

NEGOTIATING NAVIGATIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BARGAINING PRACTICES IN A COMPONENT CITY'S FARE SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Fare bargaining is a common practice in Tuguegarao City's public transportation system, where commuters negotiate with tricycle drivers before each trip. Despite the restrictions imposed by Tuguegarao City Ordinance No. 50-09-2022, which limits fare bargaining to hours between 9 PM to 5 AM and sets incremental increases for excess distance traveled, these provisions are often disregarded. This study investigated the fare bargaining practices and their impact on commuters and tricycle drivers. Using a qualitative approach with informal interviews, the study identified four major themes: a Flexible Fare System, the Initiation of the Bargaining Process, the Attitudes of Drivers and Commuters towards Bargaining, and the Perceived Fairness of the Fare system. The findings revealed that fare bargaining occurs beyond the allowed time, highlighting issues of fairness and potential exploitation. To enhance the public transportation system's efficiency, the study proposes policy interventions, including a dynamic fare system that considers distance, weather, and other factors. Additionally, the researchers suggest creating rules of conduct for driver-commuter interactions and reevaluating the fare system to ensure it meets the needs of all stakeholders. These measures aim to address the challenges and issues associated with fare bargaining and promote a more equitable and efficient public transportation system in Tuguegarao City.

Keywords: bargaining practices, fare system, drivers, commuters, fairness

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public transportation offers commuters a more efficient and cost-effective way to reach their destination compared to using private vehicles, allowing for faster and more affordable travel, as stated by Narboneta & Teknomo (2016). Kenyon & Lyons (2003), as cited by Hrelja et al. (2019), stated that an efficient public transport system offers travelers short waiting times between departures, quick travel time, punctuality, and clear information. Meanwhile, the study of Marsikun et al. (2024) focused on understanding the factors that influence people's preferences for public transportation modes, particularly in relation to availability, cost, comfort, safety, and environmental concerns. Their findings underscore the significance of public transportation in modern urban environments, emphasizing the need for effective policies and strategies to ensure efficient and cost-effective public transportation systems that cater to the diverse needs of commuters. With the population of the Philippines booming, the latest available data from the Philippine Statistics Office (PSA) state that the country's population is projected to breach one hundred thirty million (130,000,000) by 2055. With so

many people coming and going, the need for an efficient transport system cannot be emphasized enough.

Linking the islands of the archipelago was traditionally done by boat, as stated by Boquet & Bouquet (2017). Today, ships are still used by millions of people to cross straits between the major islands since there are no bridges except for Leyte to Samar. The same author also stated that a good part of intercity travel is done with buses. At the local level, mobility is done with quintessential Philippine vehicles: the jeepney (sometimes transformed into a masterpiece of pop art), the trisikel, the pedicab, or the skates. According to Agustin et al. (2018), motorcycle-propelled tricycles, namely in the Philippines, are becoming widely accepted as a valid mode of public transportation in most places, as opposed to the usage of motorbikes for personal mobility. The 2023 annual report of the Land Transportation Office records almost 1.5 million registered tricycle units in the Philippines.

The primary mode of transportation in Tuguegarao City is the tricycle (Abana et al., 2020). City Ordinance No. 12-08-2021 recognizes it, quoting, "Tuguegarao City, being the regional center in region 2, has a growing economy; hence, there is also a tremendous increase in its daily populace, a consequence of which is the influx of motorcycles and other vehicles in the city." To firmly establish the crux of the study, the researchers gathered data directly from Tuguegarao City's designated office for such matters, the Tricycle Regulation Unit (TRU). Their general function is to take in, process, and review franchise requests and monitor and record traffic violations, complaints, and grievances brought to their office, as provided by City Ordinance No. 08-2013. By their tally, there are a total of seven thousand eight hundred thirty-two (7,832) active tricycle units operating. From that count, there are one thousand five hundred thirty-one (1,531) considered dormant or inactive.

The average number of complaints filed to them in a month is twenty (20). The TRU also conducts weekly field operations to catch deviants in the act. In April-May 2023, a record number of fifty (50) violators were caught in just half a day. Among the issues raised by commuters to the TRU are (a) overcharging, (b) behavior of drivers, and (c) honesty towards things left in their vehicles.

City Ordinance No. 50-09-2022 prescribes new fare rates to and from barangays to the Poblacion, where the regular fare rate is set at P18.00, which is lowered for students, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities, hovering around P15.00. The TRU noted that the fare may be adjusted by increments, especially with excess distance traveled. However, consumers and drivers may still need to haggle even with the existence of said fare system, as evidenced by overcharging highlighted in the section above.

Bargaining has been a phenomenon that has been known to man since time immemorial. Terwiesch et al. (2005) believed that the fixed-price format used by most manufacturers and modern retail stores has led to a near extinction of haggling in Western economies, as cited in Dawra et al. (2015). Generally, haggling is an important aspect of the social activity of buying and selling in which vendors and their prospective customers engage in different socio-pragmatic acts in the processes of negotiating and making compromises, using a language or different languages (Alo & Soneye, 2014, as cited in Ikegwonu & Ndibe, 2022).

As buyers and traders meet, they come up with their goals and, during the interactions, negotiate meaning based on the common ground they have about market interactions. Especially during rush hours, Filipinos are observed to bite even at exorbitant prices in exchange for the effort needed to haggle endlessly. As noted by Raquib and Islam (2018), despite the government's regulation of fixed fares for CNG auto-rickshaws in Bangladesh through meter readers, many drivers refuse to accept the metered fares. As a result, the passengers have to haggle for a mutual fare.

