

Railway to Leverage on the Tourism Industry to Increase the Number of the Ridership for the Intercity Train Services

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Abstract

The railway is critical for economic and regional development. The emergence of the railway in the 19th century was critical to developing the transport network. This transportation system has increased the number of reachable destinations, improving mobility and connectivity that facilitates the smooth conveyance of people and goods. Nevertheless, intense competition from other modes of transport, such as road and air transport, resulted in declining railway usage as a preferred form of transport. Nonetheless, tourism is generally seen as a productive sector dedicated to creating income from people's travelling activities and staying away from their home environment. Even though tourism is crucial for economic development, it negatively impacts the environment and ecosystem. Thus, this study aimed to investigate the potential of the intercity railway in the tourism initiative to fulfil the objective of increasing its ridership and revenue. The study employed the qualitative approach utilising field surveys and discussion with key informants. The findings highlight the significant potential of integrating railways into tourism for encouraging people to utilise trains to travel while concurrently promoting community-based tourism destinations and supporting sustainable tourism. Railway and community-based tourism can promote tourism destinations and contribute to sustainable development.

Keywords: Transportation, Railway, Tourism, Community-Based Tourism, Railway Tourism

Introduction

Railway has existed due to the need for effective and efficient transport to assist the industrial revolution. It has played a significant role as the enabler of economic development and catalyst for humankind's development. This transport system has deterministic roles in the economy and further developments (Wangai et al., 2020) for the revolution to continue and provides a stimulus that helps transform mobility. The accessibility provided by railway has increased the number of reachable destinations (Liu et al., 2021) for people and goods to reach the targeted destinations safely at the right time and at a reasonable price (Bubelíny et al., 2021), contributing to the improvement of the quality of peoples' lives.

Railway has emerged as one of the most dependable modes of transport due to people's need for transport to get them to their business destinations, homes, and workplaces daily and goods to be moved to places required for production. Railway provides linkages with other activities (Jarasuniene et al., 2017) as human activities depend on the connectivity provided by the transportation system. This transportation system has shaped the city's layout, contributed to urban growth and development, and is essential for society and the economy (Besinovic, 2020). For example, the railway system in Malaysia has existed since 1885. The first railway network was developed by the British colonial to transport tin ore from Taiping to Port Weld. Subsequently, the railway network has evolved tremendously, and to this day, railway transport is an effective strategy for national well-being.

Nevertheless, the railway system has experienced a decline. In recent years, public passenger transport performance has reduced in many countries, especially with transitive economic (Dedik et al., 2021) due to competition from road transport and aviation. Concurrently, the usage of individual car transport is growing (Dedík et al., 2021). For example, over 3 million vehicles enter and exit the city of Kuala Lumpur daily (Yusoff et al., 2021). The road transport has become dominant in a relatively short-haul passenger and freight movement, and the air transport in the long-haul movement of passenger and high value and low volume freight, including postal service, which resulted in the declining railway usage as a form of transport and travel (Lee & Chen, 2017).

On the other hand, tourism is generally seen as a productive sector dedicated to creating income (Betta et al., 2021) arising from activities of people travelling and staying in a place away from their home environment for leisure, business or other purposes. Tourism plays an important role in economic activities (Santos-Roldan et al., 2020). For many countries, the tourism industry is an important sector due to its contribution to economic development. The tourism industry brought a rise in job creation, the optimisation of transportation, the enhancement of residents' income, and the protection of diverse heritage (Wang et al., 2020). The leisure or recreation activities and making use of the commercial services and the related jobs and services to meet tourists' needs stimulate export and strengthen global economic growth competitively.

The tourism industry creates linkages with other allied industries, such as hotels and restaurants, and supplies various services consumed by tourists, such as hotels and restaurants. Besides, the tourism industry also supplies diverse services consumed by tourists, such as financial, telecommunications, retail, and health services. The linkages have resulted in a positive impact on economic development, where the global direct job contribution by

the tourism industry was 3.8% in 2017 (Ahmad et al., 2018). It has become one of the major players in international commerce and concurrently functions as an income source for many countries. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), a 5% increase in international tourist arrival was anticipated and expected to reach the 1.4 billion mark in 2018. Surprisingly, the figure was recorded and attained two years ahead of UNWTO's forecast. It also recorded a USD1.7 trillion receipt. In Malaysia, as per the Tourism Malaysia data, a 6.8% increase was observed in the first half of 2019 compared to 2018, which recorded RM41.69 million in income from tourist spending.

