Revised Manuscript

Original Article

A Study for Designing and Analysis of a School Bus Project for the Municipality in Southern Thailand

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Abstract

The key characteristic of the public transport project is having challenging requirements and various stakeholders involved like a school bus project in this research. To substantiate the designing and analysis of such a project's performance, much information will be required to convince the stakeholders. Hence, acquiring the project information requires a solid framework for understanding and projecting the unseen problems that impacted the stakeholders. This research studies to design and analyse a school bus system in Hat Yai City Municipality. The study process was formulated on the feasibility study framework consisting of market, technical, and economic study. The quantitative techniques were effectively applied, including behavioural customers study, city transportation designing, simulation modelling, and economic analysis. The predicted system performances and analysis results were generated as available information for the stakeholders to make an insightful

assessment. The proposed framework can be an incisive guideline for the designing and analysis of other projects.

Keywords: transportation designing; public project; school bus system; computer simulation, ProModel®

1. Introduction

Hat Yai City is the regional centre of education in lower Southern Thailand. At present, the total number of students is about 55,000. The projected number of students in the year 2027 is about 80,000. Ordinarily, most students use personal transport for travel to and from school which spawns a high number of road trips and results in traffic congestion during school prime time between 6:30-8:00 am and 3:30-6:30 pm. The behavior of traffic congestion in Thailand's major cities, as same as in other major cities, is recurring during rush hour in the school area and affects the vicinity area. However, the main distinction of Thailand from others is that students in Thailand do not necessarily attend a school in close vicinity to their homes; instead, they can commute across the zone to attend their schools of choice. So Voluminous student trips and serious traffic congestion can make possible traffic accidents. In past available data, the correlation between the number of students and the count of their accidents has a p-value of 0.093, so there is a strong relationship between the number of students and their accidents. This indication motivates the researchers to propose a school bus project to Hat Yai City Municipality, with the goal to provide safe, effective, and efficient transportation to students, as well as, reducing the rate of accidents in Hat Yai City. However, the designing and analysis of such a project needs an interdisciplinary discipline, such as marketing, computer, and economics, to support the analysis and draw the conclusion of whether the project is worth it or not. Consequently, this paper aims to offer a comprehensive designing and decision analysis of the study for the school bus project in Hat Yai City Municipality.

In the study, the researchers adopted research methodology from a project feasibility study, which consists of three main steps, namely market feasibility study, technical feasibility study, and economic feasibility study, in which administrating/organizing feasibility study and environmental impact study were not regarded here. Contributions of this research, firstly, designing and decision analysis of the public transport project can be attained with optimal selections under our proposed methods and set of techniques. Secondly; although the adopted techniques are plain, they still provide valuable insights to the project decision analysis. Thus, lastly, our methods generally can be adopted and applied to other public projects.

The remaining manuscript can be structured as follows. The literature review will be presented in the next section. After that, the research method will be clearly explained our approach to the designing and decision analysis of the project. Next, results and discussion will be thoroughly examined for each stage related to the research method. Lastly, the conclusion will be made.

2. Literatures Review

School Bus Routing Problem (SBRP) research is pertinent to the “Vehicle Routing Problem (VRP)”, which has been under research for a long time. SBRP is an NP-Hard problem, and it was studied and presented for the first time by Newton and Thomas (1969). That study aimed to design bus routing and scheduling for one school.

