its target beneficiaries. The inability of the Mataram Metro to provide reliable and accessible scheduling information led many residents to return to private vehicle use. This issue was compounded by the placement of bus stops at considerable distances from residential areas (Arsiandi, 2023). The effectiveness of public transport accessibility is strongly influenced by stop location, and when walking distances exceed acceptable thresholds, public transportation becomes significantly less attractive to potential users (Arsiandi, 2023).

In addition to internal operational weaknesses, external institutional factors also contributed to policy failure. One important determinant was the absence of supportive regulatory measures, particularly push strategies implemented by government agencies and educational institutions. The lack of policies restricting private vehicle use among students and public employees deprived the Mataram Metro of a stable passenger base (Suhargon, 2021). Theoretically, successful public transportation systems require a balanced combination of pull strategies, such as improved service provision, and push strategies, including limitations on private vehicle dependency (Suhargon, 2021). Furthermore, on tourism-oriented routes such as Narmada-Senggigi, restricted operating hours ending at 5:00 PM reflected the policy's inability to accommodate the needs of visitors wishing to engage in evening activities such as sunset tourism. This shortcoming indicates a failure to meet the adequacy criterion, as the service did not sufficiently address actual mobility demands (Sihotang, Lucky Manuel, 2025).

Public transportation discussions in Mataram cannot be separated from the historical development of the Mataram Metro, which began operations in late 2016. Previous research by Idris et al. (2019) presented the Mataram Metro as an efficient and comfortable urban transportation model, supported by four major routes covering key areas across the city. However, the effectiveness of public policy should not be assessed solely based on its launch or initial implementation, but rather on its sustained ability to achieve intended outcomes

(Sihotang, Lucky Manuel, 2025). Using William N. Dunn's analytical framework, this section critically examines why a model initially considered ideal ultimately failed, and how the Trans Mataram 2026 initiative has attempted to address these shortcomings through strategic policy adaptation.

Adaptation of Trans Mataram

In response to the shortcomings of the Mataram Metro, the Trans Mataram program introduced a fundamental shift in fleet selection by replacing large buses with smaller ELF vehicles. From the perspective of Dunn's efficiency criterion, the use of ELF units is considerably more suitable for Mataram's densely populated and relatively narrow urban road conditions. Smaller vehicles enable more frequent departures while maintaining better control over operational costs per kilometer (Tentua et al., 2026). Although each ELF unit has a lower passenger capacity compared to the previous large buses, their maneuverability improves travel speed and expands accessibility to strategic routes that were previously underserved (Rachman et al., 2025).

Route restructuring also represents a significant policy adjustment. The transition to two main corridors, identified as the Yellow and Red routes, was based on comprehensive studies conducted by BRIDA, focusing on business districts, major university campuses such as UNRAM, UIN, and UMMAT, and densely populated residential areas. This reflects an improvement in policy appropriateness, as transportation planning has been aligned more closely with actual travel demand patterns and mobility generators within the city (Sihotang, Lucky Manuel, 2025). Unlike the previous Mataram Metro system, which largely replicated conventional transport routes without sufficient accessibility analysis, Trans Mataram prioritizes connectivity between educational institutions and essential public service centers, including civil registration offices (Dukcapil). This strategic shift enhances the practical value of the service, particularly for primary target groups such as students and elderly residents (Fearnley, 2025).

Implementation of Real-Time Tracking Technology

One of the most significant innovations introduced by Trans Mataram to address the major weaknesses of the previous system is the implementation of a browser-based fleet tracking application. This initiative directly responds to the responsiveness criterion in public policy evaluation (Dunn in Sihotang & Harapan Tua, 2025). Uncertainty regarding bus arrival times has long been recognized as one of the primary barriers to public transport adoption in urban environments (Susianti et al., 2023). Through the integration of a Real-Time Passenger Information System (RTPIS), passengers are now able to monitor vehicle locations and estimate arrival times with greater precision, reducing travel-related anxiety and enhancing user convenience.

Existing studies indicate that access to real-time transportation information positively influences customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of repeated use of public transit services (Tentua et al., 2026). This technological integration shifts the service model from a passive system, where passengers wait without certainty, to an active, data-driven mobility experience. Its implications for long-term sustainability are substantial, as transparency and predictability help build public trust and foster user loyalty, ultimately contributing to a stable bus occupancy rate (load factor) (Susianti et al., 2023). Moreover, the tracking system enables transportation authorities to monitor driver performance and route compliance more effectively, strengthening policy oversight and administrative effectiveness (Sihotang, Lucky Manuel, 2025).

