Overview

The greater metropolitan area of Beirut has a population of about 1.3 million, and suffers from severe traffic congestion, which results in lost productivity and deteriorating air quality. With World Bank support, the Greater Beirut Area has developed an effective traffic control system, reduced congestion on major corridors, and put in place an on-street parking management system. Plans are underway for an integrated mass transit system to further reduce traffic and improve air quality.

Challenge

Beirut is at the core of Lebanon’s service-based economy and accounts for one-third of the country’s population. However, the city and the greater metropolitan area suffer from severe traffic congestion, which results in high economic losses and deteriorating air quality. The congestion problem is exacerbated by the heavy reliance of urban residents’ on private cars: 83 percent of the 2 million daily vehicular trips are carried out by car, and only the remaining 17 percent rely on public transport. The Greater Beirut Area (GBA) further suffers from a lack of traffic and parking enforcement, as well as a fragmented and unorganized public transport system.

Approach

The focus of the Urban Transport Development Project (UTDP) is on providing the city of Beirut and the GBA with a basic institutional framework and the critical investments needed to maximize the efficiency of the existing urban transport infrastructure. A centerpiece in the institutional framework is the establishment of the Traffic Management Organization (TMO), supported by the construction of a Traffic Management Center (TMC). Critical investments included the construction of 19 grade separation facilities at highly congested intersections along seven main corridors of the GBA.

The strategy adopted in 2003 at the launch of the UTDP consisted of: for the short to medium term, address critical needs and prepare for an efficient transport system for the Greater Beirut Area (GBA); and, for
the long term, develop an integrated public transport system and complete the transport system infrastructure (mainly the Périphérique).

Results

Key outcomes are the following:

- Effective traffic control system throughout the Greater Beirut Area, and a well-functioning Traffic Management Organization (TMO): the Traffic Management Center (TMC) has been completed, staffed, equipped and is now operational, with closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras installed and 200 intersections equipped with traffic lights, all connected to the TMC.

- Construction of key infrastructure on major corridors: 10 grade separation facilities (overpasses and underpasses) are completed and open to traffic, 3 intersections are under construction and 2 others are being awarded as of October 30, 2011.

- Effective on-street parking management, with average daily revenue per park-meter installed under the project reaching Lebanese pound (LBP) 50,000 in 2011 (compared to 0 in 2007), with the installation and operation of 735 Pay and Display machines by a private sector operator.

- Reduction by 30 percent of parking violations in areas critical to efficient traffic operations between 2008 and 2011.

- Technical assistance for transport planning and public transport development: completion of a study for the revitalization of transport, a strategy note for public urban transport system in GBA and a study for alternative modes of transport on a main corridor.

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries are the 1.3 million inhabitants of the GBA. The GBA population will benefit from reduced travel times and a reduction in air and noise pollution as congestion is reduced, as well as safer travel and easier parking with the improvement of traffic management.

Bank Contribution

In 2002, the project’s estimated cost was US$115.17 million, of which the Bank financed US$65 million. The project’s financing plan included a financing gap expected to be filled by development partners. The absence of the expected assistance and cost overruns led the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to provide additional financing of US$69.7 million in 2009. The Bank is therefore financing US$134.7 million out of the total cost of the project of US$231.1 million.

Partners

The implementing agency is the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR). The project is supported by the World Bank and other funding agencies, among which are the European Investment Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and the Islamic Development Bank. The total cost of the project is US$231.1 million of which the Bank is financing US$134.7 million (including the original and additional financing loans), the government is financing US$26.9 million and the other funding agencies are financing US$69.5 million.

Moving Forward

The remaining challenges are: launching the planned Three-Year Operation and Maintenance contract to secure effective performance of the traffic management system; implementing the Traffic Police Action Plan (reorganization, adequate staffing and training) for effective enforcement of traffic and parking controls; and completing the preparatory studies for an
integrated public transport system. An action plan for an integrated public transport system in Beirut, TransBeirut, has been formulated and the challenge now is to prepare an urban public transport project for the GBA, complete the financing plan and start implementation.