THE BUS INSIDER

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BY COACH BUILDERS INDIA

15M

RUDRA VYOM

INDIA'S NEW 15M MULTI-AXLE COACH

ELECTRIC MOBILITY

KPN'S ELECTRIC COMEBACK

SAFETY

RETHINKING BUS SAFETY

MARKETS

GLOBAL CONFLICT LOCAL CONSEQUENCES

PRODUCT

SANATAN'S NEW HEXA

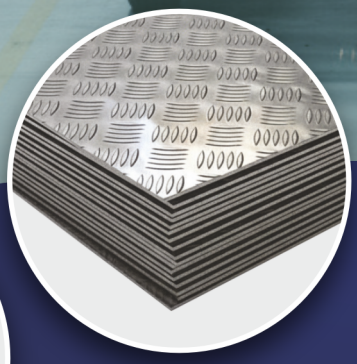
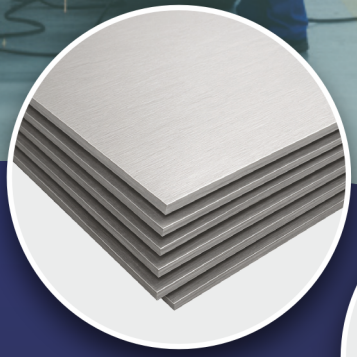
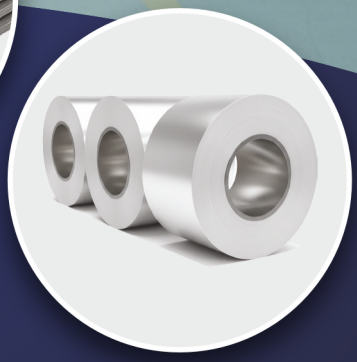


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Hello everyone,

Over the past year, one thing has become abundantly clear to me. The Indian bus industry is changing faster than ever before.

Competition is intensifying. Passenger expectations are evolving. Technology is becoming a necessity rather than a luxury. And operators are being asked to do more than ever before, often with the same determination and resilience that have defined this industry for decades.

Yet despite all this change, one thing remains constant - the people who keep India moving.

When we launched The Bus Insider, our objective was clear - create a platform dedicated to India's bus operators. A platform that understood their challenges, celebrated their successes, and told the stories that rarely make headlines.

Over the past year, we have had the privilege of speaking with operators from every corner of the country. Some run large fleets. Others have built their businesses one bus and one route at a time. But every conversation has reinforced the same belief.

The future of mobility will not be shaped by vehicles alone. It will be shaped by the people operating them.

That belief continues to guide everything we do.

At the same time, our journey over the past year has revealed something else. Many of the forces shaping the future of bus transportation extend far beyond fleet operations. They begin in manufacturing plants, component suppliers, technology companies, charging infrastructure networks, and policy discussions.

That realization has led to the launch of The Bus Wire, our new B2B publication dedicated to the broader bus ecosystem.

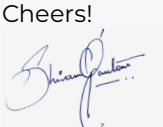
But let me be clear. While The Bus Wire will tell the stories of the businesses building the future of the industry, The Bus Insider will continue to be the voice of operators.

That commitment remains unchanged.

To everyone who has supported us on this journey, thank you. Your trust, encouragement, and feedback have helped shape both publications.

And as we begin this new chapter, we look forward to continuing the conversation.

Cheers!



Shivam Gautom



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VRL Logistics Places 715-Vehicle Order with Ashok Leyland



Representative AI-generated image

VRL Logistics has placed an order for 715 vehicles with Ashok Leyland as part of its ongoing fleet expansion and operational growth strategy.

The order includes AVTR 3120 haulage trucks, BOSS 1615 trucks, and Oyster staff buses. Ashok Leyland said 300 vehicles have already been delivered, while the remaining units are scheduled for delivery during the current year.

The latest order further strengthens the long-standing partnership between VRL Logistics and Ashok Leyland, which have worked together for decades across India's logistics and transportation sector.

Dr. Anand Sankeshwar said the company continues to rely on Ashok Leyland's vehicle performance, reliability, and after-sales support to maintain operational efficiency across its network.

"We have absolute confidence in the quality, reliability, and performance of Ashok Leyland trucks. Their strong after-sales support enables uninterrupted operations, while the rapidly expanding service network gives us a clear operational advantage," he said.

The newly ordered vehicles are equipped with advanced technologies aimed at improving fleet productivity, reducing maintenance downtime, and increasing vehicle uptime.

Madhavi Deshmukh, National Sales Head – MHCV, Ashok Leyland, stated that the order reflects the continued trust VRL Logistics has placed in Ashok Leyland's products and technology platforms.

She added that the two companies have collaborated over the years in developing products suited to the evolving needs of the logistics industry.

"We are delighted to strengthen our long-standing partnership with VRL Logistics. Over the years, VRL has worked closely with us in developing new products and features tailored to the emerging needs of customers in the logistics industry. This order win is a testament to the trust and confidence VRL Logistics has in Ashok Leyland's technology and performance, and it reinforces our dedication to creating efficient and technologically advanced products that exceed customers' expectations," she said.

The order also highlights the continued importance of operational efficiency, service support, and uptime in India's commercial transportation sector, where large fleet operators are increasingly focusing on productivity-driven fleet expansion.

> **"We have absolute confidence in the quality, reliability, and performance of Ashok Leyland trucks. Their strong after-sales support enables uninterrupted operations, while the rapidly expanding service network gives us a clear operational advantage."**



Dr. Anand Sankeshwar
Managing Director
VRL Logistics

MG Group
Marks 30 Years of Zaheerabad Facility



MG Group has completed 30 years of operations at its Zaheerabad manufacturing facility, marking a key milestone in its journey as an integrated bus body builder in India. Established in 1996, the Zaheerabad facility has evolved from a modest setup into a high-volume, fully integrated manufacturing hub, supporting the company's growth across multiple bus segments over three decades.

The company said the anniversary reflects its long-term focus on innovation, safety, and passenger experience across the passenger-vehicle segment. Over the past three decades, MG Group has built capabilities across multiple bus segments, including school buses, staff transportation, mofussil routes, and premium coaches.

The Zaheerabad plant serves as MG Group's primary production hub, with capabilities spanning fabrication, painting, trimming, assembly, FRP composites, electrical systems, and fire protection integration.

This integrated approach enables tighter quality control, improved production efficiency, and scalability across segments such as school buses, staff transportation, mofussil routes, and premium coaches. In parallel, MG Group's Belagavi facility focuses on premium coach development, like the recently launched MG TIGRA, advanced finishing, and prototype engineering.

MG Group's manufacturing capabilities have been recognised at a national commercial vehicle industry forum, where the company was awarded Application Builder of the Year, while Anil Mohan Kamat received the Business Leader of the Year honour.

With revenues exceeding ₹700 crore, MG Group is continuing to invest in expanding both capacity and capability. The company's focus areas include scaling operations at Zaheerabad, expanding premium offerings at Belagavi, and increasing investment in automation and composite technologies.

