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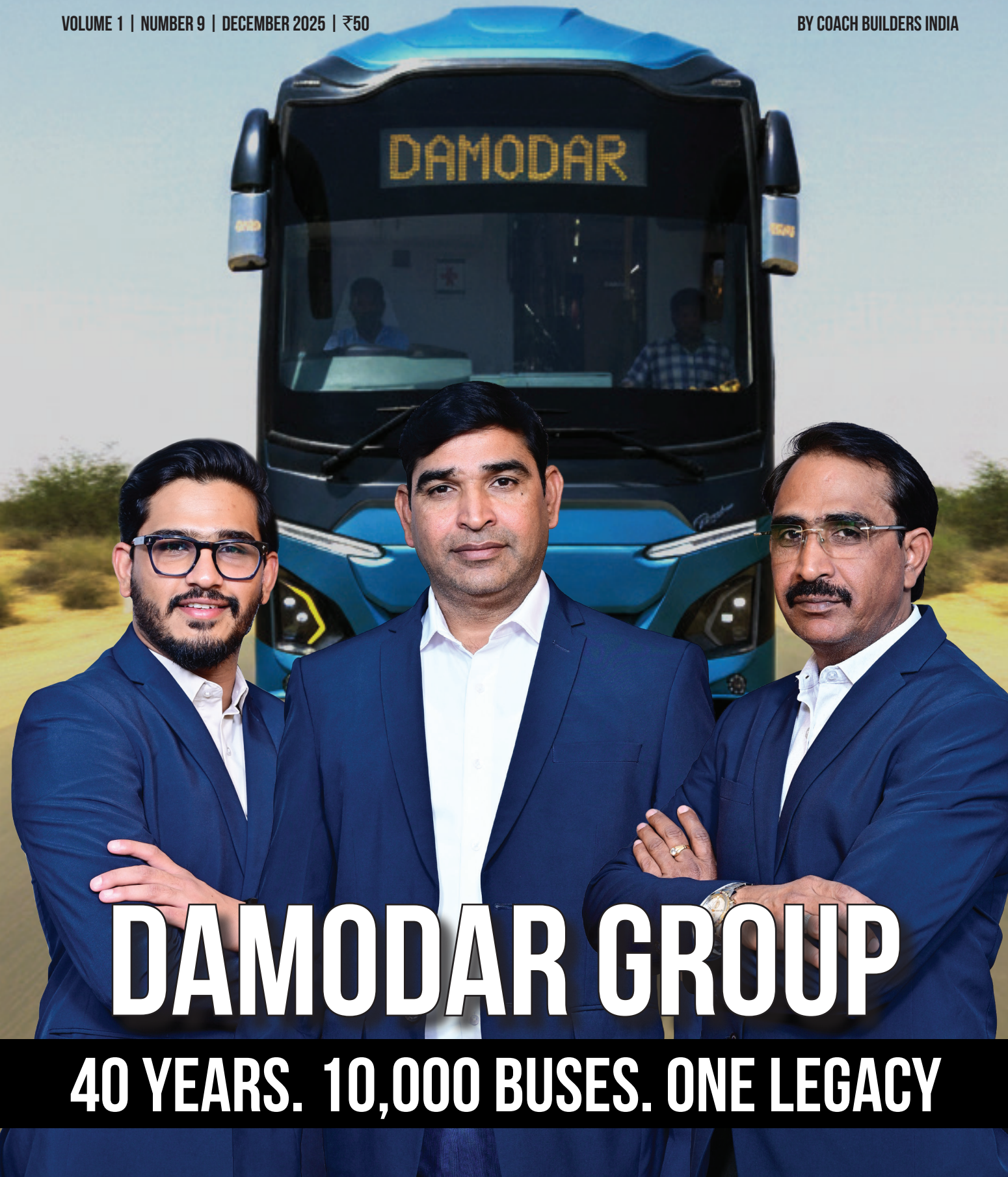

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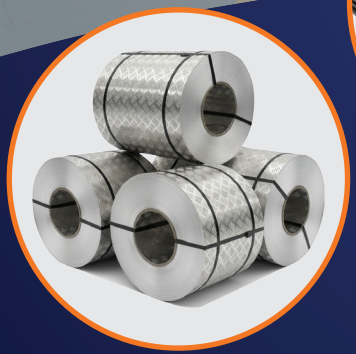

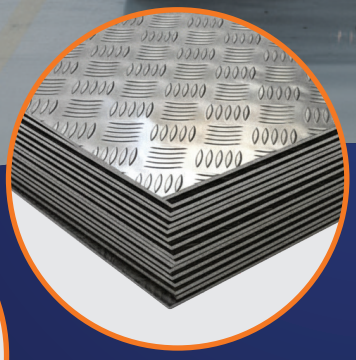

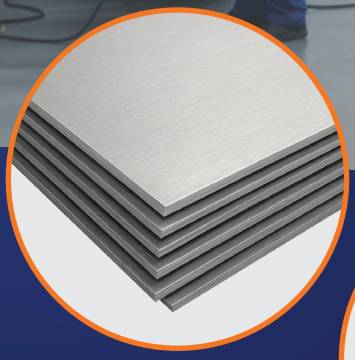

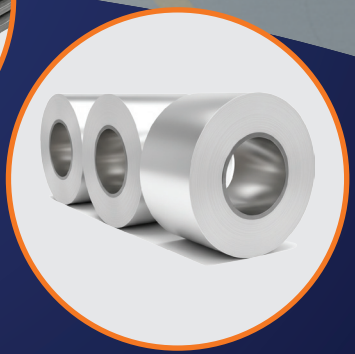

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EDITORIAL

Hello everyone,

As 2025 draws to a close, it's hard to describe the Indian bus industry with a single emotion. This was a year of undeniable growth, but also one of uncomfortable introspection. A year where the industry proved its relevance beyond doubt, even as it was forced to confront questions it had long postponed.

Demand told a powerful story. From the unprecedented scale of the Mahakumbh to festive surges during Diwali, buses once again emerged as India's most dependable mobility backbone. When pressure mounted, capacity expanded. When routes multiplied, operators adapted. Few modes of transport demonstrated this level of flexibility, speed, and reach.

Because 2025 was also the year when the spotlight turned harsh.

Bus fires shook public confidence and forced safety back into the national conversation. These were not isolated incidents, and the industry knows it. They exposed long-standing gaps in construction practices, enforcement, and accountability. The response - tighter inspections, the new AIS 153 code, and stronger scrutiny - was necessary. Painful, but necessary. Safety can no longer sit on the sidelines of growth.

At the same time, policy friction reminded us how fragile progress can be when alignment is missing. The All India Tourist Permit dispute in the southern states didn't just disrupt operations. It stranded passengers, drained operator finances, and highlighted how quickly regulatory uncertainty can undo years of effort. Growth without clarity is not growth at all.

And yet, amidst this turbulence, there were reminders of what the industry does right. Our feature on the Damodar Group is one such reminder. It shows that when innovation is grounded in engineering discipline and long-term thinking, it doesn't just survive regulation - it helps shape the industry itself. Legacy, when paired with responsibility, becomes a strength.

That, perhaps, is the real takeaway from 2025.

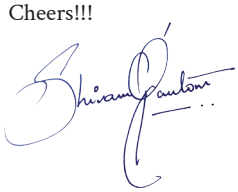
The bus industry has outgrown its old definitions. It is no longer just about adding capacity or chasing demand. It is about aligning growth with safety, innovation with compliance, and ambition with accountability. The ecosystem is too large, too critical, and too visible to function in silos anymore.

As we step into 2026, the question is no longer whether buses will continue to move India. They will. The question is whether the industry can move together, with clarity, consistency, and a shared commitment to doing things right.

At The Bus Insider, our role remains the same. To document the progress. To question the gaps. And to tell the stories that matter, honestly and responsibly.

Here's to a year that challenged us and to the work that lies ahead.

Cheers!!!



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Business

GreenCell Mobility Expands NueGo Network to 120+ Cities with New Intercity Electric Routes

GreenCell Mobility has accelerated the expansion of its electric intercity bus brand, NueGo, with the launch of multiple new routes across South and North India. The latest rollout strengthens NueGo's position as one of India's fastest-growing electric intercity travel networks, extending its footprint to over 120 cities nationwide.

The newly added routes cover several high-demand corridors, including Chennai–Salem, Gurugram–Jaipur, Delhi–Lucknow, Bengaluru–Mangaluru, Vijayawada–Chennai, Vijayawada–Tirupati, Jaipur–Udaipur, and Puducherry–Trichy, among others. These additions enhance regional connectivity and complement NueGo's existing network, catering to both business and leisure travellers seeking reliable, long-distance mobility.

Commenting on the expansion, Devndra Chawla, Managing Director and CEO of GreenCell Mobility and NueGo, said the move aligns with the company's vision of transforming intercity bus travel through sustainable and technology-led solutions. He highlighted NueGo's focus on safety, comfort, and a guest-centric approach as the brand continues to scale its operations across key corridors.

With this expansion, GreenCell Mobility continues to build momentum in electric intercity transport, supporting cleaner mobility while improving travel standards. NueGo's growing network underlines the increasing viability of electric buses for long-distance applications in India and reflects rising passenger acceptance of zero-emission intercity travel solutions.

KETO Motors to Set Up ₹300 Crore Electric Bus Plant in Telangana

KETO Motors has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Telangana to establish an electric bus manufacturing facility at Jadcherla, committing an investment of ₹300 crore. The agreement was formalised at the Telangana Rising Global Summit 2025 held at Bharat Future City, underscoring the state's push to position itself as a key hub for electric mobility manufacturing.