The approach can be divided into two steps. One is determining the shortest route of infinite bus capacity. The other is partitioning the single route to individual bus routes and schedules, which satisfy bus capacity, bus loading policy, and passenger riding time constraints. Later on, Newton and Thomas (1974) developed their work further for bus routing in a multi-school system. Bowerman, Hall, and Calamai (1995) presented the urban school bus routing problem with a multi-objective function and described algorithms for generating the solution. Solutions provided were the optimum number of routes, total bus route length, load balancing, length balancing, and student walking distance. Braca, Bramel, Posner, and Simchi-Levi (1997) worked on routing and scheduling multiple schools in urban areas in New York City with mixed loading allowance. GIS was applied to obtain actual travel time by student location and school location and to generate efficient bus routes and schedules considering also one-way streets. Schittekat, Sevaux, and Sörensen (2006) developed a model to select the bus stop where students will be assigned to from potential alternative stops, to minimize the total travel distance. In this model, the school was considered as a depot, and bus routings were obtained for single school problems and tested only for small-sized problems. Mix load algorithm was presented. Park and Kim (2010) provided a comprehensive review of the school bus routing problem. They summarized the various assumptions, constraints, and solution methods. They presented five sub-problems of SBRP, which are (1) data preparation, (2) bus stop selection, having location-allocation-routing (LAR) strategy and allocation-routing-location (ARL) strategy, (3) bus route generation, having “route-first, cluster second” approach and “cluster-first, route-second” approach, (4) school bell time adjustment, and (5) route scheduling. Last but not least, Park, Tae, and Kim (2012) developed a mixed load algorithm for the school bus routing problem (SBRP) and measured its effect on the number of required vehicles. Allowing mixed loads increases flexibility and gives cost savings. Bus starting points can be school, depot, or driver’s home. The constructive algorithm was developed and the number of vehicles could be reduced by 22 %.

Computer simulations are commonly used in studies on manufacturing systems, service systems, logistics systems, etc. Specifically, the use of computer simulations in transportation designing has become common. Carotenuto, Serebriany, and Storchi (2011) studied a simulation model in a discrete event environment to help plan flexible services for people transportation, named the “Demand Responsive Transport System (DRTS)”. Routing and scheduling were planned for multiple vehicles with limited capacity and time window constraints. Service by DRTS can be both static and dynamic. If the customers’ requests are known in advance, this is the static case; otherwise, the case is dynamic. External factors such as congestion or failures of user arrival were coped with within the discrete event simulation by integrating real observation data with the algorithm. El-Gharably, El-Kilany, and El-Sayed (2013) studied discrete event simulation in tackling the VRP in a stochastic environment. A simulation model was developed in the ExtendSimTM environment with three sections: router, customer, and total route distance calculator. The optimization was carried out by the Optimizer Block provided by the ExtendSimTM. Finally, since the late 1980s, GIS has had a variety of applications in various fields such as public health, sustainable development, natural resources, regional and community planning, transportation, and logistics. Shah and Adhvaryu (2016) measured the Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTAL) for Ahmedabad, India. A GIS mapping tool was applied for generating a visual illustration of PTAL taking into average walk speed and time, distances to public transport stops, and peak-hour route frequencies of different public transport modes.

The above review regarded the nature and characteristics of a school bus routing problem, effective technologies for addressing this type of problem in transportation planning include simulation and GIS which are vastly helpful for our research. The main distinction of this research from other studies is that Thai students do not necessarily attend a school in close vicinity to their homes; instead, they can commute across the city to attend their schools of choice. The research method is next described in detail.

3. Research Method

The research method, as shown in Figure 1, for the designing and analysis of the school bus project is described next. The study was initiated by obtaining data from the demand feasibility study which will be used in the technical feasibility study. The sampling method in this step was stratified random sampling, which stratified the population into three groups: kindergarten, primary, and secondary students. And sample size was calculated by Taro Yamane's equation with a 5% error rate, which yielded 400, 420, and 420 samples of kindergarten, primary, and secondary students, respectively.

In the technical feasibility step, a simulation model will be built and used as an experimental tool to provide foresight of the project performances. Practically, a simulation model which is a discrete event simulation performed a significant role in the decision analysis. School bus routing and scheduling were considered under time window constraints and multiple vehicles with limited capacity. The simulation results are then finally used in economic analysis.

Due to the complexities and numerous factors involved in the model, an analytical solution that can deal with all complexities and factors is troublesome. Thus, the ArcGIS software was applied using its powerful data visualization, query, and analysis capabilities. And simulation technology allowed tackling the complexities and stochastic nature of the problem efficiently.

The following is a general description of our simulation model. The bus stop locations are fixed first. Students will be assigned to the nearest bus stops from their houses. Routes will be generated for the selected bus stops to minimize the daily total travelled distance. In the morning, a student or a group of students will be picked up at a bus stop and delivered to a school. Vice versa, a student or a group of students will be picked up at the school and delivered to a bus stop in the afternoon.