These investments are aimed at improving operational efficiency while preparing for evolving market requirements.



> **"India's mobility ecosystem is transforming rapidly, making safe, scalable bus solutions more critical than ever. MG Group is investing in manufacturing, engineering, and compliance to deliver high-quality mobility and shape the future of transport in India."**

Anil Mohan Kamat
Chairman & Managing Director
MG Group

Olectra Greentech Partners with Dassault Systèmes to Accelerate Digital EV Development



Olectra Greentech has partnered with Dassault Systèmes to adopt the 3DEXPERIENCE platform as part of its digital product development strategy aimed at strengthening its electric mobility operations.

The platform will integrate product design, simulation, manufacturing, and lifecycle management into a unified collaborative environment, enabling Olectra to move toward a model-based engineering approach aligned with global OEM practices.

According to the companies, the implementation will support virtual simulation and validation before physical prototyping, helping improve coordination between engineering and manufacturing teams while reducing overall product development timelines.

> "The collaboration with Dassault Systèmes and adoption of the 3DEXPERIENCE platform would support the development of future-ready products built to global standards while enhancing speed, precision, and engineering efficiency."
>
> **Mahesh Babu**
> *Managing Director*
> Olectra Greentech

The move comes as Olectra expands investments in new electric bus and truck platforms. The Hyderabad-based electric vehicle manufacturer currently has more than 3,800 electric vehicles deployed across India and an order book exceeding 10,000 vehicles. The companies added that the collaboration aligns with the broader shift within the automotive industry toward digital engineering ecosystems designed to reduce development complexity, accelerate innovation, and support the evolution of next-generation EV architectures.

With increasing competition in India's electric commercial vehicle market, the adoption of advanced digital development platforms is expected to play a key role in improving scalability, product quality, and time-to-market for manufacturers.

> "**The partnership reflects the growing industry transition toward integrated and platform-driven vehicle development enabled by virtual engineering technologies.**"
>
> **Deepak NG**
> *Managing Director, India*
> Dassault Systèmes

zingbus Reports Over 100% YoY Growth on Key Routes Amid Strong Holiday Travel Demand

zingbus has reported over 100% year-on-year growth across several routes spanning North, South, and West India, driven by a sharp rise in intercity travel demand during the peak holiday season.

The company said the current travel cycle reflects a broader behavioural shift among younger travellers, who are increasingly opting for frequent short-duration trips rather than limiting travel to annual holidays or festival periods. This shift has led to earlier demand build-up and sustained travel activity through the summer months.

The surge in passenger volumes has placed pressure on multiple transport modes. In response, Indian Railways has announced more than 18,000 special train services between April and July 2026 to manage seasonal demand.

zingbus noted that rising airfares and limited seat availability across other modes are pushing more passengers toward bus travel for medium-distance routes between 200 km and 600 km. Factors such as affordability, higher trip frequency, and point-to-point connectivity are further strengthening demand during weekends and holiday periods.

While traditional leisure routes in North India, including Delhi–Nainital and Delhi–Shimla, recorded strong growth, the highest acceleration in demand was observed across South and West India corridors.

Key high-growth routes highlighted by the company include destinations like Goa, Kochi, Visakhapatnam, Kanyakumari, Madurai, Thanjavur, and Tirupati, reflecting rising leisure and pilgrimage-driven travel demand.

The platform said it has increased bus frequency and expanded capacity across major corridors ahead of the summer season, with deployment decisions guided by real-time booking trends and route-level demand patterns.

Founded as an intercity mobility platform, zingbus has served more than 3.5 million travellers across over 300 cities in more than 20 states. The company operates through a network of over 270 bus operators and has completed more than 10 million journeys to date.



Force Motors Launches **New Traveller N Range** with Enhanced Safety & Efficiency



Force Motors Limited has launched the new Force Traveller N Range, introducing upgraded ambulance, school bus, and delivery van variants aimed at enhancing comfort, reliability, operational efficiency, and overall customer experience. With this launch, the company will fully transition to the new-generation Traveller platform, replacing the existing Traveller range across future production.

A longstanding leader in India's shared mobility segment, the Force Traveller continues to dominate its category with over 70% market share. Over the years, the platform has established itself as one of the country's most widely used solutions for passenger transport, institutional mobility, emergency response, and last-mile logistics. It is currently regarded as India's preferred ambulance platform while also emerging as one of the fastest-growing school bus brands in its segment.

The newly introduced Traveller N Range focuses on improving real-world usability through a combination of cabin upgrades, structural refinements, and manufacturing enhancements. Inside the cabin, the vehicle receives a completely redesigned cockpit featuring a digital instrument cluster and a 9-inch infotainment system, delivering a more modern and car-like driving experience.



The range also introduces newly designed ergonomic seating, improved NVH levels for a quieter cabin environment, and an upgraded HVAC system aimed at enhancing passenger comfort and cooling efficiency.

To further strengthen ownership experience and fleet uptime, the new Traveller N Range is backed by 'Force Care', offering extended warranty support, accidental repair coverage, roadside assistance, and parts warranty. The range is also integrated with 'iPulse', Force Motors' connected vehicle solution enabling real-time vehicle tracking and diagnostics for fleet operators.

With these upgrades, Force Motors aims to further strengthen the Traveller's position in India's commercial passenger mobility and institutional transport market.

> **"Learnings from Urbania have helped us strengthen our manufacturing and quality systems, resulting in improved consistency and build quality. The new Traveller N Range has also been developed around customer feedback to deliver better comfort, reliability, lower downtime, and improved efficiency for fleet operators."**
>
> **Prasan Firodia**
> *Managing Director*
> Force Motors Limited

Eicher Partners with Cityflo for Deployment of 2,000 Premium Urban Buses

Eicher Trucks and Buses has signed an MoU with urban mobility operator Cityflo for the deployment of 2,000 buses over the next three years, marking a significant expansion of premium intra-city mobility services across India.

The partnership, announced by VE Commercial Vehicles (VECV), will support Cityflo's expansion into key urban markets. Around 500 buses are planned for deployment during FY27 as part of the phased procurement strategy.

Under the agreement, Eicher will supply a mix of diesel, CNG, and electric buses designed for city operations. The deployment plan includes the Eicher Skyline Pro 3011 AC Pushback coach with rear air suspension, targeted at premium daily commuter services.

The collaboration will focus on improving operational efficiency, vehicle uptime, and total cost of ownership, while enhancing passenger comfort. Key focus areas include better air-conditioning performance, reduced noise and vibration, improved ride quality, and optimized seating for urban routes.

B Srinivas, Managing Director and CEO of VECV, said the partnership supports efforts to increase public transport usage and reduce urban congestion through reliable mobility solutions.

Cityflo Co-Founder and Chief Business Officer **Rishabh Shah** said the companies had previously co-developed a 27-seater urban bus platform and would continue collaborating on new vehicle configurations as operations scale.