Free Fare Policy

Trans Mataram has also introduced a fully free-fare policy as an ambitious strategy to attract residents back to public transportation. From an equity perspective, this policy has significantly improved access to mobility for vulnerable groups, particularly students and elderly citizens (Fearnley, 2025). Zero-fare programs often lead to substantial increases in ridership and can enhance urban inclusivity by removing financial barriers to transportation access (Fearnley, 2025). This objective is reflected in Trans Mataram's active promotional campaigns targeting schools and universities through social media platforms and strategically placed outdoor advertisements (Suhargon, 2021).

However, when evaluated from the perspective of long-term sustainability and efficiency, the free-fare policy presents serious fiscal challenges. Since operational costs are fully funded through the regional government budget and managed by the Transportation Agency, maintaining such a policy requires a consistent and sustainable financial commitment. Existing literature suggests that while free public transport can increase ridership, it is often expensive and may not significantly reduce congestion unless accompanied by service improvements capable of attracting private car users (Fearnley, 2025). Therefore, the future sustainability of Trans Mataram depends heavily on the government's ability to maintain this subsidy while simultaneously expanding the fleet, which currently consists of only two operational units. Without adequate fleet capacity, rising demand could once again result in longer waiting times, thereby reducing service adequacy and undermining public confidence (Sihotang, Lucky Manuel, 2025).

Policy Synergy and Institutional Support

The success of Trans Mataram depends not only on internal operational improvements but also on the presence of integrated policy support. Learning from the previous failure of the Mataram Metro, the sustainability of the new system requires complementary push policies designed to reduce dependence on private vehicles. Without restrictions on private vehicle use in school zones or government office areas, Trans Mataram risks functioning merely as a supplementary transportation option rather than

becoming a primary mode of urban mobility (Suhargon, 2021). Strengthening legal frameworks and local transportation regulations is therefore essential to establishing a more orderly and supportive transportation ecosystem.

Public outreach through social media and billboard campaigns represents a responsive strategy for engaging younger users, particularly students. Nevertheless, bus stop accessibility remains a critical determinant of service effectiveness. If Trans Mataram stops remain difficult to access from key activity centers such as markets and residential neighborhoods, the operational efficiency of both the Yellow and Red corridors will be significantly reduced (Arsiandi, 2023). Periodic evaluations of bus stop placement are therefore necessary to ensure alignment with acceptable pedestrian access radii and to maintain high occupancy levels (Arsiandi, 2023).

Discussion

Comparing Mataram Metro (2016) and Trans Mataram (2026)

This study provides a comparative analysis between current field findings and earlier research conducted by Idris et al. (2019) on the implementation of the Mataram Metro. Their study described the Mataram Metro as an efficient solution to urban congestion, supported by four major routes extending across central and peripheral urban areas. However, significant discrepancies emerge between those initial expectations and the policy failures identified in the present study.

Fleet Evolution

Previous studies documented that the Mataram Metro relied on large buses supplied by the Ministry of Transportation (Idris et al., 2019). This study finds that the use of large buses itself became a major determinant of failure when evaluated through Dunn's efficiency criterion. While earlier analyses acknowledged that administrative implementation had proceeded successfully, they did not critically assess whether vehicle dimensions were compatible with the local road network. Current findings reveal that roads in areas such as Selagalas and Sayang-Sayang are characterized by significant side obstacles and constrained maneuvering space, making large bus operations inefficient. The innovation introduced by Trans Mataram lies in the adoption of smaller ELF vehicles. Although these units accommodate fewer passengers, they better satisfy the appropriateness criterion due to their flexibility and compatibility with local road conditions. This shift reflects a broader transition from a centralized, aid-driven policy model toward a more context-sensitive, locally oriented transportation strategy.

Digital Transparency Through Tracking Systems

Idris et al. (2019) identified low public awareness as one of the barriers to public transportation adoption. However, this study reveals a deeper determinant: public reluctance was driven less by lack of awareness and more by uncertainty and fear associated with

unreliable service schedules. The Mataram Metro operated without a publicly accessible tracking system, leaving passengers without predictable information regarding arrival times (Susianti et al., 2023). Trans Mataram addresses this challenge through browser-based digital tracking technology. This represents a key innovation distinguishing the current system from its predecessor. While earlier studies focused primarily on administrative implementation, this research highlights the importance of technological responsiveness. The availability of accurate, real-time information has emerged as a crucial determinant of policy sustainability that was absent in the original Mataram Metro model (Susianti, Robika, & Wijaya, 2023).

