

MOBILITY: UNLOCKING THE WHEELS OF PROGRESS

DIMO's Gahanath Pandithage on harnessing mobility for inclusive growth



core, is about enabling the seamless, safe, and sustainable movement of people and goods, minimising time, energy, and environmental impact while maximising economic and social productivity," says Pandithage.

In developed economies, this often involves predictive traffic systems, low-emission transport, and AI-enabled logistics. In developing settings, it involves basic interventions that widen access to transport and integrate low-cost technologies that match population needs.

"Developed nations lead with innovation to sustain growth; developing nations lead with inclusion to unlock it," Pandithage adds.

As a company active in the automotive, rail, marine, and infrastructure sectors, DIMO designs tailored mobility solutions across these diverse settings.

Technology plays a role in improving mobility, but Pandithage cautions

against focusing solely on it. "The global demand for more efficient mobility solutions goes beyond just technology, driven by crucial policy, social, and economic factors," he explains. Governments are imposing climate-related regulations, redesigning urban infrastructure, and offering fiscal incentives that alter consumer choices. These efforts intersect with trends such as urbanisation and increasing public awareness of transport equity.

Social changes are characterised by a growing preference for shared mobility and a need to address transportation inequities in cities.

Economic pressures, particularly congestion-related productivity losses and fossil fuel dependency have further accelerated interest in alternative transportation systems. "The huge cost of congestion provides a strong incentive for change," Pandithage observes.

Sri Lanka continues to face persistent mobility challenges. The nation loses over Rs500 billion annually due to traffic-related inefficiencies and lost productivity. Road networks are outdated, and transport modes remain disconnected, resulting in inefficient and costly commutes.

Pandithage argues that fragmented systems cannot be fixed through isolated projects. "The real challenge lies in the absence of an integrated, future-focused mobility strategy," he says. He calls for a coordinated effort that modernises infrastructure, introduces digital management tools, and creates inclusive systems that meet both rural and urban needs. DIMO, he notes, applies this thinking across its mobility-related operations.

Responsibility for improving mobility in a nation is shared among various stakeholders. Pandithage outlines the respective roles clearly. "The govern-

ment must take the lead in creating an enabling environment by strengthening regulatory frameworks, modernising infrastructure, and ensuring transparent, performance-driven public-private partnerships." These partnerships must be structured to attract long-term private investment without compromising public oversight or quality.

He adds that "the private sector, in turn, must bring innovation, speed, and technological advancement, ranging from intelligent traffic systems and predictive vehicle maintenance platforms to AI-enabled route optimisation and user-centric mobility apps." Such tools can address inefficiencies in how transport networks operate and enhance the user experience across regions with varying infrastructure maturity.

Electric vehicle (EV) adoption in Sri Lanka has begun but remains in its early stages of development. "While interest is increasing, widespread private EV ownership is still limited," Pandithage states. He identifies the key drivers as government climate commitments, reduced reliance on imported oil, lower operating costs over time, and growing environmental awareness. However, adoption has been slowed by multiple constraints.

"The key barriers would be high upfront EV costs, inadequate charging infrastructure (especially outside main cities), potential grid strain from unmanaged charging, and past fluctuating import policies," he says. For progress to occur, Pandithage suggests a focus on long-term stability. "Accelerating EV adoption requires consistent, long-term government policies, including stable tax incentives and clear regulatory frameworks."

The charging infrastructure must expand and align with renewable energy goals. Consumer education about total ownership costs and environmental impact will also play a role in shifting perceptions and usage. Without these support mechanisms, EV adoption is unlikely to move beyond early interest.

Public transport reform is another critical area. "To transform Sri Lanka's public transport into a viable and efficient mobility option, a national transport policy must prioritise safety, reliability, and user-centric design," Pandithage says. He highlights the need to modernise the fleet with vehicles that meet quality standards while providing adequate comfort and accessibility.

System integration is also necessary. "Integrated, multimodal connectivity like linking buses, rail, and last-mile services, combined with increased service frequency and real-time tracking, can rebuild public trust in mass transit," he explains. Regulation, including driver training and service monitoring, will be necessary to maintain standards and accountability.

Looking ahead, Pandithage has his eyes far down the road, beyond the horizon. "My vision for efficient mobility in Sri Lanka is an integrated, green public transport system and shared solutions

that will significantly reduce dependency on private vehicles." The emphasis is on reducing emissions, improving convenience, affordability, safety and aligning transport options with innovation.

He also identifies key performance indicators. These include mode share by walking, cycling, and public transport, average commute times, EV penetration rates, availability of charging stations, air quality metrics, and emissions from the transport sector. "Availability and gathering of data will be a challenge," he notes, acknowledging the practical limitations of current monitoring capacity, but improving them will be critical for meaningful development.

For DIMO, mobility is part of a broader national challenge to improve access, productivity, and sustainability. And as Pandithage points out, mobility is also an integral part of its corporate purpose: fuelling the dreams and aspirations of the communities it serves. ●

Gahanath Pandithage
Group Managing Director/ CEO of DIMO