The partnership reflects rising demand for organised, premium urban mobility solutions across India's major cities.

The agreement also includes integrated service support such as on-site maintenance, peak-hour aligned servicing schedules, and expanded access to parts and aftersales infrastructure to improve fleet reliability.





Ashok Leyland Q4 Results:
FY26 Operating PBT Jumps 22%
CV Sales at 2,20,437 Units

Ashok Leyland reported its highest-ever annual revenue, profitability and commercial vehicle volumes for FY26, driven by strong growth across domestic CV sales, exports, electric mobility and aftermarket businesses.

The company posted revenues of Rs. 44,007 crore for FY26, registering a growth of 14% over Rs. 38,753 crore reported in FY25.

Operating Profit Before Tax (PBT) rose 22% year-on-year to Rs. 5,163 crore, while EBITDA stood at Rs. 5,732 crore with margins improving to 13.0%. Profit After Tax (PAT) for the year stood at Rs. 3,566 crore despite a one-time charge of Rs. 308 crore related to the new Labour Code.

For Q4 FY26, the company reported EBITDA of Rs. 2,066 crore, up 15% from Rs. 1,791 crore recorded during the same period last year. Operating PBT for the quarter rose 14% to Rs. 1,909 crore, while PAT increased 13% to Rs. 1,405 crore.

Ashok Leyland ended FY26 with a net cash surplus of Rs. 5,899 crore compared to Rs. 4,242 crore in the previous financial year.

The company's overall commercial vehicle volumes touched an all-time high of 220,437 units during FY26, surpassing its previous peak achieved in FY19. LCV volumes also reached a record 74,322 units during the year.

Exports emerged as another major growth driver for the company, with volumes increasing 18.5% year-on-year to reach a historic high of 18,082 units. Switch Mobility also reported

strong growth during FY26. Electric bus volumes increased 238% to 1,530 units, while e-LCV volumes grew 56% to 1,606 units. The subsidiary more than doubled its revenue to Rs. 1,807 crore and reported a PAT of Rs. 104 crore compared to a loss in the previous year.

Commenting on the performance, Dheeraj Hinduja said the company's record results were driven by strong customer trust, export growth and momentum across Power Solutions, Aftermarket and electric mobility businesses.

He added that Ashok Leyland's defence order pipeline is currently at an all-time high, while the company's entry into Indonesia is expected to strengthen its international growth ambitions.

Shenu Agarwal said the company's strong cash generation and margin expansion reflected the success of its premiumisation strategy and diversified business portfolio.

The Board of Directors declared a second interim dividend of Rs. 2.50 per share for FY26. Combined with the earlier interim dividend announced during Q3, the total dividend payout for the financial year stands at Rs. 3.50 per share.

> **We are proud to have achieved record-breaking milestones across our businesses, with all-time high CV and export volumes, strong growth in Power Solutions, Aftermarket, Electric Mobility, and Defence, and expansion into Indonesia. Driven by innovation and customer trust, we are well-positioned to sustain profitable growth and create long-term value.**
>
> **Dheeraj Hinduja**
> *Chairman*
> Ashok Leyland Limited



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RUDRA VYOM

Engineering India's First Indigenous 15M MULTI-AXLE COACH

By Samiran Bora



Damodar Group has become one of the first Indian body builders to commercially develop and launch a coach body on Ashok Leyland's Garud 15M chassis - India's first indigenous 15-metre multi-axle coach platform. While prototype and test mule bodies had previously been developed on the platform, the launch of the **RUDRA VYOM** marks one of the earliest fully developed premium coach bodies to enter the market after the chassis became commercially available to operators.

The development is significant not just for Damodar Group, but for the Indian bus industry itself.

For years, the premium multi-axle coach segment in India was largely dominated by Swedish OEMs that defined long-distance luxury travel and high-speed intercity operations.

The arrival of an **indigenous 15-metre multi-axle platform** changes that equation considerably. For the first time, the Indian market now has a **domestically developed premium coach platform** capable of being produced at scale for Indian operating conditions and at a far more competitive cost structure. And in becoming among the **first body builders to commercially launch a fully developed coach body** on this platform, **Damodar Group** has positioned itself at the centre of this transition.

While the RUDRA VYOM visually evolves from the company's existing Rudra platform, Damodar says the shift from a conventional 13.5-metre architecture to a 15-metre multi-axle platform required extensive engineering changes across the vehicle. Structural rigidity, weight distribution, vehicle dynamics, thermal management, and overall ride stability all become significantly more complex as platform dimensions increase, making the RUDRA VYOM far more than just a cosmetic upgrade.



Beyond A Conventional Platform

According to **Dinesh Sharma, Managing Director, Damodar Group**, the transition from the conventional 13.5-metre platform to the Garud 15M architecture required extensive engineering intervention across the vehicle. As platform dimensions increase, factors such as structural rigidity, weight distribution, axle balancing, suspension behaviour and vehicle dynamics become significantly more complex.

"One of the major challenges was maintaining structural strength and stability across a longer body while ensuring the coach remained efficient and practical for long-distance operations," says Sharma.



He further stated that considerable engineering attention was given towards chassis-body integration to ensure refined highway performance, ride comfort and operational durability under Indian operating conditions. Areas such as luggage packaging, HVAC integration, electrical routing, air-conditioning ducting and service accessibility also had to be redesigned to suit the larger platform architecture.

Maintaining consistent cooling distribution across a 15-metre passenger cabin itself posed a major engineering challenge, requiring extensive airflow and HVAC optimisation.

However, the RUDRA VYOM was intentionally developed as an evolution of the existing Rudra platform rather than a complete departure from it. The company retained the familiar Rudra design language while proportionally adapting the coach to suit the larger 15-metre architecture. Instead of radically altering the styling philosophy, the focus remained on refining the overall stance, proportions and visual balance of the vehicle so that the extended platform appeared naturally integrated.

"The idea behind the RUDRA VYOM was to evolve the existing Rudra platform into a more advanced flagship product while ensuring that the design continuity and brand recognition of the original Rudra remain intact," says Sharma.

Refining The Passenger Experience

Passenger refinement remained one of the central priorities throughout the development of the RUDRA VYOM. Considerable attention was given toward improving NVH refinement by reducing cabin noise, vibration transfer and structural resonance to create a quieter and smoother passenger environment suitable for premium intercity operations.

As premium intercity mobility continues to evolve in India, passenger comfort and long-distance travel experience are increasingly becoming key differentiators for operators. In line with this, the company focused heavily on enhancing the overall interior experience through better space utilisation, refined lighting integration, improved ergonomics and upgraded material finishes.

Another major area of focus was HVAC integration and airflow optimisation. Dinesh Sharma states that maintaining consistent thermal distribution across a 15-metre passenger cabin posed a significant engineering challenge, requiring extensive airflow management and cooling optimisation throughout the vehicle length.