Bargaining behavior is a complex process that involves interpersonal, attitudinal, and economic factors, and negotiators tend to avoid all-out distributive tactics due to the mixed nature of bargaining, as stated in the theory of Peterson et al. (1977). According to Barnes (2011), consumers generally agree to contractual terms after having little to no say in the process, other than the simple decision of whether to purchase the goods or services from the company, and are bound by the terms dictated by the merchant. This is supported by the statements of Alderighi et al. (2022), that although a bad deal is typically perceived to be an unfair price, a good deal is not necessarily perceived to be the fairest price. Moreover, from a fairness perspective, the role of equity cannot be easily disregarded, as logic dictates that people generally do not want to feel that they are getting the short end of the stick or being disadvantaged, as averred by Wamsler et al. (2021).

In a news article from the Philippine News Agency (Fernandez, 2022), urging trike drivers in Koronadal City, General Santos City, to obey the implemented fare system, the drivers supported the decision, reasoning they have yet to recover from the effects of the pandemic in their operation. Reasons for the supposed increase in the fare were gas prices, prevailing cost of operation, and prices of spare parts, among others. This is supported by a news article published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer dated August 2022, which stated that a ride on a local trike cost between P80 and P100 per kilometer. In addition to overcharging, drivers haggle over the fare before accepting passengers for "longer" destinations. For a 3-kilometer trip, the agreed-upon fare can vary from P150 to P250. Up to 500 complaints were recorded in a single day at one of the city's malls, and the records were turned in to the local government.

According to Mohamad (n.d.) during his travels in the Philippines, "Be prepared to haggle before agreeing on the [fare] rate and don't be deterred by the driver's original asking price." He further noted, "Depending on your success at haggling, you may be able to get the price down to 1000 pesos, but transport rates depend very much on the weather. In the rainy season, roads are difficult to traverse, and prices can double".

On the other side of the spectrum, Saha (2016) states that conductors evaluate bargaining as pragmatically necessary and a morally justified action on their part. It is practically relevant on the grounds of their unstable financial condition. According to the same author, students are especially highlighted consequently, some conductors bargain with student passengers strenuously. Those who do not haggle with student commuters hold a relatively positive outlook towards the student entity. They believe that students are the future change makers of the country. Therefore, they deserve society's support to be self-dependent so as to take charge of their family and, in turn, of the society and the country. Supplementing that, "in reflecting on the reason behind such deceitful action, conductors highlight the difficult socio-economic reality and dishonesty of some travelers as their motivation."

This is supported by Raquib (2018), who indicates that commuters play a dominating role in haggling discourses, and it also shows the class conflict between the middle class and the working class. The study also identified that sometimes, the passengers do not have an alternative choice but to accept the drivers' proposed fare. The logic behind asking for higher fares on the part of the drivers is justified by factors such as price hikes of daily commodities and rise in renting the vehicle and/ or renting their own dwelling places.

Yet, these phenomena are not unique to the Philippines. In the study of Li and Pearce (2016), they documented scams in urban China, among which were scams generated by drivers around tourist attractions, including overpromising, overcharging, and forcing tourists into shopping locations. Similarly, in Lagos, Nigeria, a recommendation made by Osoja et al. (2019) was to have a stable charging system. To wit, they stated, "The tricycle operators do not maintain a stable charging system which sometimes gets the commuters stranded as the operators hike their fare due to a little noticeable surge which is prevalent during the peak period such as the evening time when the commuters are returning from work."

Hence, this study aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature and contribute to the discussion of bargaining, especially based on the Philippine context. Moreover, this study may offer valuable insights resulting in policy interventions and improve the overall quality of Tuguegarao City's fare system. By addressing these objectives, the research aims to provide a significant contribution to the academic discourse and practical application of bargaining in the public transportation sector. Finally, this study may add to fill gaps on discussions regarding fairness perceptions and social dynamics both in the Southeast Asian region and on a global scale.

2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to analyze the issues and challenges faced by drivers and commuters regarding the bargaining practices in Tuguegarao City and propose various policy interventions to promote a fairer, more efficient, and transparent public transportation system.

2.1 Significance of the Study

This research is significant in providing information and understanding of bargaining practices in the Tuguegarao City fare system. Furthermore, the results of this study may be used by the local government, specifically the Tricycle Regulation Unit, to reevaluate their basis for the fare system. Additionally, this study may raise awareness among tricycle commuters about the scheme and how the LGUs determine the fare system. Lastly, future researchers may expand and explore a deeper understanding of the bargaining practices in Tuguegarao City.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Research Design

The researchers utilized a qualitative method, specifically using informal interviews. Through thematic analysis of the interview, the researchers aimed to uncover the underlying social, economic, and political factors perpetuating bargaining and its impact on different

stakeholders. This method allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the bargaining practices in Tuguegarao City's fare system, aimed at uncovering the underlying reasons.

3.2 Locale of the Study

The study was administered in selected barangays of Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, following the list of barangays which was given by the Tricycle Regulation Unit.

3.3 Informants of the Study

The participants of the study were tricycle drivers and commuters residing within Tuguegarao City. The criteria for the drivers included both TODA and non-TODA members. They were selected through a random sampling technique with the aid of data saturation. If, during the course of the interview, new themes no longer emerged, the data gathering concluded. In doing so, the data collected was enough to draw appropriate conclusions, and any further data gathering would no longer add value-added insights, as stated by Glaser & Strauss (1960).