Although tourism remains robust and its growth is crucial for economic development, it has a negative impact on the environment and ecosystem (Mannaa, 2020). The mass model of tourism, which is homogeneous in nature, with concerns on standardised and uniform products for a large market segment, has led to resource deterioration in many places. Their quality finally decreased, causing adverse effects on the host destination (Ursache, 2015). The increasing number of tourists to tourist destinations has contributed to congestion of major streets, pollution, and overcrowding, leading to an adverse impact that threatens sustainability (Nag et al., 2018). Today, most countries are very concerned about the damage impacted by tourism as the interest in sustainable tourism development is growing (Grah et al., 2020). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global strategy for achieving a resilient future for all, is a milestone that governments worldwide adopted in 2015 for tourism development. Alternative tourism has arisen, in response to mass tourism, (Giampiccoli et al., 2020) as a sustainable approach to balance mass tourism and conventional tourism.

This study aims to fulfil two objectives. The first objective is to assess the potential of the railway to leverage tourism to increase its ridership and revenue for the intercity train service. Subsequently, the second objective is to examine the potential of the railway system in supporting community-based tourism (CBT). For this study, Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) has been employed for a case study as KTMB is the primary railway operator in Peninsular Malaysia. Besides, KTMB provides accessibility to all major cities and rural areas, and its railway network connects various CBT destinations often located in rural areas. The CBT is for community welfare, where the ownership, management, operation, and supervision of this business belongs to the community, especially in rural communities. The social, environmental, and economic needs of local communities are met by offering a tourism product with the objective focused on conservation and sustainability by the proper community.

The structure of this paper is organised as follows. Firstly, the fundamental constructs concerning railway and tourism are defined. The relationship between railway and tourism is explored in the theoretical background section. Subsequently, a framework combining railway and tourism is proposed for the benefit of related parties, particularly for the railway to gain ridership and revenue and the sustainable operation and further development for CBT. This article is based on extant literature, a conceptual work that draws on concepts from various theories and research findings to guide a research project.

Theoretical Background*Railway and the Economic Development*

The emergence of the railway has improved travel duration by offering reliable and consistent schedules that could be included in the planning of economic activities, such as production and distribution, which facilitates trade and distribution of goods and people's movement. It has a strong economic rationale which makes it competitive for the mobility of people and freight. The freight movement and passenger transport benefit the nation's economy and lead towards commodity production, trade boost, and people's development. The accessibility provided by railway transport is one of the significant factors for households and firms (Wenner et al., 2020), as the railway development brought tremendous changes to transport, economy, and society (Michniak, 2016).

Railways strongly influenced economic and urban development that increased the range of reach for people and goods, as transport and mobility enable a conducive environment for trade to occur, establish civilisation, give the country a growth opportunity, generate jobs, and promote economic scales realisation. The railway has resulted in positive multiplier effects and is considered a link to all aspects of life and growth.

The Declination of Railway as a Way of Travel

Railway volume has been declining for both freight and passenger services. It has been challenging to compete with the increasing popularity of road and air transport. Nowadays, individual car transport is a trend. The increased number of cars on the road is because cars are constantly and invariably identified with a sense of freedom and independence (Urbanek, 2021). In addition, moving goods by truck has resulted in decreased railway volume for freight and passenger services. Thus, the railway system is at risk, on the one hand, due to individual motoring and, on the other hand, air transport (Dedik et al., 2020).

People tend to use private cars for travel as the current nature of commutation (Nasrudin et al., 2019), resulting in a reduction in the number of railway ridership. Furthermore, the transportation of raw materials has shifted from the railway to the truck (Ko et al., 2020). Trucks are advantageous, allowing quick loading and unloading of goods. Compared to the railway, the end-to-end shipment provided by trucks has caused the railway to lose its market share in freight transport. This situation has reduced the frequency or complete abandonment of railway services. Resultantly, many branch lines were permanently closed.