Engineering Through Collaboration

Throughout the process, the Damodar team had to work in close coordination with Ashok Leyland to ensure that the body and chassis functioned as one integrated premium mobility platform.

"Structural integration, suspension behaviour, axle load optimisation, braking dynamics, cooling systems, packaging efficiency and overall vehicle performance all need to work together as a single integrated system," revealed Sharma.

Continuous coordination took place around chassis-body integration, load calculations, packaging architecture, structural optimisation and vehicle dynamics validation to ensure the final product achieved the desired levels of safety, ride comfort, stability and operational efficiency.

For Damodar Group, projects such as the RUDRA VYOM also reflect the growing importance of collaborative engineering within the Indian bus industry.

As platforms become more sophisticated and passenger expectations continue to evolve, OEM-bodybuilder partnerships are gradually becoming more engineering-driven and integration-focused rather than purely transactional.



Building A Global Identity

The significance of the RUDRA VYOM project ultimately extends far beyond a single premium coach platform. As passenger expectations continue to rise and premium intercity mobility expands, the industry itself is being pushed toward a far more engineering-driven future.

Modern premium coaches today demand significantly higher levels of structural integration, thermal efficiency, NVH refinement, safety engineering and operational optimisation. Operators are increasingly looking beyond aesthetics and seating layouts toward long-term reliability, passenger refinement and overall travel experience.

Projects such as the Garud 15M and RUDRA VYOM reflect how Indian manufacturers are gradually becoming capable of developing advanced premium mobility solutions engineered specifically for Indian operating conditions rather than adapting global platforms for local use.

“We believe India is now moving toward a phase where indigenous premium coach platforms can establish their own global identity rather than simply following international trends,” says Dinesh Sharma.

That statement perhaps best captures the broader significance of the project.





> **For decades, India has adapted global mobility solutions to suit local conditions. The next chapter belongs to Indian companies creating products that can set benchmarks of their own. RUDRA VYOM is our contribution to that future.**

Yash Sharma
Director
Damodar Group



RUDRA VYOM

Power Beyond Limits

The name **RUDRA VYOM** is derived from two powerful ***Sanskrit words*** that embody strength, scale, and limitless movement

RUDRA

A symbol of force, fearlessness, transformation, and raw energy. In Indian mythology, Rudra represents the fierce and dynamic essence associated with Lord Shiva — commanding power, dominance, and unstoppable momentum.

VYOM

Meaning sky or the infinite expanse beyond boundaries, Vyom symbolizes freedom, vision, openness, and limitless possibility.

Together, RUDRA VYOM represents:

"A powerful force engineered to move beyond limits."

> **We believe India is now moving toward a phase where indigenous premium coach platforms can establish their own global identity rather than simply following international trends.**

Dinesh Sharma
Managing Director
Damodar Group





Sanatan Bus Body Builders Expands Mobility Portfolio with Sunliner and HEXA Launches

By Violina Pegu



India's bus body building industry is entering a new phase. Passenger comfort, premium interiors, safety compliance, and differentiated design are no longer optional in India's evolving bus industry. Fleet operators across school, staff, and intercity transport segments are now demanding more refined products that combine functionality with a better travel experience.

Against this backdrop, Sanatan Bus Body Builders has unveiled two new products - the Sunliner wide-body platform and the HEXA premium 12-metre coach. The launches underline the company's growing focus on organised manufacturing, premiumisation, and compliance-led product development.

Sunliner: A Wider Bus Platform Focused on Comfort and Practicality

The Sunliner has been developed as a next-generation wide-body bus platform aimed at school, staff, and tourist transportation applications. The core idea behind the product is simple - create more usable passenger space without significantly increasing operating complexity for fleet owners.

According to the company, the Sunliner offers an additional 150 mm width compared to conventional bus platforms. While standard buses in this category typically measure 2200 mm in width, the Sunliner extends this to 2350 mm.

The additional width has enabled Sanatan to redesign the cabin layout with better passenger movement space and improved seating comfort. The company claims the Sunliner offers larger seating dimensions compared to standard buses, increasing the seat layout from 1000 mm x 700 mm to 1100 mm x 800 mm.

In practical terms, this becomes especially important for school and staff transportation segments where passengers spend long hours commuting daily. Wider gangways, larger seats, and improved cabin openness can significantly enhance the overall travel experience.

Sanatan has also placed strong emphasis on safety and structural durability. The bus comes equipped with anti-skid flooring, emergency exits, emergency button systems, fire alarm and protection systems, and roll-over compliant body construction.

The company has additionally highlighted heavy-duty structural engineering, corrosion-resistant materials, strong welded construction, and premium fabrication standards as key elements of the Sunliner platform.

Another important aspect is compliance. Sanatan has prominently highlighted AIS-153 approval for the platform, reinforcing its push toward certified and regulation-ready manufacturing at a time when safety scrutiny in the bus segment is rapidly increasing.

Interestingly, the company is also positioning the Sunliner as an affordable upgrade. The brochure states that operators can upgrade to the wider platform at an additional cost of ₹35,000, a strategy that could appeal strongly to fleet operators looking to differentiate their services without major capital expenditure.



HEXA: Sanatan's Push into the Premium Coach Segment

While the Sunliner addresses high-volume people movement applications, the newly launched HEXA targets the premium intercity coach segment.

The HEXA is a 12-metre premium coach designed to deliver stronger road presence, higher passenger comfort, and a more premium onboard experience. The coach will be offered in both 3x2 and 2x2 seating configurations, along with HHR and pushback seating options depending on operator requirements.

The design language of the HEXA reflects Sanatan's attempt to move closer toward premium coach aesthetics. The vehicle features a bold new front fascia complemented by stylish projector headlamps, giving the coach a more modern and aggressive visual identity while also improving night-time visibility.

Inside the coach, Sanatan has focused heavily on premiumisation. The HEXA gets a full-ABS interior finish along with hidden ambient lighting, creating a cleaner and more contemporary cabin environment.

Passenger comfort remains central to the product strategy. The coach offers wide and comfortable seating layouts, while optional 3-point seat belts add an additional layer of passenger safety.

The driver cockpit has also been upgraded significantly. The ergonomically designed cabin features premium ABS finishing along with dedicated AC louvers aimed at improving driver comfort during long-distance operations.

Technology integration forms another major highlight of the HEXA platform. The coach is equipped with an Android-based infotainment system supporting Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, along with an integrated reverse camera system.

Together, the Sunliner and HEXA reflect Sanatan Bus Body Builders' broader evolution towards a more product-led mobility company. As India's bus industry increasingly shifts toward organised, compliant, and passenger-centric solutions, these launches position the company to participate more aggressively across both institutional and premium transport segments.