The proposed facility will focus on the production of 9-metre electric buses and is expected to create over 2,000 direct jobs within the next three years. The MoU was signed in the presence of Shri D. Sridhar Babu, Minister for Information Technology, Electronics and Communications, Industries and Commerce, and Legislative Affairs.

To support the project, the Telangana government will extend facilitation through its TG-iPASS single-window clearance system, aimed at fast-tracking statutory and regulatory approvals. Minister Sridhar Babu said the investment reinforces Telangana's commitment to sustainable transportation and advanced manufacturing, while contributing to employment generation and industrial growth.

Venkatesh Challa, Director at KETO Motors, described Telangana as a progressive destination for EV manufacturing. He said the Jadcherla plant will allow the company to scale production and develop electric buses aligned with global standards, while supporting India's domestic manufacturing ambitions.

Headquartered in Hyderabad, KETO Motors manufactures electric autos and buses for urban and industrial mobility. The company works closely with Tron Energy Technology of Taiwan, one of the world's leading electric bus OEMs, to strengthen its capabilities for domestic and export markets.

The development marks another step in Telangana's efforts to build a strong electric mobility ecosystem.

Astranova Mobility Partners with Zingbus to Deploy Electric Intercity Buses on Delhi–Dehradun Corridor

Astranova Mobility has entered into a strategic partnership with intercity bus operator Zingbus to deploy fully electric buses on the Delhi to Dehradun route, covering a distance of over 275 kilometres. The collaboration marks Astranova's formal entry into the commercial bus financing space, expanding its electric mobility portfolio beyond two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars, light commercial vehicles, chargers, and trucks.

The first set of electric buses under the partnership is already in operation, offering passengers a zero-emission intercity travel option while delivering improved operating economics for the operator. According to the companies, the electric buses offer significantly lower per-kilometre costs compared to diesel alternatives, along with smoother rides and reduced noise levels.

Zingbus has reported strong passenger acceptance on its electric routes, supported by high vehicle uptime that strengthens operational efficiency. As part of its clean mobility roadmap, the company plans to scale its electric fleet to nearly 1,000 buses over the coming years across key intercity corridors.

Astranova Mobility has committed to leasing electric buses worth over ₹200 crore in the next 12 months across multiple operators and routes, including Zingbus. Its financing model is designed to address key barriers to bus electrification, including high upfront capital costs, concerns around range and charging infrastructure, and long-term asset management risks.

Founded in 2023, Astranova Mobility has deployed more than 25,000 electric vehicles valued at over ₹360 crore across segments. Backed by the Asian Development Bank and AdvantEdge Founders, the company offers end-to-end solutions spanning asset selection, leasing, maintenance, roadside assistance, and refurbishment.

Zingbus, established in 2019, operates across more than 350 cities with a fleet exceeding 300 buses and has completed over six million passenger journeys.

Blackbuck EV to Set Up Electric Bus Manufacturing Facility in Telangana Future City

Blackbuck Electric Vehicles India Pvt Ltd, a Hyderabad-based electric bus manufacturer, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Telangana to establish a dedicated electric bus manufacturing and development facility at Telangana Future City. The agreement was formalised in the presence of Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu, Honourable Minister for Industries, Government of Telangana, along with senior officials from the Industries and IT Department and the state's Automotive and EV vertical.

Under the MoU, the Telangana government has agreed in principle to facilitate land allocation and provide ecosystem-level support to enable Blackbuck EV to scale its manufacturing operations. The proposed facility is positioned as a key addition to the state's growing electric mobility ecosystem.

Blackbuck EV plans to invest around USD 30 million over the next five years to develop the new plant, which is designed for an annual production capacity of up to 2,000 electric buses. The facility will support the manufacture of a diversified product portfolio, including 15-metre and 13.5-metre electric sleeper coaches, 9-metre electric staff and school buses, and 7-metre electric mini-buses aimed at urban and feeder applications.

Until the new facility becomes operational, the company's existing manufacturing unit will continue to support initial production of its 15-metre and 9-metre electric bus models.

Commenting on the development, Ramakrishnam Raju, Founder of Blackbuck EV, said the partnership marks a critical step in building scalable, future-ready electric mobility solutions from Telangana. He added that the Future City facility will help accelerate production and support the broader transition toward clean transportation.

Blackbuck EV is developing a family of lightweight, high-efficiency electric buses based on advanced skateboard platforms, spanning long-distance, urban, and mini-bus segments.

SAAM Tourist Partners With Netradyne to Deploy AI-Based Safety Systems Across Sleeper Coach Fleet

SAAM Tourist has entered into a strategic partnership with fleet safety technology provider Netradyne to deploy AI-powered driver monitoring solutions across its night sleeper coach operations. The move marks a significant step in strengthening safety standards for long-distance intercity travel, where driver alertness and behaviour play a critical role.

Under the collaboration, SAAM Tourist will integrate Netradyne's Driver•i vision-based platform into its fleet. The system uses advanced AI and in-cab cameras to monitor driving behaviour in real time, detecting issues such as overspeeding, mobile phone usage, distraction and early signs of driver fatigue. Instant alerts are provided inside the cabin, while fleet managers receive detailed performance analytics for review and intervention.

According to SAAM Tourist, the Driver•i platform enables proactive safety management by combining real-time alerts with post-trip insights. The data allows targeted driver coaching, accountability and recognition of safe driving behaviour. The software-as-a-service model also reduces upfront capital investment while giving access to comprehensive safety metrics across the fleet.

Following the initial rollout on sleeper coaches, SAAM Tourist is evaluating extending the technology to its tourist and employee transport segments. The objective is to create a uniform safety framework across all operations.

VinFast to Enter India's Electric Bus Market by 2026

Vietnamese electric vehicle manufacturer VinFast is preparing to expand its India portfolio with the launch of electric buses by mid-2026, underlining its long-term commitment to the country as a key growth market. Confirming the plans, VinFast Asia CEO Pham Sanh Chau said electric buses will be introduced in India by August 2026.

VinFast is currently in discussions with several State Transport Undertakings, including those in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, to secure initial orders.

VinFast's electric bus portfolio spans models ranging from 6 metres to 12 metres in length. These buses are already in service in Vietnam and were recently introduced in European markets. The company claims a driving range of up to 260 km on a single charge, supported by battery capacities of up to 281 kWh, positioning the buses for urban and intercity public transport applications.

The bus launch will complement VinFast's broader India strategy. The company began selling electric passenger vehicles in India in September with the VF 6 and VF 7, supported by a growing network of around 26 dealerships. VinFast also plans to enter the electric two-wheeler segment in the second half of next year and launch its GSM ride-hailing service by August.

While VinFast has not confirmed local manufacturing plans for electric buses, it has indicated a long-term intent to move towards full localisation. The company has already committed investments of around ₹16,000 crore in India, including a production facility in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, with an initial capacity of 50,000 electric cars annually.

Ziel Launches EV-First Intercity Platform to Redefine Long-Distance Bus Travel

Ziel, a new EV-first mobility platform, has announced its entry into India's intercity travel market, positioning itself at the intersection of passenger comfort, operational reliability, and sustainable mobility. The platform will begin operations on high-demand routes in South India, with a phased expansion planned across longer and denser intercity corridors.

Built with a strong customer-centric focus, Ziel aims to elevate the intercity bus experience through fully electric operations combined with enhanced seating, smoother ride quality, lower noise levels, and carefully designed onboard amenities. The offering targets travellers seeking premium comfort while aligning with the growing demand for environmentally responsible transport solutions.

Operationally, Ziel has partnered with Green Energy Mobility Solutions (GEMS) to manage electric bus operations, while Electrigo will lease the initial fleet. Ziel and GEMS are part of the same group, enabling close operational integration, faster execution, and scalability across regions.

GEMS brings established expertise in electric mobility beyond passenger transport. The company is already operating electric loaders and excavators at mining sites, demonstrating the commercial viability of EVs in high-utilisation and heavy-duty applications. This experience strengthens its ability to manage demanding intercity EV operations at scale.

Commenting on the launch, Sunil Kumar, Director, said Ziel represents a key operating layer within the group's wider EV ecosystem, which spans buses, trucks, mining equipment, and charging infrastructure. Balavignesh, Co-founder of Ziel Mobility, added that ecosystem partnerships with Electrigo and in-house energy solutions enable rapid deployment with confidence.

The initial rollout will prioritise routes with high passenger density to ensure service consistency and operational efficiency. As demand scales, Ziel plans to expand its footprint, contributing to India's shift toward cleaner, future-ready intercity mobility.

ElectriGo Launches Electric Bus Leasing Platform, Delivers First Fleet to GEMS

ElectriGo has formally entered India's electric bus segment with the launch of its dedicated electric bus leasing platform on December 17, 2025. The platform is targeted at private bus operators seeking to adopt electric buses without the burden of high upfront capital investment, marking a significant step toward accelerating commercial electrification in the intercity and contract transport space.

As part of the launch, ElectriGo has delivered the first batch of 10 electric buses to Green Energy Mobility Solutions Ltd (GEMS). This delivery is part of a larger 50-bus deployment agreement between the two companies, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding signed on August 1, 2025, during the Passenger Vehicle Expo in Chennai. The remaining buses will be deployed in phases.

The buses will be operated under a full-service model, with ElectriGo providing end-to-end maintenance, operational support, and performance monitoring. ElectriGo's leasing platform follows a full-stack model that integrates vehicle financing with charging infrastructure access, preventive maintenance, and real-time telematics. By bundling these elements, the company aims to reduce adoption risks and simplify the transition to electric buses for operators.