3.4 Research Instrument

Informal interviews with tricycle drivers and commuters were used to gain a broad range of views on the matter at hand. This is in recognition of the vital role tricycles play in the transit of commuters from one place to another, particularly in remote areas, subdivisions, or closed communities where other modes of transportation do not serve the majority of the population, as stated in Memorandum Order No. 116, s. 2003. A primary purpose of the said memorandum is the transformation of tricycle businesses into cooperatives that provide transportation services as a useful means of encouraging independence and utilizing the power of the people to achieve social justice, economic development, and the establishment of the strong Republic that is being envisioned.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers first obtained permission from their Research Instructor and the Academic Dean of the School of Education, Arts, and Sciences (SEAS) to gather preliminary data to establish the gap in the study. Once they were permitted, the researchers headed to the office of the Tricycle Regulation Unit (TRU), where they asked for (1) the current number of tricycle drivers/operators within the city, (2) the number and nature of complaints filed to their office, and (3) a copy of the current fare system being implemented throughout the city.

For the formal data-gathering procedure, the researchers conducted informal interviews with the informants of the study. They were asked to share their experiences, opinions, and insights on why bargaining remains a phenomenon in such a city, their stance regarding the issue(s), and other significant information they might share that may benefit the objectives of the study. To build rapport and allow for the fullest expression, the researchers spoke Ilocano, Itawes, Ybanag, and other local vernaculars should the participants choose to speak in the corresponding dialect.

3.6 Data Analysis

The researchers utilized thematic analysis to examine the data and identify common patterns and recurring themes. This method allowed for a clearer explanation and a detailed description of why bargaining perpetuates in Tuguegarao City. First, the responses from the interviews were treated as factual data. These responses were then organized and labeled according to specific themes, topics, or noticeable patterns. Afterward, they were categorized into broader themes or classifications that captured the underlying meaning of the data. The researchers then reviewed these themes to ensure they accurately represented the participants' responses and to determine whether additional themes or connections emerged between existing themes. Through the use of data saturation, responses were grouped based on their significant characteristics, strengthening the understanding of the phenomenon and making the research much more robust.

Once finalized, each theme was clearly defined and named to ensure clarity. Finally, the researchers outlined possible conclusions that summarized the main points and interpretations of the informants' responses, demonstrating how the thematic analysis addressed the research questions of the study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Permission was asked from the participants to partake in the study. The researchers ensured that there was no coercion or forced participation in answering the questions and ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the personal information and data; only the necessary data was gathered and assessed from the participants. Protocols were followed during the conduct of the research to ensure the maximum safety and participation of all participants in the study. Should they wish to withdraw as an informant, it would not negatively impact them in any way.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study yielded four major themes: (1) Flexible Fare System, (2) the Initiation of the Bargaining Process, (3) the Attitudes of Drivers and Commuters towards Bargaining, and (4) the Perceived Fairness of the Fare system.

4.1 Flexible Fare System

The fare system sets rigid fares to be paid by passengers whenever they commute from one place to another. Eighteen (18) pesos is the regular fare, but for students and senior citizens, it is fifteen (15) pesos going to and from the Poblacion, with an incremental increase when the distance exceeds the regular route. However, even with these fixed rates, commuters, especially students, may pay more than what is set for them.

The flexibility of the fare system may not seem like a problem at first glance. However, the problem arises when considering the human factor. Not all drivers and commuters' bargain in the same manner, and not all conditions are the same. There may be inconsistencies and room for exploitation, such as charging outrageous fares, which in turn causes disputes and dissatisfaction among commuters.

Responses from the informants show that the way they bargain their fare may depend on several factors, such as the distance to be traveled, the weather, and the immediacy or urgency of the

passengers. Moreover, bargaining may be seen as justified in situations where the set fare system is considered impractical.

a) Distance and Location

The distance for one's journey is a recurring reason among the informants for instances when it is acceptable not to follow the prices set in the fare system. They stated that it is not sensible for them to strictly follow the fare system when the chosen destination is deemed too far, making the matrix no longer reliable for that trip. The following verbalizations support these claims:

Commuter 1: It depends on the distance, when I am in my uniform, they must also base it on the student fare, here going to the Rob is 15 pesos.

Commuter 2: It depends on the location where you are to going to right? Plaza to Caggay, its twenty (20) pesos, sometimes it's okay [to give] thirty (30) pesos because Caggay is a bit far.

A possible reason why bargaining still persists despite the visibility of the set fares at the front of the tricycle is that it is too arduous and burdensome to compute the incremental increase in the fare with respect to the distance. For example, a student may find it irksome to consistently think about the incremental increase, say every two (2) kilometers or so, even more so because he or she may not even know when or at what point in the journey the increment was added to the fare. Hence, in order to save time, the commuter devises a rough estimate of the fare through bargaining with the driver.

In turn, the driver decides for himself whether that price is appropriate for such a distance. Of course, knowing that he provides an essential service, he will also weigh the pros and cons of deciding whether or not to accept the price offered by the commuter. From the study of Hoshino et al. (2018), optimal pricing for distance-based transit fares can maximize revenue and ridership, improving service equity and reducing rejection of passengers. Thus, it would resolve the issue of passengers getting declined because the distance is not proportional to the pay the tricycle receives, the fuel they expend, and the labor they provide.

Moreover, according to the study of Gnap et al. (2022), an independent and precise distance measurement is crucial for accurate fare calculations and settlements in public passenger transport systems. Furthermore, optimized fare systems in public transit can provide equity for disadvantaged participants, ensuring an impartial and fair charge of transport services within zones. These disadvantaged groups may refer to those who have little or only enough means, and they are greatly affected by unrestricted bargaining as they become victims of exploitation. Hence, these findings highlight the need to evaluate if the current fare system still serves the best interests of those who are its intended beneficiaries.

a.) Weather

Weather conditions may also play a role in the bargaining interactions of drivers and commuters. During rainy or muddy conditions, roads are especially difficult to pass over. When it is raining, commuters may be compelled to bargain in order to be shielded from the elements

sooner rather than later. Moreover, it is important to note that they might see it to be permissible because there is a moral aspect to be considered. Informants stated that:

Commuter 2: I often travel from Caggay to SM, so its okay for me to pay 40 or 50 pesos when it's raining especially when I am alone because it's pitiful.