Railway in the Tourism Industry

Transportation is a crucial and primary factor in tourism (Veloso et al., 2021). Transportation is a crucial destination factor that provides satisfaction and loyalty (Zheng et al., 2020), as transport and tourism are closely related to economic activities. Tourism is a mass phenomenon requiring transport infrastructure and services. Transport systems and infrastructure guaranteeing efficient mobility usually contribute to the tourism industry's development (Albalade & Fageda, 2016). The tourism industry requires transport to facilitate tourist movement from departure to the destination and within the tourist attraction area. The building of the railway has led to the growing number of people travelling as tourists (Michniak, 2016). The modernisation of the railway network not only strengthened social and economic exchanges but also improved the way of leisure in daily life (Sang & Lin, 2021). As

the transportation system facilitates tourism development (Marek, 2021), a poor transportation system will disrupt the tourism industry.

Tourist destinations require people to travel from their homes, and the need for transport is to ferry tourists to the actual tourism site. Transport allows travelling or movement and speeds up the development of the tourism industry. The transportation system establishes the link to transfer tourists from origin to the destination for leisure or business to meet basic tourist requirements. Hence, the railway is essential for the development of any tourism destination. Railway has led to a tourism boost and is crucial for increasing tourist flow, contributing to the ease of tourism flow and growth (Pagliara & Mauriello, 2021). Besides, the railway is also the attraction of tourism concerning the discovery of nature and the environment. The railway experience is a tourist experience (Allis et al., 2016). It provides opportunities to view the nature and people along the route while travelling safely and maintaining avoidance of road traffic.

The Impact of the Tourism Industry on the Host Country

Tourism is considered the primary industry as an economic activity of global significance. Nevertheless, tourism also has a negative impact on the environment. Approximately 8% of global greenhouse gas emission is affiliated with tourism activities (Ahmad et al., 2018). The development of infrastructure to satisfy the tourists' needs, such as hotels, shops, and amusement park, lead to increased sustainable threats where the loss of natural habitat and biodiversity is occurring rampantly. On the one side, tourism can positively influence economic growth and employment generation. On the other side, it threatens heritage, cultural identity, and well-being (Grilli et al., 2021). It also instigates undesirable water and air pollution, ecosystem degradation, and socio-cultural environment loss (Zhu et al., 2021).

The tourism industry's adverse social and environmental effects have been increasingly recognised. The excessive traffic vehicles used to ferry tourists contribute to rising air pollution. Hotels and companies' improper sewage disposal systems pollute water, raising concerns about preserving water sources. Moreover, the host community are also prone to degradation and dilution in their cultures and societal values since they need to interact with tourists continuously.

The Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

The CBT was developed to provide community welfare and community empowerment in working towards sustainable tourism (Sutresna et al., 2019). It is alternative tourism for sustainable tourism and a programme developed to strengthen the social and cultural aspects of the local community through social and cultural exchanges with tourists. Besides, CBT is a platform that provides the local community with an opportunity for income generation and job creation by offering its products to tourists. This product can comprise lifestyles, natural resources, and culture to attain better living conditions and reduce poverty in certain areas (Eom et al., 2020).

Since the local community is keen to share knowledge and culture with visitors from various backgrounds and identities, tourists will have the opportunity to experience the local lifestyle and culture. This exchange is mutual since the local community will benefit by promoting their culture while being paid to do so. The CBT has a great potential to foster job creation and

additional income for the local community. Thus, it allows rural communities to retain their tradition instead of moving to urban areas to seek a job.

The aim of CBT is primarily to conserve natural resources while improving the livelihood of the host community. This tourism concept is based on tourists' desire to learn more about the different cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. The concept provides a unique opportunity for hosts and visitors to partake in a cultural exchange that allows hands-on experience and learning opportunities in a local setting (Lemelin et al., 2015).

In Malaysia, the CBT was introduced under the 7th Malaysia Plan (1996 – 2000) upon the introduction of homestay tourism under the Rural Tourism Master Plan initiative by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC). The Malaysia Homestay Programme was launched in 1995 to increase rural participation in the tourism sector to enhance local socio-economic development by providing tourists with opportunities to experience local customs and lifestyles. The programme offers accommodation and local activities to tourists, such as folk sports, cultural events, festivals, and others. Tourists often reside with a local host family from the rural community and experience unique village-style living, such as harvesting fruits in the orchard, feeding livestock on the farm, and playing traditional games, such as top-spinning.

Proposed Framework and Discussion

Leveraging the Tourism Sector to the Increasing Number of Train Ridership

Railway connectivity offers multiple benefits. The connectivity stimulates the development and economic activities and engages with the community. The transport connectivity provides the ability for an individual, family, or community to access economic and employment activities, education, healthcare, leisure, sport and social activities. For instance, the connectivity between city and rural areas will provide accessibility for the rural community to expand their market chain and increase the range of reach for their accessing education and health care.