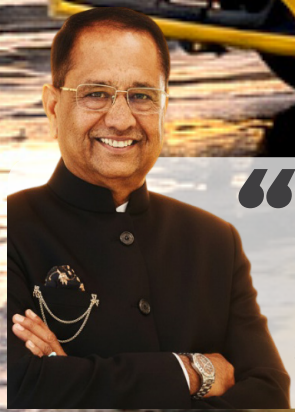


About Sanatan Bus Body Builders

Sanatan Bus Body Builders Pvt. Ltd. is one of India's leading bus body manufacturers, with a legacy spanning more than 25 years. Founded in 1999 and headquartered in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, the company has established itself as a trusted OEM body-building partner for major commercial vehicle manufacturers, including Ashok Leyland and Mahindra & Mahindra. Over the years, Sanatan has built a strong reputation for delivering high-quality, safe, and durable mobility solutions tailored to the evolving needs of fleet operators, institutions, and government organizations.

The company manufactures a diverse range of vehicles, including luxury coaches, sleeper buses, school buses, airport buses, ambulances, mobile medical units, double-decker buses, caravans, defence vehicles, and other special-purpose applications. Its integrated manufacturing facility spans approximately 350,000 square feet and has an annual production capacity of around 5,000 vehicles, supported by advanced infrastructure such as CNC machinery, FRP and ABS component manufacturing, paint booths, hydraulic fabrication equipment, and testing facilities.





"With the Sunliner, our focus was to improve passenger comfort and usable cabin space in everyday transportation segments. We believe operators today are looking for safer, wider, and more practical mobility solutions, and the Sunliner has been developed keeping these evolving expectations in mind."

Shiv Narayan Sharma
Director, Sanatan Bus Body Builders Pvt. Ltd.

Sanatan serves a broad customer base that includes leading OEMs, state transport undertakings, government agencies, defence organizations, and institutional buyers across India. The company's focus on engineering excellence, customization, safety, and regulatory compliance has helped it emerge as a prominent player in the country's bus manufacturing ecosystem.

In February 2026, Sanatan secured AIS-153 certification across 284 bus variants - one of the largest certified portfolios in India. The certification covers luxury seater, sleeper, and seater-cum-sleeper configurations across multiple OEM chassis platforms, reinforcing the company's commitment to passenger safety, quality, and future-ready manufacturing standards.



"HEXA represents our vision for the next generation of premium coaches. From design and technology to seating comfort and road presence, every aspect of the coach has been developed to deliver a more premium and modern travel experience for both operators and passengers."

Ujjwal Sharma
Director, Sanatan Bus Body Builders Pvt. Ltd.





The Electric Comeback:

How **KPN Travels** Is Reinventing Itself For A New Era

By Violina Pegu

For decades, KPN Travels was not just another private bus operator in South India; it was a trusted cultural institution that transformed grueling highway journeys into an elite, reliable experience.

For a generation of travelers in South India, booking a ticket with KPN Travels was not just a transaction; it was an upgrade in status. For operators, it was the benchmark they all aspired to match.

Founded in 1973 by KP Natarajan in Salem, KPN Travels steadily evolved from a regional operator into one of South India's most recognizable intercity mobility brands. Through the late 1980s and 1990s, the company expanded rapidly across the region, building a reputation for reliability, scale and premium service.

By the early 2000s, KPN Travels had emerged as one of the largest private intercity mobility brands in South India. At its peak, KPN Travels operated close to 250 buses and carried nearly 11,800 passengers daily across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, and Puducherry.

Then came COVID.

Like several operators, the company was forced to reassess its business. Fleet sizes reduced. Diesel operations gradually slowed down. For many in the industry, it appeared as though one of South India's most established private bus operators was slowly fading away.

But behind the scenes, KPN Travels was quietly preparing for its second innings.

With a clear view of where the industry was headed, KPN systematically wound down its diesel operations and quietly laid the foundation for a full-scale comeback - this time through electric mobility.

What many perceived as a slowdown was, in reality, a strategic reset aimed at reclaiming its former scale in an entirely new era of transportation.

Since January 2025, the company has completely ceased diesel bus operations and has begun rebuilding its intercity network with electric buses. And unlike many operators who are cautiously experimenting with electrification, KPN's ambitions are significantly larger.



The company is building its own charging ecosystem from the ground up. High-capacity charging stations ranging from 360 kW to 420 kW are already operational in Bengaluru, Salem, and Coimbatore, with additional facilities planned across Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Ulundurpet, Mettupalayam, Puducherry and Kumbakonam.

The long-term vision is clear - to rebuild operations at the same scale the company once operated during its diesel era.

For KPN Travels, this is not merely a fleet transition. It is a complete business reinvention.

Now led by the third generation of the family, represented by **R Sarvesh**, the company's latest transition reflects a larger shift underway within India's private intercity mobility industry - one where legacy operators are being forced to rethink everything from fleet economics and infrastructure ownership to long-term sustainability.

To understand the thinking behind KPN Travels' electric transition and the company's future roadmap, we spoke to **R Sarvesh**, who shared insights into the company's comeback strategy, infrastructure ambitions, and the future of electric intercity mobility in India.

KPN Travels took the bold decision to completely phase out diesel operations and rebuild the company around electric mobility. What led to this strategic reset, and why did electric buses emerge as the future for KPN Travels?

Post-pandemic, we reached a point where we had to fundamentally rethink the future of the business. The economics of diesel operations were no longer sustainable at the scale KPN Travels is known for.

For us, restarting operations in a smaller way was never the vision. KPN Travels was built on scale, network strength, and operational consistency across South India. If we were to make a comeback, it had to be at that same level once again.

That is where electric mobility changed the equation entirely. While the initial investment is undoubtedly high, we saw a far stronger long-term business case compared to diesel. We saw an opportunity not just to restart operations, but to rebuild the company for the future.

So we made a conscious decision to pause, restructure the business, and prepare for a new phase of growth centered around electric mobility. In many ways, this is not just a fleet transition for us. It is the rebirth of KPN Travels in a completely new era of intercity transportation.



What is your assessment of India's current electric bus infrastructure ecosystem? Do you believe the industry is truly prepared for large-scale intercity electric bus operations?

From an intercity private operations perspective, I believe the industry still has a long way to go. Today, charging infrastructure for sustainable large-scale intercity EV operations remains very limited, especially in South India.

For operators looking to scale meaningfully, developing their own charging infrastructure is becoming absolutely essential, at least across major start and destination points. For high-frequency intercity operations, depending entirely on third-party charging networks may not be sustainable in the long run.

That is precisely why KPN Travels decided to invest in its own charging ecosystem from the very beginning. We believe operators will eventually need dedicated charging hubs to ensure operational flexibility, reliability, and better scheduling control.

At the same time, infrastructure development remains highly capital intensive and involves multiple regulatory and operational challenges. Stronger policy support, faster approvals, and better incentives for private operators and Charge Point Operators will play a critical role in accelerating large-scale EV adoption in the intercity segment.

The private sector's participation in electric bus adoption still remains relatively limited. In your view, what is preventing more operators from making the transition towards electric mobility?