Driver 5: It depends on the passenger as long as you bring them [to their destination], it's your pity on the very wet driver who drove you there.

It is not just extreme rain that may influence fare bargaining, but excessive heat as well, especially in a tropical country like the Philippines. An article from the Philippine Inquirer dated April 28, 2024, stated that a record-breaking temperature of forty degrees Celsius (40°C or 104.0°F) was tallied—the country's highest so far that year. In the same article, the heat index, which is what the temperature may feel like to the body, was reported to reach up to forty-five degrees Celsius (45°C). A verbalization is as follows:

Commuter 15: Especially when it's extremely hot or extremely rainy and you're getting rejected by drivers, so you really need to persuade them.

Otim et al. (2022) stated that temperature has the most prominent effect on transport mode choices, with higher temperatures leading to increased walking and bike shares. However, with temperatures soaring, even walking and biking become tedious processes, making commuters take public transport in order to protect themselves from the heat. Moreover, too much heat and rain cause disturbances in transport routes, as stated by Lu et al. (2020), who noted that abnormal weather such as extreme heat, rain, fog, or haze seriously impacts transport systems, causing damage and congestion. This is supported by Miao et al. (2019), who stated that extreme weather conditions, such as very high and low temperatures and heavy rainfall, reduce public transport ridership. These weather conditions may give drivers more leverage in bargaining for the fare because commuters are rushing to get home and be safe from the harsh weather, especially since the fare system does not account for such conditions, as expressed by Dell et al. (2014).

Thus, weather conditions play a significant role in fare bargaining. As stated by Abreu et al. (2022), various weather effects brought about by climate change, such as floods and rising temperatures, have affected road transport infrastructure, which is why weather has been especially highlighted as a contributing factor.

b.) Maintenance and other miscellaneous expenses

Despite the prevalence of the fare system, bargaining persists, even with the clause in the ordinance permitting bargaining between the passenger and driver only between 9:00 PM and 5:00 AM. It must be remembered that the earnings of these tricycle drivers are not solely for themselves but are also used for the sustenance of their families and the maintenance of their tricycles. Such is illustrated by the following verbalizations:

Driver 9: It's not okay that eighteen [pesos] (18) is what's there so 18 is what they pay because gasoline is so expensive right, we depend on the distance, but if it's near, it's okay to pay 18 only.

Driver 8: Just because fifteen (15) is the fare, where they want to go is too far, of course it's [the tricycle] for five people, and we have our livelihood, how will be our families, 15 to go there, will 15 be what it also consumes?

Yilmazkuday & Yilmazkuday (2018) stated that higher gasoline prices have significant redistributive effects, with higher welfare costs for lower-income consumers. With other bills and utilities that take up their earnings, they would have to look for other means to recuperate such money lost. This is supported by Shahid et al. (2017), who stated that in the short term, increased gasoline prices negatively affect the market performance of non-energy sectors like transportation, as they can easily transfer the increased financial burden to customers by increasing prices, which in this case would be the fare.

Gasoline is not the only expense they have to consider. An example of which are maintenance costs needed to ensure that the tricycle itself is in a shape to be used optimally. When these parts are needed or are broken down due to time, usage or other factors, those also incur additional costs. And as evident in the verbalization above, the needs of their family, if they have one, are also considered. These fees pile on resulting in their take-home salary getting lesser and lesser.

If left alone, these high fees may outright leave the driver no choice but to suspend his service, or in some cases, leave it completely. Should a large number of drivers leave, it will hurt not just the commuters but the overall economy of Tuguegarao City as a whole. This is because the number of drivers is also logically connected to the number of businesses opening up such as carinderias to feed them, auto-repair and mechanical shops, as well as gasoline stations to accommodate their large number. The drivers' departure would also mean the loss of business of such which not be in the best interest of all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, rising fuel expenses does not just affect the tricycle drivers, but the commuters as well. Some commuters may also have private vehicles for their own use, however with the rise of fuel prices, it may cause commuters to shift from driving privately into riding public transit. This may lead to the perpetuation of bargaining as the fare system may not cover for the increased demand on commuters who will switch from private forms of transport into riding publicly as stated by Iseki & Ali (2014).

In light of the present circumstances and the gathered data, Jallorina (n.d.), in his study, recommends the creation of a comprehensive tricycle transit program, driver participation in value transformation, Department of Tourism involvement, computerized monitoring system establishment, and fare system evaluation. The conversion of tricycle operations into transport service cooperatives is a practical vehicle for promoting self-reliance and harnessing people power in the attainment of economic growth. The author also suggests that while evaluating the fare system, it should take into account the number of passengers heading to a specific destination in addition to the distance traveled. This plan would address the issue of passengers being turned away. Moreover, it includes gasoline as a fixed expense and fare as a variable sale. Ergo, a minimum fare for lone passengers may be set to prevent drivers and commuters from negotiating with each other.

From the study of Grimaldi & Beria (2013), factors such as lost fuel taxes due to mode shift and generated fare revenues should be considered. Considering the outstanding amount of money needed to franchise, operate, and maintain the vehicle in its day-to-day endeavors, the take-home earnings of the drivers alone would not be sufficient for their sustenance and that of their families. Calderón (2021) stated that higher operational costs in transit routes lead to inequity among the population, increasing fare inequities. Thus, tricycle drivers may be forced to bargain despite the prevalence of the existing fare system, owing to the aforementioned factors. This is validated by Banerjee (2015), who mentioned that regulated fares in the auto-rickshaw market in New Delhi are ignored by drivers and customers who bargain on prices among themselves.