Fare Policy Transformation

Earlier evaluations considered the Mataram Metro's affordable fare structure to be sufficient for public accessibility (Idris et al., 2019). In practice, however, a flat fare of IDR 4,000 remained uncompetitive compared to the relatively low operating costs of private motorcycles in Mataram. The strategic innovation of Trans Mataram lies in the implementation of a zero-fare policy. From an equity perspective, this approach significantly increases accessibility for vulnerable groups such as students and elderly residents. This finding suggests that in medium-sized cities such as Mataram, affordable pricing alone may not be enough to shift transportation culture. Instead, fare-free interventions may be necessary to encourage substantial behavioral change, representing an important addition to previous policy discussions (Fearnley, 2025).

Route Optimization

Idris et al. (2019) described the original four Mataram Metro routes as comprehensive, extending to areas such as Narmada and Senggigi. However, this study finds that excessively broad route coverage, combined with limited fleet availability, resulted in prolonged service intervals that could exceed one hour. By contrast, Trans Mataram has adopted a more focused strategy through the implementation of the Red and Yellow corridors, designed based on BRIDA's targeted mobility analysis. These routes specifically serve university campuses and government offices, thereby better fulfilling Dunn's adequacy criterion. The findings suggest that for pilot urban transport systems, compact and high-demand routes may offer greater sustainability than extensive routes with low passenger density (Tentua et al., 2026).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the failure of the Mataram Metro policy was primarily driven by a mismatch between policy design and the actual transportation context of Mataram City. The findings reveal that the determinants of policy failure can be understood through several dimensions of William N. Dunn's policy evaluation framework, particularly appropriateness, responsiveness, adequacy, efficiency, and equity. The inappropriate

selection of large-capacity buses, which were incompatible with local road geometries, significantly reduced operational efficiency and contributed to traffic disruption. At the same time, the inability to provide reliable service schedules and strategically accessible bus stops weakened public trust and discouraged long-term behavioral shifts from private vehicles to public transportation. These internal weaknesses were further intensified by the absence of complementary institutional support, particularly regulatory measures aimed at reducing dependence on private vehicles among key user groups such as students and government employees.

The analysis also demonstrates that policy failure in public transportation cannot be attributed solely to technical or operational shortcomings, but must be understood as the result of insufficient policy integration and limited responsiveness to user expectations. The case of Mataram Metro illustrates that even well-intentioned transportation policies may fail when implementation does not adequately account for local infrastructure constraints, user mobility patterns, and broader governance support. In this context, the lack of synchronization between service provision (pull strategies) and mobility restriction measures (push strategies) undermined the system's ability to establish a stable and sustainable ridership base. These findings reaffirm that effective public transportation policy requires a holistic approach that combines infrastructure suitability, service reliability, institutional coordination, and adaptive governance.

In contrast, the emergence of Trans Mataram in 2026 reflects an important process of policy learning and adaptive reform. Several strategic adjustments introduced in the new system, including the transition to smaller ELF vehicles, route optimization focused on high-demand travel corridors, the implementation of real-time digital tracking technology, and the adoption of a zero-fare policy, demonstrate significant improvements in addressing the shortcomings of the previous model. These innovations indicate a shift from a centrally driven policy orientation toward a more context-sensitive and user-centered transportation approach. Particularly, the integration of digital tracking systems has strengthened service responsiveness by reducing uncertainty and improving public confidence, while the free-fare policy has enhanced transportation equity by expanding access for vulnerable social groups.

Despite these promising improvements, the long-term sustainability of Trans Mataram remains dependent on consistent institutional commitment and strategic policy reinforcement. The continuation of government subsidies, expansion of fleet capacity, periodic evaluation of bus stop accessibility, and the implementation of supportive regulatory interventions aimed at limiting private vehicle use will be essential to ensuring the effectiveness and resilience of the new system. Without such complementary efforts, Trans Mataram risks repeating the trajectory of its predecessor.

Overall, this study contributes to the broader discourse on urban transportation policy by demonstrating that policy failure can serve as a valuable source of institutional learning. The case of Mataram highlights the importance of designing adaptive and context-

responsive public transport policies that are not only technically feasible but also socially accepted and institutionally supported. The findings provide practical recommendations for policymakers in Mataram and other medium-sized cities facing similar transportation challenges, emphasizing that sustainable public transportation requires continuous policy evaluation, technological innovation, and integrated governance strategies.

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