ElectriGo was incubated out of Turno, India's electric small commercial vehicle platform founded in 2021. Launched in 2024, ElectriGo focuses on medium and heavy-duty electric commercial vehicles, including buses.

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BUILT FOR LONG ROADS

The Damodar Story of Legacy, Design, and Reinvention

By Shivam Gautom

The story of the Damodar Group is closely tied to the evolution of Indian highways, of journeys that became longer, nights that became more comfortable, and bus travel that gradually became more human. What began in 1986 as a modest workshop has grown into one of India's most respected bus body-building brands, and the original pioneer of the country's sleeper coach revolution. When the idea of sleeping berths inside buses was unheard of, and even unrecognised by regulations, Damodar dared to challenge convention and reshape long-distance road travel.

Over the past four decades, the Group has built more than **10,000 buses**, earning trust kilometre by kilometre. Today, this legacy is upheld by three pillars - **Mr. Dinesh Chandra Sharma (Managing Director)**, **Mr. M. L. Sharma (Director),** and third-generation leader **Yash Sharma (Director).**

Bringing together engineering expertise and global business insight, Yash has infused a renewed focus on **design, brand identity, and future readiness,** while staying firmly grounded in Damodar's core manufacturing values.

In a free-wheeling conversation, Yash Sharma reflects on Damodar's journey, its defining milestones, and the road ahead for one of India's most enduring bus-building legacies.

Damodar Group is widely credited with spearheading the sleeper coach revolution in India. Can you share the story behind it?

Absolutely! The idea came from my grandfather, **Mr. Giridhari Lal Sharma,** in the early 1990s. Back then, long-distance travel in India was uncomfortable- passengers spent hours sitting upright on seater coaches. He asked a simple but bold question: 'If people sleep at home every night, why can't they sleep while traveling?'

However, turning that idea into reality wasn't easy, especially back in the day. There was no category for a sleeper bus, and registering it took six months of persistence and advocacy to convince the authorities that this innovation would change the way India travelled.

When it was finally approved, it marked the birth of the sleeper coach era. That bold step set the tone for Damodar's pioneering spirit, and it's a legacy we continue to build on today.

Mr. Giridhari Lal Sharma

Founder, Damodar Group

> "For me, leadership is service - service to a brand my grandfather created, an industry my father strengthened, and a legacy I am entrusted to evolve."

Could you share more about your infrastructure, including plant size, assembly capabilities, workforce strength, and production capacities?

The Damodar Group oversees two state-of-the-art manufacturing entities - Shree Damodar Coach Crafts Pvt. Ltd. in Bengaluru and Damodar Motors India Pvt. Ltd. in Tumkur. Together, they span over 20 acres with a collective production capacity of about 700 buses annually. Our Tumkur unit doubles as a design and innovation centre, driving product development, prototyping, and research that ultimately powers our manufacturing operations.

A new 10-acre advanced manufacturing facility in Bengaluru is set to come up shortly, dedicated

exclusively to electric mobility. With the commissioning of this plant, our annual production capacity is expected to increase to approximately 1,000–1,200 buses.

To further strengthen our presence and service reach across India, we are now establishing a new 6.5-acre manufacturing plant in Jaipur, dedicated to catering to the North Indian market. This upcoming facility marks a significant step in our expansion roadmap, and operations are planned to commence by the end of 2026.

How has Damodar evolved in terms of design, safety, and manufacturing standards over the last few years?

Damodar has always been known for strength and durability, but as passenger expectations grew, we realised buses needed personality, comfort, and safety alongside build quality. This led to our PRAVAHA design philosophy, inspired by Indian mythology and temple geometry, giving every bus a distinct identity.

On safety, we were the first in India to achieve AIS119, AIS153, and AIS052 standards across OEM platforms, with 100% FR-grade interiors and rigorous structural, electrical, and fire-safety protocols.

Manufacturing has evolved drastically too, from pure craftsmanship to a blend of skilled hands and precise engineering. CAD planning, alignment jigs, modular interiors, and multi-stage QC ensure every bus not only looks premium on day one but performs reliably for years. Strength, design, and safety now define every bus that comes out of the Damodar Group.

Can you tell us about Damodar's market presence? Which regions or states are your strongest markets?

Today, Damodar has a strong pan-India presence, with buses operating reliably across North, West, Central, South, and even North-East India. This extensive reach reflects the trust fleet operators have placed in our brand and the consistent performance that has defined Damodar for over four decades.

Is there a recent model or project that you are particularly proud of? Can you share the story behind it and how your team brought it to life?

If I had to highlight a defining moment for the new era of Damodar, it would be the launch of our flagship model, RUDRA, in July 2025. RUDRA embodies our design philosophy, PRAVAHA, where every curve, line, and detail carries intention — from the Trishul-inspired body flows to Vasuki-inspired DRLs and the temple crown fascia — giving the coach a distinctive presence even when stationary.

The development of RUDRA presented significant technical and design challenges. Translating mythological and aesthetic sketches into manufacturable geometry while maintaining structural integrity required extensive CAD simulations, prototype iterations, and precision tooling.

But when it finally rolled out, it represented the culmination of Damodar's heritage, the expertise of our workforce, and our vision for the future. Operators immediately recognised its quality and performance, while it also established a new benchmark for design, comfort, and presence in the industry.

Electric buses are gaining momentum in India. Are there any plans to enter the electric bus manufacturing space anytime soon?

We strongly believe that electric mobility is the future, not just a trend. And we are actively preparing for the EV era, but this is a completely different segment, and any product we launch must match the same reliability and performance standards as our diesel buses.

> **"Damodar has always been known for strength and durability, but as passenger expectations grew, we realised buses needed personality, comfort, and safety alongside build quality."**

Designing an electric sleeper coach requires a fundamentally new approach to architecture, weight distribution, thermal management, safety, and electrical systems.

That's why our entry into electric mobility will be deliberate and engineering-led, ensuring the same reliability, safety, and lifecycle performance that define every Damodar diesel coach today.

Talking about you, what motivated you to take on leadership responsibilities at an early stage in a traditionally experience-driven industry? And how has the experience been so far?

As the third generation in the Damodar legacy, stepping into a role wasn't about taking charge; it was about understanding the legacy I grew up in. For me, the factory wasn't just a workplace; it was part of my childhood.

When I first joined the company after my MBA, I didn't start in an office - I started on the shop floor. I spent time with our workforce, learning what makes a bus last, what keeps passengers comfortable, and how small details make a big difference.

Being young in a traditional industry had its challenges. But I realised my role wasn't to replace experience, it was to combine it with a vision for the future.

For me, leadership is service - service to a brand my grandfather created, an industry my father strengthened, and a legacy I am entrusted to evolve. My goal isn't just to manage Damodar, it's to grow it responsibly and ensure my grandfather's vision continues for the next generation.

Looking ahead, what are the key priorities for Damodar as you enter the next phase of growth? Are there any upcoming models or initiatives that you are excited about?

Our focus is on strengthening Damodar while preparing for the future of mobility. The objective is to build on the trust earned over 40 years, while evolving with changing market and passenger expectations.

We are also anticipating the launch of KALPA, our upcoming semi-premium coach. While RUDRA represents our flagship design statement, KALPA is engineered for wider adoption, combining Damodar's design DNA, comfort, and durability with scalability and commercial practicality. We expect it to become one of our most visible models on Indian highways.

Another major focus area is electric mobility. We are investing in R&D and infrastructure, including a new advanced manufacturing facility dedicated to EVs. Alongside this, we continue to upgrade manufacturing processes, safety systems, and lightweight engineering, ensuring Damodar remains reliable, relevant, and future-ready.

> **"Our entry into electric mobility will be deliberate and engineering-led, ensuring the same reliability, safety, and lifecycle performance that define every Damodar diesel coach today."**

2025 Year-Ender

The Highs, Lows, and Turning Points of India's Bus Industry

From record-breaking demand and festive surges to safety crises and policy friction, a look back at the moments that shaped India's bus industry in 2025

BY **SHIVAM GAUTOM**

2025 was not a year the Indian bus industry could afford to treat lightly. It was a year of scale and stress, of growth and reckoning, where moments of operational triumph sat alongside hard questions on safety, enforcement, and policy alignment.

Demand surged, scrutiny intensified, and long-standing fault lines finally surfaced. Taken together, the year became a mirror, reflecting both how far the industry has come and how much work still lies ahead.

Mahakumbh 2025: Demand at an Unprecedented Scale

The year kicked off on a fiercely positive note for the Indian bus industry, fuelled by the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj. While the event is spiritual at its core, for mobility players it proved to be an economic and operational blockbuster, setting the tone for everything that followed.

The scale of movement was unprecedented. Millions travelled across states, cities, and districts within a compressed time window. While trains and flights played their part, it was buses that emerged as the most flexible and responsive mode of transport, absorbing demand that shifted daily and often unpredictably.

According to Sciative Solutions' analysis, bus transport supply surged by 378% from pre-Kumbh levels as the event gathered momentum. Operators ramped up services rapidly, adding capacity well ahead of peak the days to avoid bottlenecks.

The demand story was even more striking. As per redBus, bus seat demand for Prayagraj witnessed a staggering 36x increase compared to a normal period.

Bus travel between Delhi and Prayagraj alone spiked by 648% during January.

To meet this surge, operators and platforms expanded their networks aggressively. The number of unique bus routes servicing the Mahakumbh region increased from 322 routes to 1,611 routes by January 2025, reflecting the industry's ability to scale rapidly under pressure.