In Malaysia, KTMB is the primary railway operator connecting and bridging the gap between cities and rural areas in Peninsular Malaysia through its railway network. Once upon a time, KTMB's intercity train services were the main transportation in Peninsular Malaysia but have since declined, and the number of ridership has decreased. People today tend to travel with their private vehicles as they feel convenient and flexible travelling by car, leading to the growing number of cars. Consequently, KTMB's intercity train ridership has dropped to 1.3 million from 2010 to 2019. This scenario implies a reduction in the frequency of train availability. Besides, the Electric Train Services (ETS) by KTMB usage only has 64% occupancy during weekdays.

Efforts should be initiated in order to raise the railway ridership and the revenue. Tourism is viewed as one of the initiatives for the railway to leverage, particularly the CBT. Railway networks provide access to rural areas where CBT destinations are often located. Hence, strategies should be developed to manipulate the accessibility to rural areas by collaborating with travel agencies or homestay programme operators to take tourists to travel by train to CBT destinations. These initiatives will benefit both the railway and CBT entrepreneurs. The combination of a leisurely trip by train and the taste of an authentic rural lifestyle will benefit the railway in terms of ridership and income generation while sustaining rural development.

In line with the rising concern towards sustainability, as the railway is widely acknowledged to be an environmentally friendly mode of transport, and CBT is a sustainable tourism approach, the sustainable tourism development strategy should be used as an approach to retain the benefit of tourism and sustainable rural development. Rural tourism is given special priority in the national sustainable development strategy as it is viewed as a high potential sector with a vertical institutional structure that supports its development.

The Combination of Railway and CBT into One Package

A significant need exists to shift people's travel mindset from using personal cars to public railways since it is generally an environmentally friendly travel mode. The growing car use is not favourable to the global sustainable goals of reducing energy consumption, improving air quality, and decreasing the impact of road congestion, road safety issues, socio-economic issues, and greenhouse gas emission. Therefore, an alternative model and growth strategies are needed to create an effective, attractive, and sustainable transit service to compete with the single-occupant automobile in implementing sustainable practices to curb climate change that accounts for the mobility requirements of the future generation. Private car usage is on the verge of gridlock. The resulting negative impacts impair the quality of urban life and mobility for city dwellers, thereby making the transport system unsustainable. Thus, travel time has increased and negatively impacted the economy and environment.

An alternative growing trend in tourism is a form of tourism that supports the sustainable development of tourism objectives (Gheorghe, 2014). The tourism form refers to a unique product, such as a sport, event or culture, that can be customised to meet the needs of a particular audience depending on the motivation, behaviour, and experience of production and consumption (Gheorghe, 2014). This approach is also deemed sustainable to counter mass tourism, a potential threat to degrading the environment and diluting cultures.

Nowadays, a rising concern prevalent in most countries worldwide is the negative impact of tourism by strongly establishing the roots of economic and social development with an ecological foundation (Görçün, 2018). Niche tourism is viewed as a suitable approach due to the embedded sustainable principle in tourism development. For instance, CBT is considered a type of niche tourism. This arrangement will help preserve the local culture from being altered by the social fabric of host communities and sustainable rural development. As for the tourists, unique and personally meaningful customised products can be delivered since most of them are tired of being packaged and mass-produced, which lowers the standards and quality of a vacation (Yan et al., 2019). Currently, tourists are increasingly defying the mass tourism trend and proposing a more sustainable alternative.

Railway and CBT are two different elements. Railway provides a means of travel for people and concurrently acts as an attraction of tourism experience. Nowadays, railway technologies have expanded the capabilities of the railway system in attaining faster speed, greater capacity, and better safety to increase its efficiency and provide better services, establishing the competitive edge for railways to remain in the market. Nevertheless, CBT is sustainable tourism where residents invite travellers to visit and stay in their communities with the intent to provide an authentic experience of the local culture and traditions for the purpose of rural sustainability and improving the host community's livelihoods.