However, it is worth considering that while distance-based fare systems can reduce total travel time, they could also lead to less dispersed flows, and total utility could be improved compared to additive fares (Maadi & Schmöcker, 2020). This is supported by Matas et al. (2020), who stated that swapping from flat or rigid fares to distance-based fares, or from integrated to non-integrated tickets, affects ridership and company revenues, with a higher potential for revenue changes. Thus, further extensive analysis and a thorough reexamination of the fare system are needed to determine whether it still meets the needs and demands of its stakeholders. Therefore, fare bargaining may be justified when there is a need to balance cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and the impact on passengers and the urban environment in the context of public transport fare systems.

4.2 Initiation of the Bargaining Process

Based on the responses of the commuters and drivers, the commuters mostly initiate fare bargaining, and a bargain is likely to be successful if the commuters set their desired fare first. It is crucial for us to know who initiates the bargaining process by naming a price as it sets the tone and dynamics of the whole interaction, and may influence its outcome. Commuters and tricycle drivers engage in a dynamic where fares are determined through negotiation.

Whoever sets the price first may have a firmer control of the bargaining process as they have already set the baseline by which subsequent offers made by the other party have to be aligned. This is in line with what Bochet et al. (2019) stated that bargaining efficiency can be improved by knowing who initiates. Moreover, if he who makes the initial offer seems confrontational or aggressive, the other may also respond the same, which may provoke disagreements or conflict. Conversely, when one perceives the other to be fair or transparent, they may be more accepting of the offers. As stated by Kumar (2021) a successful bargain depends on the words used with conventional politeness in initiation, conventional solidarity banter in argumentation, and impoliteness mitigation banter in settlement. These are supported by the following verbalizations:

Driver 3: They freely give, as long as what they give, that's it. I do not say "this is not enough", or "it should be capacity."

Driver 8: It is prohibited for us to give prices, because we had a meeting where they told us that we cannot set the price, the passenger would really have to be the one to set the price.

Initiating negotiations is crucial, as it sets the tone for the negotiation process and influences the decision to engage, request, and optimize as expressed by Kapoutsis et al. (2017). Based on the exchanges above, it is the commuter which holds the commuter is in a stronger position. Moreover, according to Heddeya (2023), when the one who has the stronger bargaining position initiates, fewer offers are exchanged, negotiations finish faster, the likelihood of reaching agreement rises, and the variance of prices at which subjects agree drops substantially.

Backus (2020) stated that players with more bargaining strength typically receive better outcomes, which aligns with the findings that consumers are more dominant during bargaining interactions. In consonance with this, drivers have to find at least some way to put them at a non-disadvantageous footing during the bargaining interaction. Moreover, drivers are less likely to quote the first price because the existence of the fare system impairs them from doing so. Reasons among commuters why their offer first may vary, but the authors deduce that it must be because they wish to set the baseline of the price to which they are agreeable to. They may also offer first if they are pressed for time, offering a price in order to avoid haggling and secure transportation immediately. This is supported by a verbalization from an informant quoting:

Commuter 15: Sometimes it's the driver, but sometimes I set the price, like when I go home to ours, 40 pesos is what I pay, so I say it, "40 pesos from here, until there" because I already know that is only how much I will pay.

According to the study of Ali et al. (2022), fare bargaining can be successful if initiated by the commuter. Tricycle drivers are essentially businessmen as they sell their brand of service; hence, being customer-oriented and allowing the passenger to offer first creates a bond between the parties. Moreover, when the passenger makes the initial offer, drivers may feel more in control and can adapt their style based on how the passenger presents themselves, as deduced from their initial proposal. Commuters may also compare existing fare structures with discounted prices offered by ride-hailing services before making travel choices.

Ali et al. (2022) further stated that commuters may adapt and alter their travel behaviors based on the discounts provided by ride-hailing services, indicating the significance of pricing strategies in attracting customers. The success of the bargaining process depends upon the financial needs of tricycle drivers and the affordability and satisfaction of commuters.

Fixed fare structures may not always account for fluctuations in demand, which may lead to potential issues with underpricing or overpricing during peak and off-peak times, as stated by Marabucci (2020). On the other hand, unfixed fare structures may require more complex pricing mechanisms and monitoring systems to ensure fairness and prevent exploitation.

Rahman (2020) noted in his study that rickshaw drivers prefer a bargaining process when fixing fares to charge more from passengers, while passengers favor a fixed fare system. These findings suggest that commuters play a crucial role in the fare bargaining process and that their responses to pricing strategies can influence their decisions regarding ride-hailing services. Overall, several studies underscore the nuance of fare bargaining, which is a complex interplay of bargaining power, costs, cultural norms, and mutual understanding between parties (Zhang & Chung, 2020).

4.3 Attitudes of Drivers and Commuters towards Bargaining

Based on the informants' responses, the drivers reported that they experienced instances where they had rude or uncooperative passengers. However, their responses indicate that they have a positive perception towards students as commuters. Meanwhile, commuters present the opposite, as they stated that some drivers charge high fares even for short-distance trips.

a.) Drivers' Positive Perception of Students

Drivers hold students in high regard as they are seen as the future generation. Thus, they should be treated fairly and with respect. It is illustrated in the following verbalization:

Driver 1: Students are much more gallant. These students, they understand...

Driver 4: For students, I understand because I was once a student, and I also have children who were students once.