Bus deployment peaked around February 10, after which capacity was gradually rationalised as demand stabilised. Even then, services were reduced to only 34.9% below peak levels, indicating sustained travel activity well beyond the event's busiest days.

What Mahakumbh highlighted was not just demand but adaptability. Buses absorbed pressure in a way few other modes could.

Spring and Summer: When Data Started Telling the Story

As the calendar moved into spring and summer, travel patterns began to stabilise, but volumes remained firmly elevated. redBus' latest India Bus Track Report offers deeper insight into demand and eveolving passenger behaviour during this period.

According to the report by redBus, intercity bus travel recorded a 25% year-on-year growth in passenger volumes during H1 FY26, with travel between April and September accounting for a significant share of annual intercity movement. Growth was driven by expanding route networks, rising digital ticketing adoption, and a growing preference for premium travel options.

Comfort-led choices continued to dominate the market. Sleeper and hybrid buses accounted for 85% of all journeys, while AC buses represented 71% of total seats sold, reinforcing the industry's gradual shift away from basic point-to-point transport toward experience-led mobility.

Long-haul travel also gained momentum, with nearly 65% of active routes exceeding 250 kilometres, signalling a clear move from short, regional trips to longer inter-state journeys where buses increasingly compete with rail on convenience and flexibility.

Geographically, demand growth was no longer metro-centric. redBus data showed that 61% of bookings originated from non-metro cities and towns, while India's top six metros contributed 33%, and other state capitals accounted for the remaining 6%. The numbers highlighted deeper digital penetration and a broadening mobility appetite beyond traditional urban centres.

By mid-year, one thing was evident. The bus industry was no longer just responding to spikes in demand. It was navigating a structurally larger, more distributed, and increasingly expectation-driven market.

Diwali: The Festive Surge

By the time Diwali arrived, demand surged once again.

The festival remains one of the most important travel periods for the bus industry, and 2025 was no exception. Advance bookings opened early, high-density routes sold out days in advance, and sleeper buses ran at near-full occupancy, driven by overnight travel preferences and time-bound holiday travel.

According to the Sciative Solutions Festive Mobility Report published in October, private operators recorded a 45% year-on-year increase in bookings during the festive window.

The spike was most visible on long-haul intercity corridors. Advance booking data from October 17–19, 2025, showed demand on Delhi–Varanasi up 51%, Mumbai–Indore up 46%, and Bangalore–Visakhapatnam up 43% compared to Diwali 2024.

To meet this surge, operators expanded capacity aggressively. IntrCity SmartBus reported a 70% increase in seat capacity across its network during the festive period.

Diwali once again underlined the bus industry's role as India's most flexible mobility backbone, able to scale fast, cover long distances, and absorb peak demand with speed and reach.

When the Spotlight Turned Harsh: Fires and Safety Under Scrutiny
The final quarter of the year brought the industry face-to-face with its most difficult chapter.

A series of bus fires made national headlines. From the Jaisalmer and Kurnool fires to the recent inferno in Chitradurga, the headlines were grim. What had been a year of growth and demand was quickly overtaken by questions of safety and accountability.

The numbers were sobering as well. The government informed the Rajya Sabha that 64 lives were lost in 45 major bus fire incidents between January 1, 2021, and December 10, 2025. These were not isolated accidents. They pointed to a systemic problem.

Experts flagged a familiar mix of risks: buses built or modified at non-compliant local garages, unsafe aftermarket electrical changes, flammable materials, and weak enforcement that allowed such vehicles to stay on the road.

Authorities responded with tighter inspections and action against non-compliant buses and body builders. At the policy level, the government intensified the push for the AIS 153 bus body code that was made mandatory from September 2025.

The message was clear. Safety could no longer be optional. While the fires were tragic, they also marked a turning point - forcing the industry to confront long-standing gaps and bringing safety firmly to the centre of the conversation.

Policy Friction: The Southern AITP Permit Dispute

As 2025 drew to a close, a legal and operational storm was quietly building in South India. The All India Tourist Permit (AITP) system meant to enable seamless interstate operations, ran into its toughest test.

In Tamil Nadu transport authorities began enforcing an additional state-level entry tax on AITP buses registered outside the state. This was despite AITP's mandate under the Central Motor Vehicles Act to exempt such vehicles from additional state taxes.

Enforcement soon spilled onto the roads and buses were detained at borders. Kerala and Karnataka responded soon after with retaliatory taxes.

By November 11, 2025, operators across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka suspended interstate services. Nearly 1,500 private buses went off the road, stranding an estimated 45,000 passengers daily, just as the Sabarimala pilgrimage season began. In under two weeks, the industry reportedly lost ₹36 crore.

While the strike was called off by the end of November following temporary arrangements, many operators cautioned that the relief may be short-lived. Several flagged that the issue could resurface once quarterly tax cycles expire in January, leaving continued uncertainty over how AITP rules will be enforced on the ground.

What Comes Next: Aligning Growth, Safety, and Policy

As the industry steps into 2026, the lessons of the past year are hard to ignore. 2025 proved that India's bus ecosystem can scale at speed, absorb unprecedented demand, and remain the backbone of intercity mobility when the country needs it most. But it also exposed the cost of weak enforcement, fragmented accountability, and misaligned policy.

Growth alone is no longer the benchmark. Safety, compliance, and regulatory clarity will define the next phase of the industry's evolution.

Buses will continue to move India. The question heading into 2026 is whether the ecosystem can move in sync, aligning growth with safety, enforcement with intent, and policy with reality.

Strengthening Bus Safety in India: A Systemic Responsibility

BY **DR. HARISH SABHARWAL, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, AIMTC**

India has witnessed a disturbing rise in bus fire incidents and fatal accidents in recent months. These tragedies have brought the issue of bus safety back into national focus, raising important questions about construction practices, regulatory oversight, operational discipline, and the responsibilities of different stakeholders in the transport ecosystem.

The concerns are serious. Many of the recent fires have revealed clear gaps in compliance, fabrication standards, maintenance, and enforcement. These gaps do not exist in isolation. They reflect systemic issues that must be understood honestly if we want meaningful and long-term change.

1. The Problem of Non-Compliant Bus Construction

A large number of private buses in India are still being constructed or modified at non-standard and unauthorized bus body builders. Cost pressures, lack of awareness, and weak enforcement drive this trend.

These practices often lead to:

- Use of flammable or low-grade materials
- Substandard and unsafe electrical wiring
- Deviation from structural safety specifications
- Improper emergency exits
- Compromised vehicle stability

Such violations put passengers and road users at serious risk. They create unsafe buses that should never be permitted on public roads.

The misuse of passenger buses for unauthorised cargo carriage adds another layer of danger. Carrying heavy or flammable goods, on roofs, inside the cabin, or under the belly, changes the vehicle's centre of gravity and increases the possibility of rollovers, brake failures, and severe accidents. This happens in full knowledge of enforcement agencies, which shows how deep the problem runs.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has laid down strict bus body codes under AIS-153. These standards are clear and comprehensive. But implementation remains weak. Many body builders still do not comply. Several states do not enforce standards uniformly. As a result, unsafe buses continue to receive registration and fitness certificates.

Until these gaps are closed, India will continue to see avoidable tragedies.

2. Why Fires Happen: Understanding the Main Causes

The recent fires have common, recurring causes. None of them are new. All of them are preventable.

Faulty Electrical Systems

Short circuits are one of the most frequent ignition points. The main reasons include:

- Low-quality wiring used during fabrication
- Unauthorized high-load accessories added later
- Poor insulation and poor-quality connectors
- Overloaded circuits due to aftermarket modifications

When circuits overheat, insulation melts. A short circuit becomes inevitable, especially in engine bays or AC units.

Fuel System Leaks

Improper routing of fuel lines, damaged hoses, and ageing seals are another major source of fires. If fuel leaks onto hot engine components or the exhaust manifold, it ignites almost instantly. These failures usually emerge due to poor maintenance or wear and tear.

Overheating and Mechanical Failures

Engine overheating, failing bearings, and brake overheating, especially on downhill routes, can ignite flammable fluids, tyres, or nearby components. In many cases, these issues develop slowly and silently until they trigger a fire.

Carriage of Commercial Goods

Carrying 8–10 MT of goods meant for commercial vehicles is extremely dangerous. Roof cargo raises the bus height, increases instability, and increases the chance of contact with electrical lines. Cargo inside sleeper coaches blocks escape routes and fuels the fire.

These incidents highlight one fact - India urgently needs a nationwide ban on cargo in passenger buses, mandatory fire-safety audits, and strict real-time inspections. Public awareness must also increase so that passengers recognise and report unsafe practices.

3. Are Operators Solely to Blame? The Reality Is More Complex

After every major accident, public and media narratives often place the full blame on the operator. While operators do carry responsibility for their vehicle's fitness and driver behaviour, the reality is far more complex.

Operator Responsibility Does Not Exist in Isolation

Weak regulation, poor enforcement, and competitive pressures make it difficult for operators to follow best practices consistently. Operating margins are narrow. Cost pressures are high. In such conditions, cutting corners, while unsafe, often becomes a survival strategy.

Misuse of Permits is a Widespread Issue

Contract Carriage and All India Tourist Permit buses are illegally run as Stage Carriage vehicles across many States. These buses operate under time pressure and often overspeed to complete long intercity routes. Many also carry commercial cargo without e-way bills.