Apart from the upfront cost, I think one of the biggest concerns for operators today is uncertainty. Unlike diesel buses, electric buses still do not have an established resale market. Naturally, that makes many operators cautious about making large investments.

Infrastructure is another major challenge. Large-scale intercity electric operations require dedicated charging ecosystems, and setting up that infrastructure involves substantial investment. At present, only a few operators have the financial strength to build their own charging networks and manage them efficiently.

Electric buses are significantly more expensive than conventional diesel buses, but financing support is still limited. Many operators struggle to secure funding through nationalized banks and are often forced to depend on NBFCs with higher interest rates.

Finally, product availability itself remains limited, particularly in the premium 13.5-meter segment. Operators still do not have enough proven long-distance electric coach platforms to choose from.





What were the key factors that influenced KPN Travels' decision to choose the Veera Vahana MahaSamrat 13.5 platform for its electric operations?

One of the biggest factors behind this decision was our long-standing relationship with Veera Vahana. We have known Mr. Srinivas Reddy and the team for many years, and that level of trust and understanding played an important role during our evaluation process.

But beyond the relationship, the product itself stood out strongly. When we explored the market, there were very limited options available in the 13.5-meter segment, especially with hybrid seating and sleeper configurations suited for long-distance intercity operations. Veera already had proven products in operation with very high running kilometres, which gave us additional confidence from a reliability standpoint.

Another important factor was the battery ecosystem. Exponent Energy, which supplies the battery technology for the MahaSamrat platform, offered a stronger warranty structure that aligned well with our long-term operational requirements.

Looking back now, we believe it was the right decision. Even today, there are very few proven electric coach platforms in the 13.5-meter premium intercity segment operating at this level of scale and performance.





Aluminium Price Surge

Adds Fresh Pressure On India's Bus Industry

By Mohit Garg, CEO & Managing Director, INALCO

Global aluminium prices have witnessed a sharp rise since February 2026, with the London Metal Exchange (LME) aluminium price crossing USD 3,600 per tonne and touching multi-year highs. Tight global inventories, elevated energy costs, geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, and production constraints across major aluminium-producing regions have all contributed to the rally. At the same time, sustained demand from infrastructure, transportation, renewable energy and automotive sectors continues to keep prices elevated.

While aluminium price movements are often viewed through a broader industrial lens, the impact on the bus and coach industry is becoming increasingly significant.

Aluminium today plays an important role in modern bus body construction due to its lightweight properties, corrosion resistance and long operational life. Across several premium and long-distance applications, manufacturers continue to increase the use of aluminium to improve efficiency, durability and overall vehicle performance.

However, the recent surge in aluminium prices is beginning to place additional pressure on bus body manufacturers and component suppliers. Since aluminium procurement is directly linked to global commodity pricing, sudden fluctuations make it difficult for manufacturers to maintain stable quotations, plan inventories efficiently and execute long-term contracts with predictability.

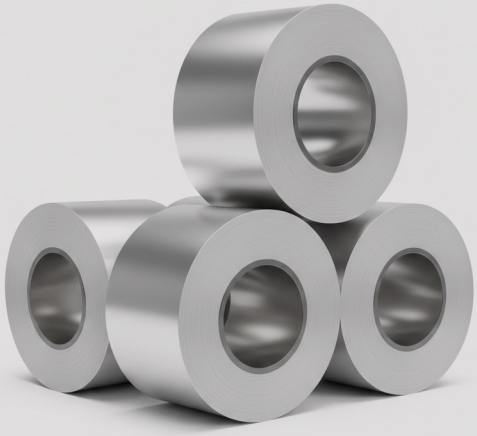
For body builders and OEM suppliers operating in an already cost-sensitive market, the challenge extends beyond raw material procurement alone. Frequent fluctuations



in aluminium prices are creating additional pressure on manufacturers, especially in projects where quotations are finalised months in advance. In several cases, raw material prices continue to rise after pricing commitments have already been made, making cost recovery increasingly difficult and putting pressure on margins and working capital.

The impact could eventually trickle down across the value chain. If elevated raw material prices continue for a prolonged period, manufacturers may be forced to reassess product pricing, particularly in premium coach and fully built bus segments where aluminium usage is relatively higher.

Operators, meanwhile, are already dealing with rising operational expenses, particularly





after the recent sharp increase in diesel prices. Any sustained increase in vehicle acquisition costs could influence replacement cycles, fleet expansion decisions and overall market dynamics.

For now, the industry appears to be in a wait-and-watch phase. Whether aluminium prices stabilise over the coming months or continue their upward trajectory remains uncertain. Much will depend on global energy markets, geopolitical developments and production recovery across key regions.

What remains clear, however, is that material economics are becoming an increasingly important part of the larger conversation around the future of bus manufacturing.



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.



Bus Operators Walk a Tightrope as Diesel Prices Continue to Rise

By Violina Pegu

Escalating tensions in the Middle East have pushed global crude oil prices higher, triggering a sharp increase in domestic diesel prices. Over the past few weeks alone, diesel prices have risen by nearly Rs. 7.5 per litre, adding fresh pressure on an industry where fuel accounts for nearly half of operating costs.

For India's intercity bus operators, the impact is immediate. Every increase at the fuel pump directly affects route economics, fleet profitability, and operating margins. While passengers may not yet be feeling the effect through higher ticket prices, operators say they are already absorbing a significant financial burden.

As geopolitical uncertainty continues to influence global energy markets, bus operators across India are closely watching how the situation unfolds.

In an industry already grappling with rising input costs and intense competition, the latest diesel hike has reignited concerns around route viability, capacity utilisation, and the ability to sustain profitability in the months ahead.

When Every Litre Counts

A Rs. 7.5 per litre increase in diesel prices becomes substantial when applied across large fleets operating hundreds of kilometres every day.

"Diesel is the single largest operating cost for intercity bus operators, accounting for roughly 50-55% of total operating expenses. Any sudden increase has an immediate and significant impact on route economics," says **Abhijeet Konduskar, CEO, Konduskar Travels**.

Industry estimates suggest that the recent diesel hike has increased operating costs by roughly Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.5 per kilometre per bus.