Since the railway is targeting to increase the number of ridership, an initiative should be taken to address the low volumes of ridership. The research aimed to determine the possibility of integrating the railway into the tourism approach as one of the strategies to increase ridership. Together with the collaboration with related parties, such as travel agencies, railroad operators may develop a strategy to leverage tourism, particularly the CBT. Combining homestay experience with rail travel will allow tourists to enjoy food and drinks, entertainment and event socialising while appreciating sceneries along the rail journey. Thus, the initiative should benefit the railway and the CBT to sustain the business and identify the challenges in sustaining the CBT.

The Proposed Framework

The railway system is struggling to increase its number of ridership for the intercity train services. Increased ridership is required for the revenue and income generation for the sake of the railway to ensure that it continues operating. The intercity rail transport market share is declining, has led to the frequency reduction, and a significant percentage of railway networks closed worldwide (Rovelli et al., 2020).

Thus, railways should leverage tourism. In the context of a steadily growing tourism industry, business innovation and full concentration on passenger transportation by increasing the visibility of service offerings will improve the railway. This strategy can be accomplished by fostering close collaboration between stakeholders to offer attractive packages to attract people to use the railway to travel, particularly tourists to enjoy train rides to reach their destination. A rail tourism approach could be an initiative to attract people to travel by rail and encourage train ridership while fostering CBT and local communities' economies.

The use of trains is good for the environment. The railway is often considered an essential means of transport in the long term. The ability of a railway to ferry a large number of people or freight at one time consumes lesser energy. As described by the International Union of Railway (UIC), the railway is 'greener' and 'environmental-friendly' as it is proven to consume lesser energy than other means of transport. Besides, using the railway as part of the intermodal strategy for sustainability is significantly effective alongside the community-driven and a better environment tourism approach towards sustainable development.

The following diagram presents the framework proposed in this study:

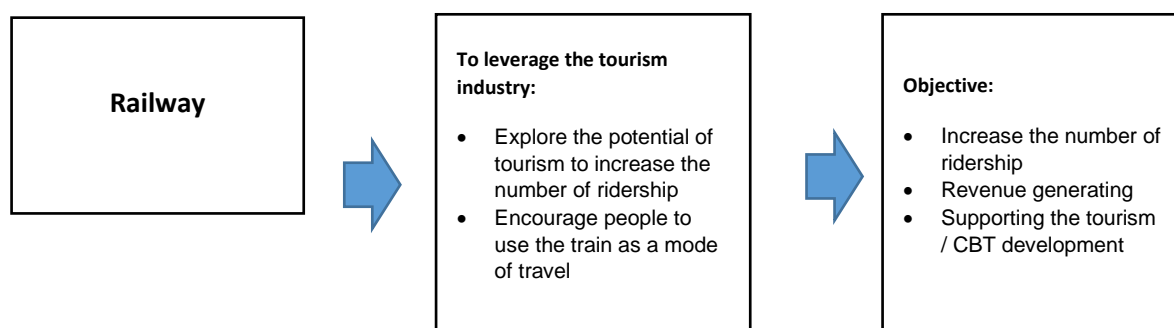


Figure 1. The proposed framework

Conclusion

In struggling to increase the number of ridership, strategies to encourage railway transportation must be undertaken. One of the strategies is to leverage tourism. By closely collaborating with all the related parties, a wide range of tourism alternatives can be offered by combining onboard experience, theme, exclusivity, and technology. This study determines the potential of the railway to manipulate the advantage of railway connectivity to the rural area where CBT destination is often located. As there is a growing concern towards sustainable practice, CBT is a form of sustainable tourism with a community-driven objective that could be exploited. The combination of homestay experience with train rides may give a unique holiday experience to the tourist. The approach will attract people, particularly the tourists, to ride the train and experience the attractive onboard entertainment, socialising, and enjoy foods and drinks with specific themes. For instance, tourists can experience Eid-ul-Adha and Qurbani in Malaysian villages and a full range of authentic traditional and cultural activities at the chosen homestay. This initiative could be one of the efforts by railway operators to encourage train ridership. Railway, besides a means of travel, is essential for tourism to ferry tourists and a form of tourism attraction. Thus, the initiative will benefit the railway and CBT to sustain business and future development. This initiative also supports sustainable practice towards a better living and environment.

This study contributes by exploring the factors that will help railway to fulfil objective of increasing its ridership and revenue. The strong competition from other modes of transport, particularly the road transport, railway volume of passenger has declined. Tourism is seen as an initiative for railway to encourage people to travel by train aimed to fulfil its objective while concurrently promoting community based tourism for rural sustainability and supporting sustainable tourism.

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