This creates multiple risks:

- Unstable vehicle dynamics
- Brake failures and tyre bursts
- Blocked emergency exits
- Increased fire intensity
- Huge financial and legal liabilities

Sleeper buses are especially vulnerable. Many sleeper buses:

- Do not meet any recognised safety standard
- Carry excessive luggage under berths
- Are certified without proper checks
- Use non-compliant materials and layouts

The absence of sleeper coach standards under AIS-153 is a serious regulatory gap that must be addressed urgently.

Enforcement Gap is the Biggest Failure

Unsafe buses continue to receive fitness certificates. Non-compliant body builders continue to operate. Critical inspections are either superficial or skipped. This shows that operators alone are not the problem. The system around them is equally responsible.

Blaming operators alone is not only unfair, it also prevents real solutions.

4. The State of Safety Implementation: A Realistic Assessment

On a scale of 0 to 10, India's implementation of safety standards stands at 4/10. The standards themselves are strong and comprehensive. But weak enforcement destroys their value.

Key issues include:

- Non-compliant buses passing fitness checks
- Lack of structured oversight on body builders
- Overloading and cargo carriage left unchecked
- Infrequent or ineffective maintenance inspections

India needs an overhaul of its enforcement approach. Annual third-party fitness audits should be mandatory. Bus body builders must be certified and monitored strictly. Modern safety technologies like VTS, ADAS, and driver-fatigue monitoring should be standard.

5. What Operators Can Do: Practical Steps for Safer Operations

Operators still play a critical role in improving safety. Several actions fall directly within their control.

Driver and Operational Discipline

- Enforce mandatory rest hours
- Monitor driving behaviour through VTS
- Provide defensive driving training
- Conduct route-specific briefings for challenging terrains

Pre-Trip Inspections

A 30-point checklist covering tyres, brakes, lighting, emergency exits, and fluid levels should be mandatory before every trip. Drivers or mechanics must sign off after inspection.

Construction and Material Compliance

- Procure buses only from certified body builders
- Use flame-retardant materials and compliant wiring
- Avoid aftermarket modifications that overload circuits

Fire Safety Systems

- Equip all buses with tested fire extinguishers
- Install AFDSS in engine bays
- Train drivers and helpers in basic fire response and evacuation

The Road Ahead

India's bus safety challenge is a shared responsibility. Operators, coach builders, RTOs, regulators, OEMs, and enforcement agencies must all work in alignment. Blaming one stakeholder will not solve the problem.

The goal must be simple and non-negotiable: safe buses, safe roads, and safe travel for every passenger.

Only a coordinated and disciplined approach can deliver that outcome.

About the Author

Dr. Harish Sabharwal is the National President of the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) and the owner of Sabharwal Travels. A veteran transport entrepreneur, he has decades of experience in the passenger transport sector and is a strong advocate for policy reforms, road safety, and the welfare of transport operators and drivers across India.

BharatBenz Launches 19.5-Tonne Heavy-Duty Bus for Intercity Operations

BY **VIOLINA PEGU**

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV) has introduced the BharatBenz 1924 bus, a next-generation heavy-duty platform engineered specifically for India's fast-growing intercity passenger transport segment.

Formally named the BB1924, the new BharatBenz 19.5 tonne bus is targeted at bus operators seeking higher payload capacity, improved operating economics, and long-term reliability.

Designed to serve operators seeking enhanced performance and lower total cost of ownership, the 13.5M BharatBenz new bus supports up to 51+1+1 seating, making it ideal for premium tourist coaches and long-haul applications. In a sleeper configuration, the BB1924 can accommodate up to 36 berths.

Proven Through Extensive Intercity Field Trials

DICV conducted rigorous field evaluations across major corridors, including Mumbai–Pune, Delhi–Jaipur, and Chennai–Bangalore. These trials demonstrated noticeable reductions in total cost of ownership when compared to existing market alternatives—thanks to improved fuel efficiency, longer service intervals, and reduced brake wear.

Engineered for Performance and Durability

Powering the new BharatBenz 1924 is a BS-VI OBD-II OM926 six-cylinder diesel engine with turbocharger and intercooler, delivering:

- 241 hp
- 850 Nm torque
- Mated to a 6-speed synchromesh gearbox optimized for highway cruising.

A six-year/600,000 km powertrain warranty underscores BharatBenz's focus on long-term asset value.

Advanced Safety & Comfort Features

The bus incorporates a comprehensive suite of safety technologies:

- ABS with EBD
- Electronic Vehicle Stability Control
- Five-stage electromagnetic retarder reduces brake wear by 40%
- Pneumatic suspension with anti-roll bars
- Factory-fitted Michelin 295/80 R22.5 radial tubeless tyres

> **"THE BB1924 REPRESENTS A PARADIGM SHIFT IN HOW WE THINK ABOUT INTERCITY MOBILITY. WITH ADVANCED SAFETY FEATURES, HIGH LOCALIZATION, AND A STRONG FOCUS ON TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP, BHARATBENZ SETS A BENCHMARK FOR RELIABILITY AND VALUE."**
>
> **ANDAMUTHU PONNUSAMY,**
> HEAD OF BUS BUSINESS, DAIMLER INDIA COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

Specifications of the BharatBenz 1924 Bus

Model Name
BharatBenz BB1924

GVW
19,500 kg (19.5-tonne class)

Engine
OM926, BS-VI OBD-II, 6-cyl diesel

Power Output
241 hp

Torque
850 Nm

Induction
Turbocharged, intercooled

Gearbox
6-speed synchromesh

Seating Capacity
Up to 51+1+1

Frame
High-tensile steel, 255 x 73.3 x 7 mm

Wheelbase
6,850 mm

Suspension
Pneumatic (front & rear) with anti-roll bars

Tyres
Michelin 295/80 R22.5 radial tubeless

Safety Features
ABS with EBD, Electronic Stability Control, 5-stage retarder

Fuel Tank Capacity
380 liters

Range
Over 1,300 km

Service Interval
First at 60,000 km; then every 120,000 km

Warranty
6 years or 600,000 km (powertrain)

Chassis Life
10–15 years

Network Availability
398 BharatBenz touchpoints

Financing
From 8.5% interest; tenure up to 5 years

A high-tensile steel chassis frame (255 x 73.3 x 7 mm) and a 6,850 mm wheelbase contribute to stability and body-builder flexibility.

Long Range, Longer Service Intervals

With a 380-litre fuel tank, the BB1924 delivers a highway range of over 1,300 km, enabling long-haul routes without frequent refuelling. Maintenance is also optimized:

- First service at 60,000 km
- Subsequent services every 120,000 km
- Designed for a 10–15 year service life

Nationwide Availability & Financing Options

The BharatBenz 19.5 tonne bus will be offered through 398 authorized BharatBenz touchpoints across India. To support fleet expansion, DICV has partnered with 15+ banks and NBFCs, including HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, and Bajaj Finserv, offering:

- Interest rates starting at 8.5% per annum
- EMI tenures up to 5 years

Strong After-Sales & Telematics Support

DICV also promises to enhance fleet uptime with:

- 24×7 roadside assistance
- 95% parts availability within 24–48 hours
- IoT-based telematics for predictive maintenance
- Driver and technician training programs in multiple regional languages
- Maintenance packages covering up to 6 years / 600,000 km

Prime Bus

Youthful Ambition Meets Intercity Mobility

BY **SHIVAM GAUTOM**

For decades, India's intercity bus industry has been shaped by legacy operators, family-run businesses, and hard-earned operational wisdom passed down over generations. It has rarely been seen as a space for young entrepreneurs. Yet, quietly and deliberately, that perception is beginning to change.

Across the country, a new generation is stepping into the bus business with fresh eyes, sharper expectations, and a willingness to build differently from day one. Primeluxe Transport Pvt Ltd, operating under the brand Prime Bus, is one such entrant - young in age, clear in intent, and unafraid of the complexity that comes with moving people at scale.

Headquartered in Bangalore and established in May 2025, Prime Bus is the result of a long-held ambition shared by its directors, Chinthan PA and Darshan M.

For them, buses were never just vehicles.

"I've been fascinated by buses since childhood," says Chinthan PA. "The idea of connecting people through comfortable travel always stayed with me. Prime Bus is where that passion finally found its expression."

That sense of purpose is important. Entering the bus transport business today is not easy. Margins are tight, regulations are complex, and customer expectations are rising rapidly. Yet, for the founders of Prime Bus, these challenges were precisely the reason to begin.

> **"AT THE START OF OUR JOURNEY, CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLATFORM WAS CRITICAL. BHARATBENZ OFFERED THE RELIABILITY AND CONFIDENCE WE NEEDED TO MOVE FORWARD."**
>
> **CHINTHAN PA,**
> DIRECTOR, PRIME BUS

In a sector where branding has traditionally taken a back seat to operations, Prime Bus has made a conscious effort to stand out visually and digitally.

Seeing the Gaps Others Accepted

Like many first-generation entrepreneurs, Chinthan and Darshan entered the industry as customers before they became operators. And what they saw troubled them.

The intercity bus experience, they felt, often suffered from poor comfort, inconsistent schedules, weak communication, and minimal use of technology. Digital integration was limited.

Most importantly, passengers were expected to adjust to the system, rather than the system being designed around them.

> **A STRONG BRAND SIGNALS SAFETY, PUNCTUALITY, AND QUALITY. SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS US STAY CONNECTED, SHARE REAL EXPERIENCES, AND BUILD LONG-TERM LOYALTY.**
>
> **DARSHAN M,**
> DIRECTOR, PRIME BUS

"There is a clear gap between what passengers expect today and what the industry traditionally offers," Darshan M explains. "We felt there was room to build a service that respected time, comfort, and reliability, without treating these as premium extras."