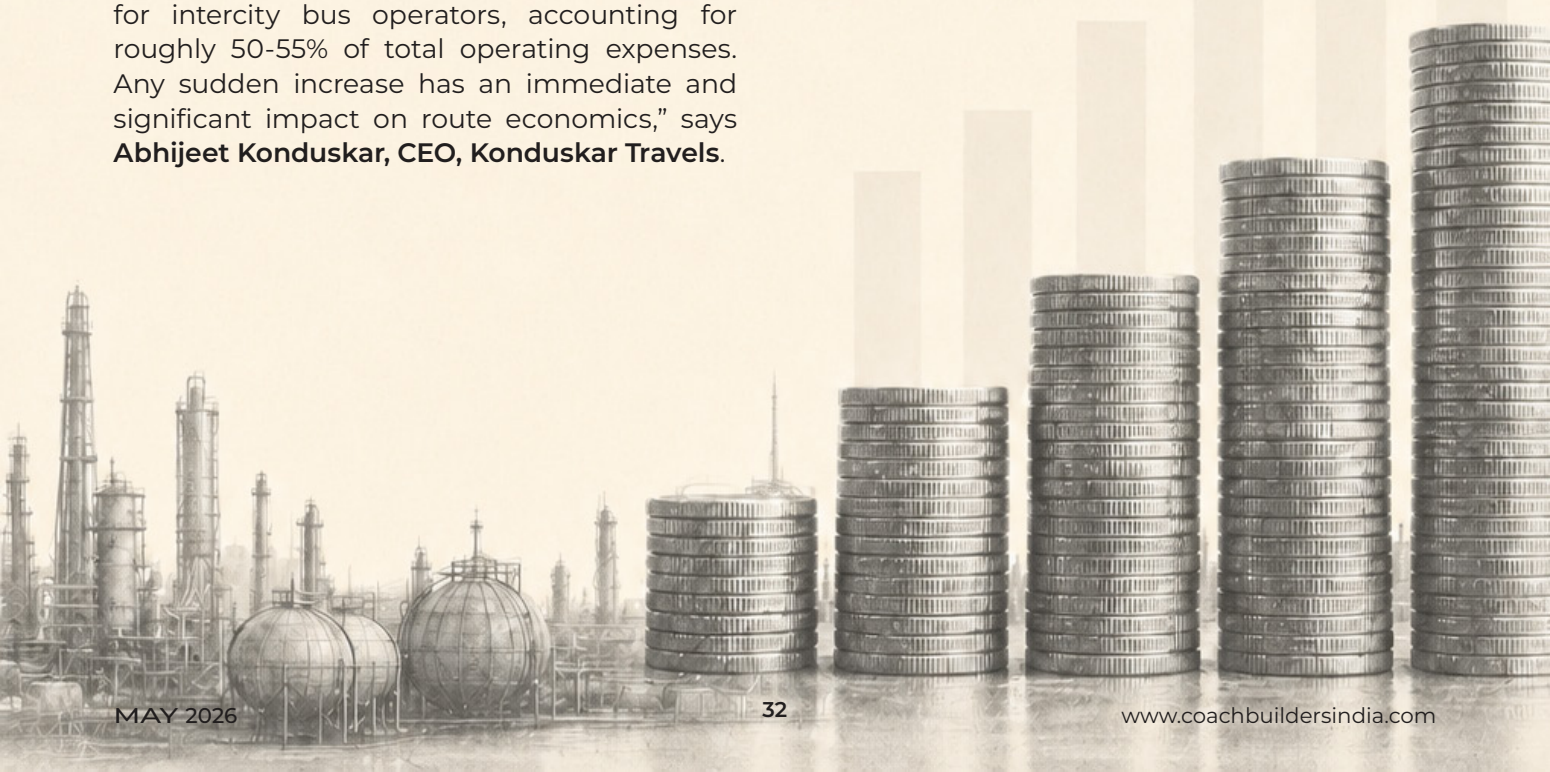
"Our average fuel efficiency typically ranges between 3.2 to 3.6 km per litre. With diesel prices increasing by nearly Rs. 7.5 per litre recently, the direct fuel-related operating cost has increased by approximately Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.5 per kilometre per bus," says **Dharmasen Patil, Director, Sangitam Travels Pvt. Ltd**.

At scale, the impact compounds quickly. Even a marginal increase in per-kilometre cost translates into a significant rise in operating expenditure when multiplied across multiple vehicles and long operating cycles.



"With diesel prices increasing by nearly Rs. 7.5 per litre recently, the direct fuel-related operating cost has increased by approximately Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.5 per kilometre per bus."

Dharmasen Patil
Director
Sangitam Travels Pvt. Ltd.



Beyond Diesel: The Hidden Cost Load

While diesel remains the primary driver of cost pressure, operators say the burden is being amplified by increases across other essential consumables like DPF, engine oil and spare parts.

Sunny Tomar, Managing Director, Sagar Tours & Travels, told us, "AdBlue rose from about Rs. 1,280 to Rs. 1,750 per 20-litre bucket, while engine oil prices have increased from about Rs. 280 to Rs. 350 per litre."

Taken together, operators estimate that overall operating costs have increased by roughly Rs. 2.5–2.75 per kilometre compared to just a few months ago.

The pressure extends far beyond day-to-day operating costs. For many operators, shrinking margins are beginning to affect broader business stability, forcing companies to closely reassess cash flow management, maintenance planning, and future investments.

"Higher fuel bills squeeze margins, reduce cash flow available for maintenance and driver wages, and make it harder to invest in upgrades or expansion. In short, it weakens the business economics and raises the risk profile of our entire operations," says Tomar.



> **"Higher fuel costs are squeezing margins, limiting cash flow for maintenance and wages, and reducing the ability to invest in fleet upgrades, expansion, and long-term operational stability."**



Sunny Tomar
Managing Director
Sagar Tours & Travels

Holding Back the Fare Hike

Despite rising costs, many operators have so far refrained from increasing fares, choosing instead to absorb the impact in order to avoid immediate price shocks for passengers. According to Konduskar, this approach is closely tied to seasonal demand cycles.

"At present, many operators, including us, are absorbing these increases to avoid passing immediate cost shocks to passengers. However, this approach is only manageable for a limited period," he says.

"The real pressure will begin after June 10, when the peak summer travel season ends and the industry enters the lean monsoon period," he adds.

> **"Diesel accounts for nearly 50–55% of total operating expenses for intercity bus operators, making any sudden increase in fuel prices an immediate challenge for route economics and profitability."**



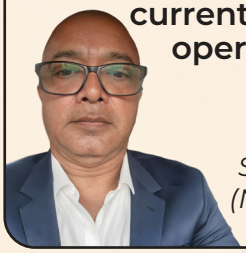
Abhijeet Konduskar
CEO
Konduskar Travels

Manjunatha T N, Co-founder, EvoBus, agrees that the industry's flexibility remains limited. "Absorbing cost increases indefinitely is not sustainable. In routes where excess capacity exists, operators may continue doing so for some time to maintain occupancy and market presence, but this cannot continue indefinitely," he says.

In several states, operators point out that fare structures are regulated and fixed by State Transport Authorities, limiting their ability to respond to rising operating costs.

"We have a fixed per-kilometre fare determined by the State Transport Authority. We already operate on thin margins compared to other parts of India. The situation has now become even more challenging, but we cannot revise fares even if we want to," says **Anjit Bora, MD, Royal Tours and Travels and Senior Vice President (North-East), BOCI**.

While operators remain cautious about passing on the impact to passengers, many believe that fare revisions may eventually become unavoidable if current cost pressures persist.