From the exchanges above, it can be seen that they see students in a more favourable way. The informant stated that he was once a student, and so were his children once. From his answer, it can be reasoned that the reason why he was more accommodating towards students is because of his history as one and his children. He understands them because he would or wanted his children to be afforded the same treatment – with kindness and compassion emphasizing the presence of a parental perspective at play here. Since they share a common ground, they are more willing, agreeable or understanding towards students when quoting or setting prices. This is supported by Galeotti et al. (2021) stating that bargaining involves attraction and compromise effects, which are influenced by the efficiency and equality properties of feasible agreements. However, not all types of commuters are treated or treat the drivers the same way.

b.) Drivers' Negative Experiences towards non-student commuters.

While tricycle drivers may have an optimistic perception towards student commuters, the same cannot be said towards other types such those in the workforce or senior citizens. A verbalization from an informant stated:

Driver 2: Those who have the means, they are the ones who are gristly, there are those who will curse you, saying “you’re just a tricycle driver.”

Driver 9: There are many, sometimes they even throw their fares, so sometimes tricycle drivers like us have no rights.

These negative attitudes from the commuters may come from a place of societal bias as some commuters may see the driver at a lower societal level due to their occupation and lower socio-economic status. This is mirrored by Little & Zeitzoff (2017) that actors develop behavioral biases consistent with psychology and behavioral economics, which inevitably lead to conflict. They also see present laws as more favorable towards commuters and thus refrain from speaking out to avoid affecting their business. Moreover, when asked what they would like the City Government to do, informants answered that they would like their rights to be better

protected against malicious complaints, and for them to be respected and be valued. An informant is quoted in saying that:

Driver 2: We should also be respected in the same way. There are many passengers who are rude, or like that, when it's our fault they complain however when it's the passenger's fault we don't complain, we just let them be.

As a constant of Tuguegarao City, it is important to stabilize the parties with its various interest groups. Singling out one for the other could cause a deterioration in the social order and could have situations that are not beneficial to the general populace. Policymakers and transport authorities need to strike a balance between the needs of commuters and drivers to maintain a harmonious and productive working relationship. Transparent and inclusive bargaining processes that consider the interests of both groups are crucial (Avner et al., 2017).

Driver 7: Both the passenger's and the driver's sides should be taken to clarify the instant complaints of the passengers. The driver should be able to defend his side, since there are times that passengers tend to exaggerate or make false complaints even if that's not what occurred. We hope that they should hear both sides to be fair.

When they are called upon to the TRU, the time lost in order to hear a complaint could have been directed towards their pasada or trips. Thus, the tricycle drivers wish for a more robust grievance machinery in order to resolve their complaints in a way that would not detrimentally affect their business.

c.) Commuters' Negative Experiences with Drivers

While students are put on a pedestal, drivers' experiences tell us that it does not mirror the drivers' experiences towards non-student commuters. Conversely, commuters state that some drivers exhibit a negative attitude when bargaining, as seen in the following responses:

Commuter 7: To the tricycle drivers, they should reduce their rude behavior towards their passengers since their prices are outrageous even for a short distance, sometimes it reaches fifty pesos for a short distance.

The informants' harsh use of language connotes a high level of frustration towards tricycle drivers who exploit passengers by extorting fares higher than what is prescribed or what is deemed acceptable. Based on the informant's words, such a problem if left to stew, could exacerbate conflicts between the commuters, drivers, and managing authorities for a perceived lack of regulation against exploitative drivers, emphasizing the need for a policy recommendation or intervention.

As the city's mass and symbolic vehicle, the image of Tuguegarao city is closely linked to the image of the tricycles. As stated by Olariu (2017), a positive public image is essential for an organization's success, as a negative image can negatively affect its success. While it is important to give credence to what the tricycle drivers' pleas, it must not come at the expense of the commuters.

As seen in the responses above, drivers in Tuguegarao City call for a policy or intervention that would protect them from passengers who arbitrarily report them to the TRU, leading to the disruption of their business. Swann (2019) advises that [effective] conflict management focuses on strategic implementation for positive outcomes, focusing on integration, accommodation, domination, avoidance, and compromise.

These positive outcomes that would work in favor of the driver and passenger would be a system where the passenger's claims need to be examined to determine if they reach a plausibility that would warrant intervention from the appropriate authorities, and for the drivers to be able to address their side of the conflict without major interruptions in their service. Ensuring that both parties have a voice helps promote fair and equitable outcomes in the bargaining process. Listening to the concerns and perspectives of both drivers and passengers can lead to more balanced and reasonable fare agreements (Caoleng, 2024).

4.4 Perceived Fairness of the Fare system

Throughout the course of this study, one pivotal question comes to mind. Is the fare system fair? Responses from the informants indicate it is not fair because at the end of the day, the two-peso incremental increase per two kilometers is not really followed. An informant stated that:

Commuter 13: No, because what you said, that it's two pesos for every 2 kilometers, is also not followed, because the price that the tricycle drivers give me is fixed even if it doesn't go over what you said about adding 2 pesos every 2 kilometers that exceeds."

Commuter 16: No, I'm a student. Since, in the first place there is a standard fare system so why do I have to know when I will add the two pesos.

Based on the responses of the commuters, it can infer that it is not fair for the commuters because the drivers themselves set an arbitrary amount rendering the set prices in the fare system ineffective. Commuters, especially students have allowances meticulously budgeted for expenditure. Even when they bargain, there are instances that the amount they are prepared to offer is rejected because the driver wishes it to be higher. This in turn adds to the expenses of the student, which the added amount could have been used for other things altogether. However, drivers present a different story. As stated by an informant:

Driver 17: Ma'am, it's pitiful when the fare system is the only thing we follow. Of course, there are passengers who wish to go far, then they give a price. We think if it's right, like 30 pesos then you go to Carig, of course we think about the gasoline, lots of things to pay for, for food, for the studies of my children, no more, it's done...