Prime Bus was conceived as an answer to that gap. The focus from the start was on premium seating, thoughtful onboard amenities, and a service model supported by technology. AI-driven scheduling, live tracking, and a mobile-first booking and support experience form the backbone of operations.

At the same time, the company is aiming to build additional revenue streams through cargo movement, onboard sales, and transit advertising - elements often overlooked by operators but critical for long-term sustainability.

What 'Prime' Really Means

The name Prime Bus is not accidental. It reflects a simple but demanding philosophy.

The focus from the start was on premium seating, thoughtful onboard amenities, and a service model supported by technology.

"As customers, we expect certain standards when we travel," says Chinthan. "Our commitment is to deliver those same standards consistently. That is what makes the service truly Prime."

In a sector where branding has traditionally taken a back seat to operations, Prime Bus has made a conscious effort to stand out visually and digitally. Its strong branding and active social media presence are not just marketing tools, but extensions of how the company communicates trust and transparency.

"Brand perception matters more than ever today," Darshan notes. "Passengers have choices. A strong brand signals safety, punctuality, and quality. Social media helps us stay connected, share real experiences, and build long-term loyalty."

Making the Right Choices Early

For any new bus operator, early decisions often determine long-term outcomes. Prime Bus has approached these choices with caution and intent.

On the OEM front, the company selected BharatBenz, citing reliability, market presence, and strong resale value as decisive factors. "You want a platform you can trust, especially when you're just starting out," Chinthan explains.

For coach building, Prime Bus partnered with MG Automotive (Bus & Coach), known for its road presence and consistency. Additionally, both the founders remained closely involved in design discussions to ensure the final product aligned with their comfort and branding vision.

Perhaps the most strategic decision was partnering with ZingBus as their aggregator platform.

"We were very clear that we didn't want to learn everything the hard way," Darshan says. "We trusted the team at ZingBus, and their support gave us confidence as first-time operators."

Starting Small, Thinking Long-Term

Prime Bus is soon launching operations on the Bangalore–Chennai corridor, one of the country's busiest intercity routes. The choice was deliberate. High demand, diverse passenger profiles, and operational intensity make it a strong testing ground for systems, service quality, and reliability.

Looking ahead, the founders are focused on building steadily and sustainably, with a clear ambition for where Prime Bus is headed.

"In five years, we want Prime Bus to represent the epitome of luxury in intercity travel," Chinthan says. "Not just in how the bus looks, but in how the entire journey feels."

Looking ahead, the founders are focused on building steadily and sustainably, with a clear ambition for where Prime Bus is headed.

A Quiet Signal of Change

Prime Bus may still be young, but its emergence signals something larger. It reflects a shift in mindset. A willingness among younger entrepreneurs to engage with the complexity of bus operations, rather than shy away from it. And a belief that this industry, when built thoughtfully, can deliver both impact and sustainability.

For an industry often described as traditional, that shift matters.

Because when new players enter with respect for the craft and a vision for the future, they don't just add capacity. They raise expectations.

And that, perhaps, is where real transformation begins.

IntrCity SmartBus Study Reveals 80% Cleaner Air Exposure During Bus Journeys

ACROSS MOST ROUTES, AIR QUALITY REMAINED WITHIN ACCEPTABLE LIMITS FOR 60–80% OF TRAVEL TIME, WITH PM2.5 LEVELS STAYING BELOW 60 G/M^3.

BY **VIOINA PEGU**

A first-of-its-kind study tracking air quality inside intercity buses has delivered an encouraging insight for long-distance travellers in India. The analysis shows that passengers spent nearly 80 percent of their journey time breathing air with PM2.5 levels below 60 micrograms per cubic metre, far cleaner than the ambient winter air typically recorded across North and Central Indian cities.

The study, conducted jointly by Respirer Living Sciences and IntrCity SmartBus between December 7 and 14, 2025, monitored real-time air quality inside 11 SmartBus.AQI coaches operating on key intercity routes.

Equipped with continuous PM2.5 monitoring and advanced filtration systems, these buses generated what is now the first publicly available dataset capturing in-bus air quality during long-haul road travel in India.

The results are striking! Passengers spent close to 80 percent of their journey time breathing air with particulate matter levels below 60 micrograms per cubic metre. This is significantly cleaner than typical winter ambient air conditions across large parts of North and Central India, where outdoor PM2.5 levels frequently exceed safe limits.

The study found that several key intercity routes consistently maintained PM2.5 concentrations under 60 µg/m³ for more than 80 percent of total travel time, including:

- Delhi–Kanpur
- Pune–Nagpur
- Pune–Bangalore
- Delhi–Lucknow
- Pathankot–Delhi
- Delhi–Katra

Instances where pollution levels crossed 90 µg/m³ were limited to less than 10 percent of total journey time and were largely traced to external factors such as high-pollution urban stretches, boarding points, and highway rest stops.

Over the monitoring period, the buses carried an estimated 4,500 passengers, assuming a standard 30-seat capacity per vehicle.

Over the monitoring period, the buses carried an estimated 4,500 passengers, assuming a standard 30-seat capacity per vehicle. For travellers, particularly during peak winter pollution episodes, the reduction in exposure to harmful particulate matter represents a measurable health benefit, one that goes beyond comfort and enters the realm of preventive wellbeing.

The study also highlights the operational value of granular air-quality data. By identifying specific pollution-prone stretches, operators can fine-tune ventilation settings, adjust filtration cycles, or modify halt strategies to further reduce passenger exposure.

"PASSENGERS CAN TRACK REAL-TIME AQI AND PM2.5 ONBOARD AND THROUGH THE INTRCITY APP, GIVING FULL VISIBILITY INTO AIR QUALITY DURING THEIR JOURNEY."

MANISH RATHI,
CEO & COFOUNDER,
INTRCITY SMARTBUS

"THIS DATASET MARKS A TURNING POINT IN UNDERSTANDING AIR QUALITY DURING INTERCITY BUS JOURNEYS, SHOWING WHAT PASSENGERS ACTUALLY BREATHE AND WHERE CLEAN-AIR SYSTEMS MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE."

RONAK SUTARIA,
FOUNDER & CEO
RESPIRER LIVING SCIENCES

IntrCity SmartBus and Respirer Living Sciences have partnered to launch India's first air-purified intercity bus fleet - SmartBus.AQI in November 2025. The AI-powered air quality system is designed to monitor and filter pollutants such as PM2.5, carbon dioxide, dust, and smoke. Passengers can view live air quality and PM2.5 readings onboard and through the IntrCity mobile application, bringing transparency into a space that was previously invisible.

Aluminium Flat Rolled Products: A Smart Material Choice for Modern Bus Bodies

BY **MOHIT GARG,** CEO & MANAGING DIRECTOR, INALCO

The bus and coach industry is evolving rapidly in response to rising operating costs, tighter emission norms, and the accelerating shift toward electric and sustainable mobility. As manufacturers and fleet operators focus on improving efficiency, durability, and lifecycle performance, material selection, particularly for exterior and interior body panels, has become a critical consideration. In this context, aluminium flat rolled products are increasingly emerging as a practical solution that aligns with the technical, operational, and sustainability requirements of modern bus fleets. Here's why this material choice matters.

Lightweight Body Panels for Improved Efficiency

One of the key advantages of aluminium body panels is their lightweight nature. Exterior and interior panels cover a large surface area of a bus, and replacing heavier materials with aluminium sheets can significantly reduce overall vehicle weight.

Lower weight improves fuel efficiency in diesel and CNG buses and helps improve energy efficiency in electric buses. For fleet operators, this results in lower energy consumption and reduced operating cost per kilometre over the vehicle's service life.

Corrosion Resistance in Demanding Operating Conditions

Buses operate in challenging environments, with body panels continuously exposed to rain, humidity, dust, pollution, and, in many regions, coastal air. Aluminium sheets offer strong resistance to corrosion due to the formation of a natural protective oxide layer.

Unlike ferrous materials, aluminium does not rust, helping bus body panels maintain their surface quality and performance over long periods. This resistance reduces the frequency of repainting and body repairs, contributing to improved durability and appearance.

Lower Maintenance and Lifecycle Cost Benefits

From a lifecycle perspective, aluminium sheets help reduce maintenance-related costs. Improved resistance to corrosion and environmental degradation leads to longer panel life and fewer unscheduled repairs.

For high-utilisation buses, this means less downtime and better fleet availability, an important factor for public transport authorities and private operators managing large fleets over extended service periods.

Manufacturing Advantages of Pre-Painted Aluminium Sheets

Pre-painted aluminium sheets are increasingly used in bus body fabrication due to their consistent surface quality and manufacturing efficiencies. Factory-applied coatings offer uniform colour, controlled thickness, and enhanced resistance to weathering.

The use of pre-painted sheets helps streamline the body-building process, reduce dependency on post-fabrication painting stages, shorten production cycles, and lower overall labour and energy intensity, while delivering a durable and high-quality finish.

Formability of High-Quality Aluminium Sheets

High-quality aluminium sheets and coils are valued in bus body construction primarily for their consistent formability characteristics.

When produced with controlled chemistry and tight thickness tolerances, aluminium sheets can be cut, bent, and formed reliably during fabrication.

This predictable forming behaviour helps body builders achieve uniform panel shapes and accurate fitment across multiple vehicles.

Supporting Sustainability and Circular Economy Goals

Sustainability is becoming a central focus in the transportation sector. Aluminium sheets and coils are fully recyclable and can be reused repeatedly without loss of material properties.