> **"Our fares are fixed by the State Transport Authority, leaving little flexibility to respond to rising costs. We already operate on thin margins, and the current situation has made operations even more challenging."**
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> 
>
> **Anjit Bora**
> *Sr. Vice President (North-East)*, BOCI

> **"Absorbing cost increases indefinitely is not sustainable. In routes where excess capacity exists, operators may continue doing so for some time to maintain occupancy and market presence, but this cannot continue indefinitely."**
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> **Manjunatha T N**
> *Co-founder*
> EvoBus

What Lies Ahead for Operators

Taken together, these perspectives point to an industry facing pressures that extend well beyond fuel alone. Rising diesel prices have added to an already growing list of costs, including AdBlue, lubricants, parts, and maintenance, at a time when operators have limited flexibility to increase fares.

The pressure is already influencing how operators think about pricing, fleet utilisation, and route economics.

For now, most operators continue to absorb the additional burden. But industry leaders acknowledge that this approach may become increasingly difficult if fuel prices continue to surge and demand weakens in the months ahead.

The immediate challenge for operators is managing costs without compromising service quality or passenger affordability. But the broader question is how the industry adapts to an environment where fuel costs can change rapidly in response to events far beyond India's borders.





Busworld India Conclave 2026 Reflects A Bus Industry Entering Its Next Phase

By Violina Pegu

After an eight-year gap, Busworld returned to India at a time when the country's bus and coach industry is undergoing one of its biggest transformations in decades.

Held at the Yashobhoomi Convention Centre in New Delhi, the Busworld India Conclave 2026 brought together OEMs, body builders, operators, suppliers, policymakers and technology companies for a day of discussions that reflected both the optimism and growing urgency surrounding the sector.

What emerged through the day was a clear message: India's bus industry is no longer debating whether change will happen. It is now grappling with how fast it can execute that change. Electrification, safety, infrastructure, software, and passenger experience are now converging into a single industry-wide transformation.







The opening sessions set the tone for the event, with Vincent Dewaele emphasising that India was too important a market to remain absent from the Busworld calendar. He recalled how a delegation of nearly 100 Indian participants at Busworld Europe had strongly encouraged him to bring the event back to India.

JBM Electric Vehicles Chairman **Nishant Arya** called the current moment a "paradigm shift" for the bus industry, arguing that India now has the opportunity to evolve ***"from Make in India to Making for the World."***

ZF Group India President **Akash Passey** added that the next decade of mobility in India will be defined by buses, reflecting the growing belief that public transport is set to play a far bigger role in the country's mobility ecosystem.

Electrification dominated discussions across sessions, but the tone was noticeably more practical than aspirational. Industry leaders openly acknowledged that the transition to electric mobility has moved beyond pilot projects and entered a phase where infrastructure, financing, and operational readiness will determine success.

The growing gap between EV announcements and actual on-road execution was also highlighted. Akash Passey pointed out that although more than 63,000 electric buses have been ordered in India, only around 16,000 are currently operational. Charging infrastructure, grid readiness, financing, and depot planning emerged as recurring concerns throughout the day.

Operator voices added another layer of realism to the conversations. Purple Mobility Solutions CMD Prasanna Patwardhan noted that nearly 92% of India's buses are privately operated, yet many operators still lack the land, electrical infrastructure and financing support required for EV adoption. He also stressed that electrification cannot succeed without deeper participation from private operators and stronger infrastructure planning.











Talking To Next-Gen OEMs

At the same time, the conclave revealed how quickly the industry's competitive landscape is changing. Leaders reflected the emergence of a new breed of companies focusing on unserved verticals such as intercity electric coaches and compact urban buses. Several speakers argued that the traditional differentiator is no longer only hardware, but increasingly software, telematics and service ecosystems.

Data emerged as one of the conclave's strongest underlying themes. OEMs and operators discussed predictive maintenance, real-time fleet intelligence, charging analytics and integrated digital systems as key enablers for the next phase of growth. Some companies revealed they are already monitoring hundreds of real-time vehicle parameters to improve uptime and operational reliability. The growing demand for common telematics standards and open data frameworks further reflected how software is becoming central to bus operations

Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) and integrated traffic management systems were also key talking points, indicating that India's bus sector is beginning to view digital infrastructure as seriously as mechanical engineering.

Bus Operators: Movers And Shakers

At the same time, the conclave highlighted how passenger expectations are rapidly evolving. Operators repeatedly stressed that Indian bus travel can no longer compete purely on affordability. Safety, predictability, cleanliness and premium experience are becoming equally critical.

Manoj Agarwala of redBus pointed toward the growing participation of women travellers in intercity mobility and the increasing demand for hospitality-style travel experiences. Airport-grade bus terminals, onboard washrooms, improved interiors and technology-enabled customer engagement were highlighted as emerging differentiators.







Building India's Next-Gen Coaches

The session deliberated how the industry must move beyond fragmented, low-volume manufacturing and transition toward a more standardised, scalable ecosystem capable of producing 5,000–10,000 coaches per OEM annually.

The discussions also highlighted the urgent need for India-specific EV coach platforms designed for local operating conditions, road infrastructure and climate realities. Participants pointed to charging infrastructure gaps, shortage of EV-trained technicians, thermal management challenges and battery cooling systems as key hurdles for long-distance electric coach adoption. Speakers emphasised that the next phase of India's coach industry will depend not only on electrification, but also on stronger standardisation, engineering-led manufacturing and ecosystem-level readiness.

Safety, Standards & Skills

Safety, meanwhile, remained one of the conclave's most serious concerns. Recent bus fire incidents and the tightening AIS-153 framework dominated several discussions, signalling a broader industry shift from fabrication-led manufacturing toward engineering-led, compliance-driven vehicle development.







"There is no future for petrol and diesel vehicles. Hydrogen is the fuel of the future."

Localising The Ev Supply Chain

Finally, the focus shifted to localising the EV supply chain, highlighted the growing importance of building a resilient and digitally connected ecosystem for electric buses in India. Speakers stressed that while the industry has made significant progress in vehicles and charging hardware, the next phase of growth will depend heavily on interoperability, common digital standards and stronger domestic manufacturing capabilities.

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari delivered perhaps the conclave's strongest message when he declared that there is "no future for diesel and petrol vehicles," while simultaneously pushing the industry toward higher safety standards, cleaner fuels and accessible mobility solutions.

Overall, Busworld India Conclave 2026 reflected an industry that is becoming more ambitious, more technology-driven and significantly more self-aware. The conversations were no longer centred only around future opportunities, but around the difficult realities of scaling infrastructure, improving safety, modernising operations and building globally competitive mobility solutions.

For an industry that moves nearly 40 crore passengers every day, the message from the conclave was unmistakable - India's bus sector is no longer preparing for transformation. It is already in the middle of it.





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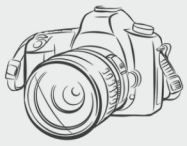
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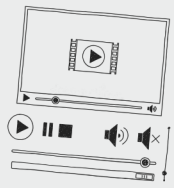
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