A possible explanation why he has answered so may be because with the rising cost of utilities and commodities, the measly 15-18 pesos fare may not be enough to cover essential needs. Moreover, they do not expect to get every passenger they wish to take because some may be out of their route. But should they do so, and bargain with these out-of-lane passengers, their expectation of what the fare should be is different from what the passenger offers. The stability of the economy may also be a factor, as to why they charge extra. Since the cost of utilities rise, it also stands to reason that transit fares will increase accordingly which may impact low-

income commuters who consistently rely on public transit in order to traverse the city. This is supported by the latest available data from Statista where it recorded sixty percent (60%) of Filipinos in 2023 relying on public transportation.

As gasoline steadily increases in price, they have to match what they expend with what they charge in order to make a sustainable livelihood. Gasoline prices in the Philippines play at around sixty-five (65) pesos. Each tricycle can only carry five (5) passengers unless they want to overload their unit. The average capacity of each unit for fuel is six (6) litres, meaning four-hundred (400) pesos on average is expended each time they refuel, which happens multiple times throughout the day. If the fare collected on each trip for five passengers ranges from seventy-five to one hundred pesos (P75-P100), they would have to have four or five trips just to recoup what they paid for fuel. It is not fair for them because they also have bills to pay. Not to add, the amount of money required to operate, apply for a franchise, own or maintain the tricycle. Hence, there is a pressing need to look back into the fare system to see if it still serves the interests of the commuters and drivers in way that is efficient, effective and fair to them.

5.0 POLICY INTERVENTION

Table 1. Summary of the Findings and Proposed Interventions

ISSUE	DRIVERS	COMMUTERS	ASPECT OF A POLICY
Flexibility of the Fare system	For drivers, it is an issue because of the inherent unpredictability of bargaining actors owing to various conditions such as distance, weather, and incurring various costs.	Meanwhile, it is an issue for commuters when they are pressed for time signaling their urgent need for transportation, making them more prone to bargain their fare.	The study proposes a dynamic fare system that account for such factors essentially embracing a true flexible fare system.
Initiation of the Bargaining Process	Both parties stated that it is the commuter who must initiate and offer the price first.		Establish defined fare ranges to serve as reference points for drivers and commuters, protecting against setting egregious prices.
Attitudes of Drivers and Commuters	Drivers experience passengers who are disorderly. However, students are treated more favorably because they are seen as hope for the future.	Meanwhile, commuters present that they experience instances where drivers charge excessive prices even for short-distance trips.	Create rules and norms of conduct to govern the interactions of passengers and commuters.

<p>Perceived Fareness of the Fare system</p>	<p>Drivers stated that the fare system is not really fair to them since they have to cover to other expenses such as fuel, and sustenance for their families.</p>	<p>Commuters expressed that the incremental increase of fare based on excess distance travelled is not fair because they don't know at what point in the ride this increase occurred.</p>	<p>A reevaluation of the fare system to see if it still serves the interests of the stakeholders holistically.</p>
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The current fare system can be considered in its structure to be a hybrid of zone-based and flat-based fare structures. The three common fare structures include the flat-based, zone-based, and distance-based structure. In a flat-based fare structure, the same fare is paid without taking distance into the equation. Zone-based fare structure changes are based on zones that are expected to be traversed. Meanwhile, distance or graduate-based fare structures state that passengers must pay more if they travel more to account for increased fuel and labor expenses.

Rubensson et al. (2020) opines that [high-income] travelers may stand to gain from all three fare schemes, but flat-based fares are the least, and distance-based fares may be horizontally equitable but have poor vertical equity. Horizontal equity means that people pay the same amount if they belong to the same income group. However, vertical equity, which states that those that earn more should pay more, in this case, must be thoroughly assessed and evaluated by existing laws, rules, and regulations as the concept calls for directly proportional taxes in response to the amount they earn in a day.

The aforementioned scenario would create a zero-sum game where one party may stand to gain at the expense of one or the other parties. In this case, it would render the benefit gained by the drivers obsolete as it would shift the fares to increase to cover the tax burden of the drivers. Nonetheless, even considering combining distance-based and area-based fare strategies, it generates the greatest social wellbeing and highest demand for passengers (Liu et al., 2017). Nonetheless, even considering combining distance-based and area-based fare strategies, it generates the highest social welfare and largest passenger demand (Liu et al., 2017).

Therefore, basing from the findings of the research and issues presented, the researchers present this policy framework aligned with the objectives and the paradigm set forth in this paper.

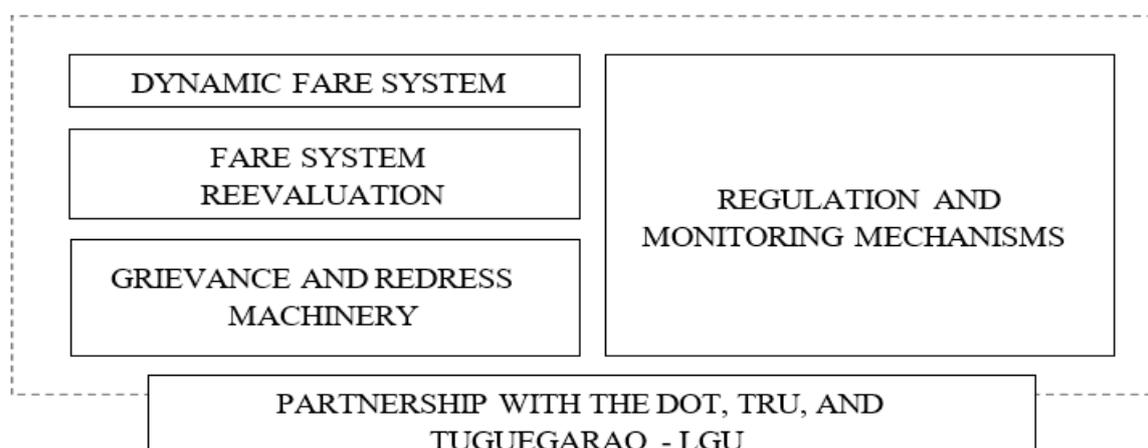


Figure 1. Policy Framework

Figure 2 shows the framework of the proposed policy intervention that will be implemented, the steps that will be taken, its regulation and monitoring mechanisms, as well as collaboration with various public and private entities to ensure its refinement and success.