At the end of a bus's service life, aluminium body panels retain value and can be efficiently recycled, supporting circular economy principles and reducing the overall environmental footprint of bus manufacturing.

Final Statement

As the bus industry continues to modernise, aluminium sheets and coils offer a balanced material solution for body panels, combining lightweight performance, durability, manufacturing efficiency, and sustainability.

These attributes make aluminium flat-rolled products a practical choice for buses designed to meet current operational demands while supporting future mobility goals.

About the Author

Mohit Garg is the CEO & Managing Director of INALCO and a recognised leader in India's aluminium sector. With over a decade of experience across ferrous and non-ferrous industries, he drives the company's strategic growth and industry influence. Known for his clarity of vision and decisive leadership, Mohit is shaping Inalco's role in the future of aluminium manufacturing.

New-Age E-Bus Makers Take Center Stage in India's Biggest PM E-Drive Tender

BY **VIOLINA PEGU**

India's electric mobility landscape has reached a defining moment. The country's largest-ever electric bus tender under the ₹10,900-crore PM E-Drive scheme has delivered a decisive verdict: new-age electric bus manufacturers are now firmly in the driver's seat, leaving several legacy players struggling to keep pace.

Of the 10,900 electric buses on offer, nearly 80% have been secured by relatively young, EV-focused manufacturers, signaling a clear shift in how India's public transport electrification will unfold over the next decade.

Aggressive Pricing Changes the Game

At the heart of this transformation lies pricing strategy. Flush with fresh capital and operating on EV-native platforms, companies like PMI Electro Mobility and EKA Mobility adopted highly aggressive pricing models, undercutting traditional manufacturers by narrow but decisive margins.

Manufacturer / Consortium	Number of E-Buses Awarded
PMI Electro Mobility	5,210
EKA Mobility	3,485
Olectra Greentech	1,785
Anthony Travels Consortium	420
Total	**10,900**

PMI Electro Mobility emerged as the single largest winner, bagging contracts for 5,210 electric buses, while EKA Mobility, a subsidiary of Pinnacle Industries, secured 3,485 buses. Together, the two companies accounted for over 8,600 buses, a dominant share of the tender.

Industry sources indicate that bid prices varied by city and were 5–15% lower than earlier estimates, according to a report by Mint. In some cases, legacy players reportedly lost contracts over margins as slim as ₹0.20 per kilometre, underscoring how finely balanced and fiercely competitive the tender was.

Legacy Players Left on the Sidelines

The results came as a surprise to many in the industry. Established manufacturers such as Tata Motors, VE Commercial Vehicles (VECV), and JBM Auto failed to secure even a single contract in the tender.

Among traditional players, only Olectra Greentech, an early entrant into India's electric bus segment and a subsidiary of Megha Engineering, managed a partial win, securing 1,785 buses.

Ashok Leyland, one of India's largest conventional bus manufacturers, missed the tender entirely. The company cited a technical glitch on the CESL bidding portal, which allegedly prevented the successful submission of its bid.

Through its subsidiary OHM Global Mobility, Ashok Leyland has challenged the decision in the Delhi High Court, while CESL maintains that the bid was never received. The results, officials said, were announced only after obtaining legal advice.

PMI and EKA Strengthen Market Leadership

The tender outcome further cements PMI Electro Mobility's leadership in the Indian electric bus market. The company currently holds around 25% of the 4,239 electric buses sold in India in 2025 and already has an order book of approximately 3,000 buses. With the latest win, PMI has clearly established itself as the country's largest electric bus manufacturer.

EKA Mobility's strong showing reinforces the growing role of new, vertically integrated EV players that are willing to rethink cost structures, localisation strategies, and long-term operational models.

The remaining 420 buses under the tender were awarded to the Anthony Travels consortium, according to industry sources.

Cities and Deployment Timeline

Under this phase of the PM E-Drive scheme, electric buses will be deployed across five major cities:

- **Bengaluru:** ~4,500 buses
- **Hyderabad:** ~2,000 buses
- **Delhi: ~**2,800 buses
- **Ahmedabad:** ~1,000 buses
- **Surat:** ~600 buses

With the tender process now concluded after months of delays and legal scrutiny, bus deployment is expected to begin next year.

GCC Model Ensures Long-Term Viability

The tender follows the Gross Cost Contract (GCC) framework, under which private operators will own, operate, and maintain the electric buses for 10–12 years. These operators will also be responsible for setting up charging infrastructure and energy management systems at depots provided by city authorities.

In return, city transport undertakings will pay operators a fixed per-kilometre fee, a model designed to ensure affordability for cities while providing predictable, long-term revenue for operators.

CESL confirmed that financial bids from 14 technically qualified bidders were evaluated and that the discovered rates were both “attractive and lower than estimates.” Letters of Award will now be issued by the respective city transport undertakings.

A Turning Point for India’s E-Bus Ecosystem

The outcome of this landmark tender highlights a fundamental shift in India’s electric bus ecosystem. EV-first manufacturers, with leaner structures and sharper pricing strategies, are outmaneuvering legacy players that once dominated the bus market.

As cities accelerate their transition to electric mobility, this tender may well serve as a blueprint, both in scale and structure, for future procurements. For traditional manufacturers, it is a clear signal that adaptation is no longer optional, but urgent.

MAN Truck & Bus Secures Largest-Ever Deutsche Bahn Bus Contract of 3,000 Buses

MAN Truck & Bus has been named the main supplier under Deutsche Bahn's largest bus procurement programme to date, following the signing of a framework agreement covering more than 3,000 buses. The agreement spans the period from 2027 to 2032 and represents a major endorsement of MAN's city and intercity bus portfolio, with a strong emphasis on zero-emission mobility.

The contract includes a mix of MAN Lion's City, MAN Lion's City E, and MAN Lion's Intercity LE models. A significant proportion of the buses will be fully electric, underlining Deutsche Bahn's commitment to accelerating the transition to sustainable public transport across Germany. All vehicles under the agreement will be operated by DB Regio AG in both urban and intercity applications.

MAN and Deutsche Bahn share a long-standing partnership that dates back to 2010. Over the past 15 years, MAN has delivered close to 5,000 buses to DB, many of which continue to operate across German cities and regional routes. The new framework agreement builds on this collaboration, offering Deutsche Bahn access to a flexible and future-ready product range.

For intercity services, MAN will supply the Lion's Intercity LE in three length variants. The low-entry model is designed to combine passenger comfort, operational flexibility, and fuel efficiency. Urban requirements will be addressed through the MAN Lion's City range, which includes diesel, CNG, hybrid, and fully electric options.

The MAN Lion's City E forms a central pillar of the agreement. Available in 10-, 12-, and 18-metre configurations, the electric buses are designed for diverse urban operating conditions. With in-house battery technology, quiet operation, and high passenger capacity, the Lion's City E reinforces MAN's role in shaping the future of sustainable public transport in Germany.

Solaris to Supply 20 Trollino 12 Trolleybuses to Lublin Under New Contract

Solaris has secured a new contract to supply 20 Trollino 12 trolleybuses to the Municipal Transport Company in Lublin (MPK Lublin), further strengthening the city's position as one of Poland's leaders in electromobility. Deliveries are scheduled for early 2027.

With this order, Lublin's trolleybus fleet will expand to 80 vehicles, reinforcing its long-standing commitment to zero-emission public transport. Alongside Gdynia and Tychy, Lublin is one of only three Polish cities operating trolleybuses, and it continues to invest steadily in this mode as part of a broader sustainable mobility strategy.

Solaris CEO Agata Stańda highlighted that the partnership with MPK Lublin spans nearly 30 years and includes the delivery of more than 120 zero-emission vehicles. She noted that the latest Trollino contract represents another milestone in building one of the most advanced electromobility networks in the country.

The new Trollino 12 trolleybuses will combine a conventional trolleybus driveline with onboard batteries, enabling off-wire operation beyond the overhead network. The batteries can recharge while connected to the catenary, offering greater route flexibility. Additional features include a preconditioning system for interior temperature control before departure and Solaris' eSConnect software for remote monitoring and diagnostics.

Each vehicle will comply with GSR2 safety standards and accommodate up to 80 passengers, with 29 seated, while offering modern comfort features such as USB charging and passenger counting systems.

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Kinetic and Geely Unveil New Zealand's First Lightweight Electric Double-Decker Bus

Kinetic New Zealand has announced the debut of the country's first lightweight electric double-decker bus, marking a significant milestone for zero-emission public transport. Developed through a strategic partnership between Kinetic and Geely, the new vehicle is set to enter trial operations with Environment Canterbury ahead of a broader rollout.

The electric double-decker is the first of its kind in New Zealand to meet weight compliance regulations without requiring a special permit. It has been developed in line with Volvo's global research, development, and safety standards, ensuring high levels of structural integrity and passenger protection.

A key highlight of the new bus is its lightweight construction. The vehicle utilizes aerospace-grade aluminum technology, similar to the materials used in aircraft such as the Airbus A380. This approach delivers a stronger yet significantly lighter body compared to conventional steel-built double-deck buses, improving efficiency and operational flexibility.

Development took place over 18 months, during which four prototypes were built and tested to fine-tune performance, safety, and compliance for New Zealand operating conditions. An R&D investment of USD 6 million supported the project.

According to Kinetic, the new electric double-decker has been designed to suit the specific demands of New Zealand's urban transport networks, offering improved charging efficiency, enhanced safety, and lower environmental impact. The vehicle is scheduled to enter regular metro service in 2026, supporting the country's transition toward low-emission public transport systems.

