

## Doorstep School Bus Project

Report by: Guruswamy Kumaraswamy (GURUSWAMYunderscoreKatHOTMAILdotCOM)

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Last report (April 2013) by V. Premnath

This was a scheduled visit. I sent email to Mrs. Paranjpe, who put me in touch with the Associate Director of Doorsteps (DSS), Mr. Ravindra Mahamuni and I met with him at the Pune University Circle at 9am. The drive to Kondhwa took a little over 45 minutes in the morning traffic. The background to the Doorstep School Bus project has already been described in previous reports. Briefly, the RTE makes education a right for all children until the age of 14. While schooling at local municipal schools is free, kids of construction site workers are unable to access local schools since (a) they often have to stay at home to take care of younger siblings and (b) they don't have an easy way to get to/from the local school. Often these are kids of migrant workers and do not speak the local language – this is an added barrier to going to school. Therefore, Doorstep runs crèches for kids under 3, balwadis for kids between 3 and 6 years and gets older kids enrolled in local schools. They also run this school bus service to pick up/drop off kids from their homes to the local school.

The DSS structure has a crèche/balwadi at a construction site that is managed by 2 teachers; a supervisor for 5 locations and a coordinator for 10 locations. The supervisor supports the teachers and maintains records. Thus, each coordinator is associated with 2 supervisors and about 20-25 teachers. Between classes, some of the teachers are given the job of travelling with the kids in the bus. At any time, there are always two teachers in addition to the driver in the bus.

We met the bus at Kondhwa at about 10am, and were accompanied by a supervisor (Sunita) and two teachers (Neeta and didn't get the name of the other teacher). Sunita has spent about 9 years with DSS, and rose from teacher at Karve Road to a supervisor. She is familiar with several DSS sites and has worked at Karve Nagar, Pashan and now at Kondhwa. The teachers are local, from the Kondhwa region. The bus driver, Navnath Bhosale, reports at 7am and has a 12 hour duty. In that time, he drives about 80km on average per day, according to Mr. Mahamuni. The schools/bus service works six days a week (except on Sunday). The bus is well maintained and runs well. The seat cushions are fraying, but this is probably normal for a bus that transports so many school kids every day. I believe that all these school buses are fitted with a speed regulator so that only a certain maximum speed can be attained. Mr. Bhosale drove very carefully in the hour or so that I travelled with him and was also very mindful of making sure that the doors were shut when the bus was moving and also making sure that the kids got off/on safely. The schedule of the bus, as given to me by Mr. Mahamuni is as follows:

Time	Rout
From 6.45 a.m to 8.00 a.m	Leaves to drop children to Morning school. From R Euforia → Soba Ivory (15) → Vivian (10) → Mahavir (8) → Marval (8) → PMC School. → R Euphoria (Total 10 k.m approx.)
8 a.m. to 10 a.m	At R Euphoria ( free time )
From 10 a.m. to 11.15 a.m	Punyadham (5) →Kulotsav (7) → Potraj Vasti (8) → Tilekar Nagar (6) → Shivparvati Garden (20) → Pmc school (Total 10 k.m approx)
11.15 to 12.00 noon	Siddharth Nagar Chandan Garden (8) → K Raheja (2) → 9 Hills (10) → Balaji (10) →Siddharth Nagar PMC school → Somji School (Total 24 k.m.)
12.15 a.m.	





We followed a typical routine once we got onto the bus. We did two circuits, picking up kids from one part of Kondhwa and dropping them to the local school and then doing the same in another region.

At first, we went pick up kids from a local “labour camp” for a construction site. There were about 4-5 kids waiting for the bus and they got on. There were no parents. The parents had left for work in the morning and the kids stay by themselves (there are neighbours, etc) and then get on the bus. Typically, the kids eat at home and then go to school where they get a mid day meal. The school runs from 12-5 pm. Since the bus has to make multiple trips to ferry kids to school and, since all these municipal schools run during the same hours, some of these kids are dropped off to school very early. For example, these kids, in the first circuit got to school around 10.30 (viz. 90 minutes before the start of school). However, there were several other kids there and these kids stay inside the school and play until school starts. I noted that they were by themselves at home (viz. without their parents) and here, they were in school with their friends (for about 90 min before the start of school). I spoke to two of the kids: Sonu Kumari and Rekha Kumari. Sonu and Rekha are originally from Bihar and don’t speak any Marathi. They were relatively new to the bus route and were shy – however, Sonu told me that she was learning the alphabet (ka, kha) in school.





See video 1: Riding the school bus

There were some other amusing instances. When we stopped at the next construction site to pick up some other kids, one of the parents showed up and complained that one of the other kids got into a fight with his and his kid was refusing to go to school today. The teachers intervened and spoke to the kids (not very different from what one would see anywhere else with kids 😊). At another site, some of the kids said that they were playing and refused to come. The teachers had to get out of the bus and convince them to go to school. The teachers told me that, for the most part, the kids are ready and waiting for the bus (See video 2: Getting on the bus). However, in some instances, they have to go to the kids and convince them to go to school. I saw a few other instances where the teachers had to go fetch the kids. In the first circuit, there were 12 kids who were dropped off. The bus then rounded up other kids for the same school. Here, the bus got a lot more full, with about 35 kids. I spoke to Neelam, another kid who went to the same school and went to the sixth grade. Neelam's family used to live in Pimpri, but have moved to Kondhwa since they got some land here. Neelam is originally from Bijapur in Karnataka and speaks Kannada at home. However, she was fluent in Marathi. Neelam saw me writing in my pad and could read her name (in English, despite my terrible hand writing). With so many kids in the bus, the teachers did a roll call (See video 3). The teacher maintains a log book with the names of all the kids, according to the route. They check numbers when the kids get on, in the morning and crosscheck in the evening, when they drop the kids back home.



I noticed that several of the school kids had old, tattered uniforms and several were barefoot. I was told that the Pune Municipal Corporation provides the kids with uniforms and shoes but that the kids hadn't received these for the year as yet. They were likely to receive them next week. Some of the parents did not even know where the school was. Two of the mothers got on, when we did the second circuit, saying that they needed to go to the school to sign the register. The bus driver tried telling them that he needed to pick up several kids and that there was a short cut that they could take to walk to the school – however, they insisted on riding the bus since they said that they had no idea where the school was. They said that once they saw the school and signed the register, they would walk back home. For the second circuit too, the bus got very crowded with about 45-50 kids (plus the two teachers, the supervisor, a coordinator who had got on along the way, Mr. Mahamuni and me). The kids sat 3-4 to a seat and we got to the school. This particular school was a 10 min walk from the stop (the bus couldn't go any further) and the teachers got off with the kids and took them to the school before returning.



Overall impressions: This is run as intended. I think that getting kids to/from school safely is something every parent worries about, independent of where they are and what they earn. Therefore, I think DSS is doing a wonderful job in facilitating this.

Mr. Mahamuni did not know about the budget for this project and details of the financials. He referred me to their office – however, since I had not scheduled to go there (and since the office was in Aundh, about 45 min from Kondhwa), I decided not to look at their records. Overall, the bus service appears to be run well, by a cheerful set of teachers and driver. Therefore, I think that this project is doing well and is running as they had proposed.