- a) **A dynamic fare system** that takes into consideration the distance traveled, present weather conditions, as well as other variable factors such as load carried and travel time, intending to reduce or alleviate the need for both commuters and drivers to bargain with each other, thus fostering a more harmonious and productive social order.
- b) **A reevaluation of the current fare system** would include in its amendment the number of passengers to be carried and the destination they are bound to. In this regard, the issue of passengers getting rejected or ignored by drivers, which would induce them to bargain, will be alleviated. Moreover, this would consider both fixed factors such as gasoline and maintenance costs and variable sales (fare).
- c) **Regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms** are essential for maintaining a high-quality, safe, and efficient tricycle transportation system in Tuguegarao City. A feedback mechanism can help address overcharging concerns, a common complaint among commuters. This will keep the Tricycle Regulation Unit up to date with the latest developments and adjust its programs and policies in response to the reception of such policy proposals.

The researchers then recommend the following courses of action in order to affect such goals:

- I. Promote the participation of tricycle drivers in value transformation initiatives. This can include training programs to improve their service quality, customer service skills, and compliance with regulations.
- II. Implement a comprehensive tricycle transit program that includes:
 - a) Development of a computerized monitoring system to track and manage tricycle operations
 - b) Evaluation and adjustment of the fare system to ensure fairness and affordability for passengers
 - c) Increased involvement of the Department of Tourism to enhance the tourism experience using tricycle services

As noted in the paper, tricycle drivers are aware of the repercussions if they disobey the fare system and other regulations, and they will face either a fine or revocation of their license to operate. While the TRU provides a grievance machinery for the commuter to report unruly drivers, the opposite does not exist for the tricycle driver against disorderly commuters. It is also worth noting that a bill has been proposed in Congress, specifically Senate Bill No. 2494, known as the "Magna Carta for Tricycle Drivers and Operators Act of 2023." Among the many purposes of the Act is to "lay down the rights and benefits of workers in the tricycle sector, including but not limited to mandatory membership to government assistance programs such as the Social Security System (SSS) and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), life and accident insurance, and legal assistance." However, at the time of this writing, the Bill remains as a proposal.

Their sustenance [tricycle drivers] depends on the number of passengers and trips. Being called into the office of the TRU signals a disruption in their regular course of business, directly affecting them and their dependents. Hence, the researchers propose the establishment of codes of conduct for commuters and drivers, establishing norms of respectful behavior towards one another, professionalism, and appropriate accountability mechanisms to address grievances and complaints.

- I. Removing or amending the 9 PM-5 AM provision of the city ordinance for the following reasons:
 - a) For consistency and fairness, removing this restriction would ensure that fares are calculated and charged consistently throughout the day, promoting fairness for both drivers and commuters. Allowing fare bargaining during specific hours creates inconsistency and unfairness in fare bargaining practices.
 - b) Limiting fare bargaining to late-night hours can lead to a lack of transparency and potential abuse.
 - c) The limited time window for fare bargaining may enable drivers to exploit passengers, especially during late-night hours when alternative transportation options are limited.

It is also important to note that many cities have moved away from allowing fare bargaining altogether, opting for metered systems that promote transparency and accountability. Amending the Ordinance regulating fare rates to align with these best practices would benefit both commuters and drivers. An illustrative example would be in Bongabong, Quezon in the form of Municipal Ordinance No. 2019-08, specifically Section 4(h), which states in essence that tricycles may be allowed to operate as if they are [metered] taxies where they will service when hailed or demanded upon by commuters without a set route to follow in a designated area.

In the implementation of such policies, these guidelines are proposed;

- a) Collaborate with TRU to ensure alignment with existing regulations and facilitate the settlement of reported grievances.
- b) Launch a comprehensive awareness campaign to inform the tricycle drivers and commuters of the proposed changes, having them voice out their concerns and include them in the decision-making process as major stakeholders and pillars of the community.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study comprehensively proves the presence of bargaining practices in Tuguegarao City by showing that the prices set in the fare system are not strictly followed and may vary based on distance, urgency, and the financial status of both the drivers and commuters. Tricycle drivers state that the fares may not be followed should the commuters themselves consent to it, as well as to cover and recover maintenance costs and other miscellaneous expenses. Meanwhile, the commuters state that the fare system may not be practical because it does not cover specialized or chartered trips. Moreover, drivers call for enhanced protection and fair treatment against commuters who exhibit negative attitudes, similar to how passengers have a grievance

mechanism against unruly drivers. Overall, the paper posits that both parties should be provided with fair and transparent means when they bargain—one that considers the nuanced and complex interests of the stakeholders involved.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is ample room for future researchers to investigate more deeply and examine the lapses that may be found from this study. Moreover, future researchers may seek to measure the proposed policies' effectiveness, implementation, and reception among the stakeholders affected by such measures. The findings of this study may also be used for future studies, such as examining the economic impacts of bargaining on passengers' satisfaction and the overall efficiency of the fare system, to better guide policies aimed at social development and a sustainable transportation sector.

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