Alexander Dennis Enviro100AEV Begins Passenger Trials in Cambridge Autonomous Bus Project

Alexander Dennis has commenced passenger trials of its autonomous Enviro100AEV electric bus as part of the next phase of the Connector autonomous vehicle project in Cambridge, England. The self-driving bus entered service on 17 December, operating between the Trumpington and Babraham Park & Ride sites and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

The trial is led by the Greater Cambridge Partnership and is designed to assess whether autonomous buses can play a role in the city's future public transport network. Services run Monday to Friday and are free for passengers. Operations are handled by Whippet, part of the Ascendal Group, with trained safety drivers present on board at all times.

Another Enviro100AEV is scheduled to join the trial in the coming weeks, expanding capacity and giving more passengers first-hand experience of autonomous public transport. A smaller Connector vehicle operating in West Cambridge has already carried around 800 passengers since June, covering more than 2,000 miles.

Designed and built in the UK, the Enviro100AEV recently received the Vehicle of the Year award at the Self-Driving Industry Awards 2025. The electric bus integrates radar, lidar, cameras, artificial intelligence and high-performance computing, supported by an SAE Level 4 automated driving system supplied by Fusion Processing.

The Connector project is funded by the UK Government under the CAM Pathfinder Programme and brings together partners including Alexander Dennis, Fusion Processing, Whippet, Mistral Bus & Coach, dRISK and Anthrometric.

Skoda Delivers First Batch of 32Tr Trolleybuses to Teplice, Czech Republic

Skoda Group has delivered eight new 12-metre Skoda 32Tr trolleybuses to the Teplice Municipal Transport Company, marking the first phase of a framework contract covering up to 17 vehicles. The overall contract value exceeds 290 million CZK. All eight trolleybuses are scheduled to enter regular passenger service from December 22.

The delivery strengthens Teplice's long-standing trolleybus network and supports the city's push for quieter, emission-free urban mobility. According to Skoda Electric, the battery-equipped trolleybuses offer operators greater route flexibility while improving daily comfort for passengers.

The Skoda 32Tr is a fully low-floor, two-axle trolleybus designed specifically for urban operations. Measuring 12 metres in length, it features three doors and can carry up to 95 passengers, with seating for 35. The vehicle is powered by a 160 kW asynchronous traction motor and operates on 600 V or 750 V DC overhead lines.

A key feature is its onboard traction battery, which allows the trolleybus to travel up to 12 kilometres beyond the overhead network. The battery charges automatically while driving under the trolley line. The vehicle also supports regenerative braking, feeding energy back into the power supply system.

Additional features include full air-conditioning, a modern passenger information system, onboard cameras, and spacious interiors designed to accommodate wheelchairs and strollers. All electrical equipment is housed in a protected, insulated container to ensure reliable operation in challenging weather conditions.

IVECO BUS Delivers 15 CROSSWAY Line Buses for LEGO® Employee Transport in Hungary

IVECO BUS, together with its official Hungarian dealer ECO-tech visiON Kft., has delivered 15 CROSSWAY Line buses to RÉVÉSZ Group, strengthening organised employee mobility in the region. The new fleet will be used to transport nearly 2,000 LEGO® employees daily between their homes and workplaces.

The 13-metre CROSSWAY Line buses are designed for short- and medium-distance operations, making them well suited for high-frequency corporate shuttle services. Each vehicle offers seating and standing capacity for up to 59 passengers and combines comfort, safety and operational efficiency for intensive daily use.

Passenger comfort has been prioritised through ergonomic seating and onboard Wi-Fi, ensuring a pleasant commuting experience. Safety is enhanced through the integration of advanced driver assistance systems, supporting drivers and improving overall road safety. A standout feature of the fleet is its distinctive LEGO®-inspired exterior livery, adding a playful and recognisable identity to the buses.

The dedicated transport service is fully funded by LEGO® and reflects the company's focus on employee well-being and responsible mobility. By providing reliable shared transport, the initiative helps reduce private car usage while improving efficiency and safety in daily commuting.

The delivery highlights how tailored bus solutions can support corporate transport needs while aligning with sustainability objectives and regional mobility strategies.

Volkswagen Truck & Bus to Begin Deliveries of First Electric Buses in Brazil

Volkswagen Truck & Bus (VWTB) is set to commence deliveries of its first fully electric buses, marking a key milestone in the company's electrification journey. The e-Volksbus will be introduced in São Paulo in the coming weeks, with expansion to other Brazilian cities, including Resende, already planned.

The launch coincides with a significant production achievement for VWTB, which has confirmed it has crossed a cumulative output of 1.25 million vehicles, the highest production milestone in its history.

The initial order for the e-Volksbus 22L comprises 100 units. Transport operator Transpass has already taken delivery of 50 buses, while the remaining vehicles will be allocated to other public transport operators from January 2026. Following its São Paulo debut, the electric bus will gradually be deployed in additional cities across Brazil.

The e-Volksbus 22L has been undergoing real-world operational trials in São Paulo since May, validating performance under urban conditions. The first unit for Resende is scheduled for delivery this month and will be operated by Viação Princesinha do Vale.

Designed for urban applications, the e-Volksbus 22L can carry up to 82 passengers and supports bus bodies up to 13.2 metres in length. It offers a driving range of up to 250 km, powered by 12 battery packs, positioning it as a practical zero-emission solution for Brazilian city transport.

Daimler Buses and BYD Europe to Deliver Major Electric Bus Orders for De Lijn

Daimler Buses and BYD Europe are set to deliver a significant number of new electric buses to De Lijn, as the Flemish public transport operator accelerates its transition towards a fully zero-emission fleet.

As part of a broader investment programme backed by EUR 400 million from the Flemish Minister of Mobility and Public Works, Annick De Ridder, De Lijn has confirmed major procurement commitments with both manufacturers.

Under a newly approved framework agreement, Daimler Buses Belgium will be eligible to supply up to 500 Mercedes-Benz eCitaro standard electric buses, with a total contract value estimated at up to EUR 303 million. De Lijn has already placed an initial order for more than 80 eCitaro units, with deliveries scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2027. The agreement runs for several years and provides flexibility for further call-offs as fleet electrification progresses.

In parallel, BYD Europe will deliver 268 additional 12-metre electric buses, completing De Lijn's full

drawdown of its 2023 framework agreement with the manufacturer for up to 500 vehicles. Deliveries of the BYD buses will take place in phases starting from the second quarter of 2027. De Lijn cited positive operational experience with earlier BYD electric buses as a key factor behind the latest order.

Together, the Daimler Buses and BYD Europe deliveries form a central pillar of De Lijn's plan to electrify more than 2,000 buses over the next decade and achieve a fully emission-free fleet by 2035, while also enhancing passenger comfort and service quality across Flanders.

Hyundai Subsidiary HTWO and Kaiwo to Supply 224 Hydrogen Buses for Guangzhou

Hyundai Motor Group has secured the largest single hydrogen bus order in China to date, with 224 fuel cell buses to be delivered to the state-owned Guangzhou Public Transport Group. The order has been placed with HTWO Guangzhou, Hyundai's hydrogen-focused subsidiary, in partnership with Chinese commercial vehicle manufacturer Kaiwo Group.

The contract forms part of a wider procurement programme under which Guangzhou Public Transport Group plans to deploy around 450 hydrogen buses. The HTWO and Kaiwo collaboration will account for nearly half of the total fleet, underlining the growing confidence in hydrogen-powered public transport in major Chinese cities.

The buses are 8.5-metre hydrogen midibuses jointly developed by HTWO Guangzhou and Kaiwo. Each vehicle is equipped with a 90 kW fuel cell system delivering an efficiency of 64 percent.

According to the manufacturers, the buses offer a driving range of up to 576 kilometres and can be refuelled in approximately five minutes, supporting high daily utilisation. A low-floor layout and a short rear overhang of less than 1.1 metres have been designed to improve accessibility and urban manoeuvrability.

The fuel cell powertrain is produced locally at HTWO Guangzhou's manufacturing facility, completed in 2023. This plant is Hyundai's first overseas hydrogen fuel cell production site and plays a central role in the group's China hydrogen strategy.

In addition to this order, HTWO and Kaiwo recently secured a further contract for 25 hydrogen buses, taking their total deliveries to Guangzhou to 249 units.

BYD Plans New Electric Bus and Truck Factory in Brazil to Meet Rising Demand

BYD is planning to build a new manufacturing facility in Brazil within the next two to three years as demand for electric buses continues to outpace its current production capacity. The move follows strong order intake that has effectively exhausted output at BYD's existing electric bus chassis plant in Campinas, São Paulo state.

BYD has been assembling battery-electric bus chassis at the Campinas facility since 2015 and has produced around 600 units over the past decade. However, with confirmed orders, the company expects to manufacture nearly 1,200 chassis in 2026 alone, fully utilising the plant's capacity. While the site has a nominal capacity of up to 2,000 units annually, actual output is lower due to production complexity, particularly for articulated buses that require more time and resources.

As an interim step, BYD will establish a temporary production unit near Campinas, expected to roughly double capacity within four to six months. This short-term expansion will bridge the gap until a new, larger factory becomes operational in São Paulo state.

The planned facility will significantly expand BYD's local manufacturing footprint. At full scale, it could produce 6,000 to 7,000 electric bus and truck chassis annually and employ 700 to 800 people. The new plant will also enable BYD to locally manufacture electric trucks, currently imported into Brazil, while supporting exports across South America and potentially Africa.

The expansion is driven by a major fleet replacement cycle among Brazilian public transport operators, particularly in São Paulo, where bus renewals were delayed during the Covid-19 period.

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