

Small buses can fill public transport gaps on narrow and medium demand routes; 96 per cent of surveyed riders support microbus services: CEEW study

- 63.7 per cent of all microbus users shifted from auto- and e-rickshaws, and 14 per cent from two-wheelers
- Lower fares (78 per cent), air conditioning and comfort (74 per cent), and safety (55 per cent) were the main attractions for minibuses
- Vehicle class suited the stage-carriage operation, especially on narrow corridors, but current vehicle design needs modifications.
- A 45-day microbus pilot designed and conducted by CEEW in Raipur, along with the support from Government of Chhattisgarh and under guidance from the MoHUA

New Delhi, 23 October 2026: Small buses, minibuses, can fill public transport gaps in Indian cities' narrow, crowded roads, and especially in small and medium towns. Riders surveyed under the Raipur microbus pilot, 96 per cent backed microbus services for their daily commute. These key insights come from a new study '**Are Minibuses Suitable as Public Transport Vehicles?**' by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), launched today at the 19th Urban Mobility India (UMI) Conference. CEEW ran a 45-day pilot project of minibuses in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, in collaboration with the Government of Chhattisgarh and under the guidance of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

During the pilot in June–July 2026, eight air-conditioned vehicles, with seating capacities ranging from 17 to 22, operated daily from 06:00 to 19:00 across two key routes: Raipur Junction–ISBT Bhatagaon and Raipur Junction–Tatibandh. As demand grew rapidly, the pilot recorded 18,682 total boardings, averaging 480 riders daily and a single-day maximum of 722.

Onboard surveys of 500 passengers showed that just over half (53 per cent) were workers, who commuted around four times a week and travelled 4–12 kilometres per trip. Overall, 63.7 per cent of riders shifted from auto- and e-rickshaws, and 14 per cent switched from two-wheelers. They were drawn by lower fares (78 per cent), air conditioning and comfort (74 per cent), and better safety (55 per cent). After switching to minibuses, their average individual travel spending fell from 6.9 per cent to 3.1 per cent of household income. For passengers from the lowest-income households, it fell from 13.9 per cent to 6.6 per cent. The vehicle size and class were found suitable for stage-carriage operations. However, users and crew recommended design changes to the existing models.

Himani Jain, Fellow, CEEW: *"Public transport share must increase across Indian cities to address growing congestion, vehicular air pollution and GHG. Small buses are inconspicuously missing in Indian markets. CEEW analysis shows that minibuses could be a viable public transit option, in addition to standard buses. It's critical to choose the right bus-size to match demand and road width. Our pilot finds that minibuses can offer affordable and reliable service on narrow roads of old city areas. It could also be useful as feeder service to Metro, on routes in small and medium cities and its peri-urban connectivity."*

By 2031, India is projected to have about 4,200 statutory cities, and the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme covers 169 large cities. Nearly 95% of cities in India are small and medium - with populations between 20,000 and 300,000. Many of these cities do not have enough passengers for a big bus, and their roads are too narrow for standard buses. CEEW's another study '**Minibuses have Mega Demand in Indian Cities: Rethinking Public Transport for all 4,200 Cities**' estimates that Indian cities will need about 6.5 lakh minibuses by 2031, and 77 per cent of these will be needed in small and medium towns.

Recommendations

1. **Match bus size to the road.** At the passenger demand levels observed in the pilot, a 17-seat vehicle operates at 80 per cent seat occupancy, compared with just 42 per cent for a nine-metre bus, making smaller vehicles significantly more efficient for narrow corridors. Small and medium cities like Raipur should map demand and road widths across arterial, sub-arterial, and collector roads, and assign vehicle sizes accordingly.
2. **Test more models and fuels.** The pilot tested only two diesel models. Also electric microbus variants are not available commercially. Several such trials across cities, including technology variants, would show what works and what it costs to operate microbuses as transit services.
3. **Create standards and schemes.** Cities need Vehicle standards and specifications, SOPs, model contracts, based on pilots like Raipur and a national Scheme like PM-eBus Sewa to scale adoption of microbuses as transit vehicles.

Read the full study, **Are Microbuses Suitable as Public Transport Vehicles? Pilot on Narrow, Medium-Demand Routes in Raipur, Chhattisgarh** by Anannya Jha and Himani Jain, [here](#).

For media queries and interviews, contact:

Rishi Singh - +91 9313129941, rishi.singh@ceew.in, Tulshe Agnihotri - tulshe.agnihotri@ceew.in

About CEEW

The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) — a homegrown institution with headquarters in New Delhi — is among the world's leading climate think tanks. The Council is also often ranked among the world's best-managed and independent think tanks. It uses data, integrated analysis, and strategic outreach to explain — and change — the use, reuse, and misuse of resources. It prides itself on the independence of its high-quality research and strives to impact sustainable development at scale in India and the Global South. In over 15 years of operation, CEEW has impacted over 400 million lives and engaged with over 20 state governments. Follow us on X (formerly Twitter) @CEEWIndia or on LinkedIn for the latest updates.