In order to design bus routing, students' addresses and school locations were needed within the layout of Hat Yai City Municipality. While the development of bus routing is an NP-hard problem, it can be fragmented into smaller sub-problems by school zoning, which was done before addressing bus routing. A number of conditions were taken into consideration in routing, namely (1) bus stops are commonly used for students of every school, (2) specific school in each zone will be located as hubs of transportation (start-stop location for buses), (3) each route is set with a radius of 500 meters, (4) but for the first 500 meters there will be no school bus service because the demand survey found that parents who are within 500 meters between home and school are more likely to pick up and send students by themselves, (6) the bus will travel only on roads more than 6 meters wide, and (7) the morning time-window is from 6:30 am through 7:50 am, however; the bus must arrive at the last school at least 5 minutes before school starts, and the afternoon time window is during 3:30 pm through 7:00 pm. The bus routing network was then built, and the shortest path analysis used Dijkstra's algorithm.

The computer simulation model for school bus system was built using the ProModel® software package. Main elements in ProModel® such as Locations, Entities, Path Networks, Resources, Processing, and Arrivals represented the school bus system. Various declared input variables, such as traffic lights, bus stops, school buses, schools, and bus seats were managed in Microsoft Excel and imported to ProModel®. Flow of the simulation program is shown in Figure 2

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demand Feasibility Study

There were 35 schools in Hat Yai City Municipality. The planned sample sizes, which are target groups, were 400, 420, and 420 of kindergarten, primary, and secondary students, respectively; and 1,480 sets of questionnaires were distributed inducing 1,400 responses (94.60% response rate).

Statistical analysis of the demand survey is summarized, as follows. The survey of the demand feasibility study found that more than 50 % of samples are interested and intend to employ the bus service, and the highest demand for school bus service was 42.3% for the primary school students. The kindergarten level has moderate demand, about 36.8% because parents demand close supervision and high security for their children. Consequently, they may deliberate school bus is not suitable for them. The primary level students are more mature in taking care of themselves, so their parents are more interested in school bus service. The secondary level students with the lowest demand for school bus service was 42.3%. Their parents are more likely interested in bus services with economic benefits to them, and the lowest cost option may not be a school bus.

In addition, the survey data disclosed ranking of the decision factors that safety, traveling time, convenience, and price, respectively, would concern how the potential customers determine and decide in using the service. Also, Figure 3 exhibits their requirements for the service. As well, such information will be deployed as service design parameters in the next phase.

3.2 Technical Feasibility Study

Initially, the preferred bus type in this project, due to the survey, is a minibus that provides more seats than a van with a lower cost. A minibus with 30 seats and a diesel engine (175 horsepower at 2,600 rpm) is selected. Because mini-buses were chosen for the service, it was necessary to limit the routing to primary and secondary roads only. Consequently, the bus stops were designated to the main roads, with a total of 53 bus stops covering the Hat Yai City Municipality, and 64 traffic lights in the model, based on the density of students and the road network for each school. Next, school zoning and school bus routing were designed following the previously stated requirements in the Research Methods section.

The 53 bus stops located in Hat Yai City Municipality and the 2 school zones for providing the school bus service are initially planned in the project. The bus routings of zones 1 and 2 had 5 and 4 routes, respectively. A summary of the routes in each zone is given in Table 1. The proposed solutions with minimum length routes were obtained with Dijkstra’s algorithm in ArcGis Network Analyst, which integrates information on the road network accounting for one-way streets, U-turn points, speeds, etc. Such detailed information cannot be dealt with in analytical models found in prior literature.

Once the simulation model was built, it was verified and validated. The simulation was used to investigate the expected performance of the tentative school bus system. The simulation runs in this research were terminating simulations. It delivered a comparison for the SBRP between “mixed load plan” and “single load plan”. Key performance indicators of the system are travel times, the number of trips in the specified time window, bus waiting time at the red light, the total number of served students, and CO2 emission.

3.2.1 Travel times

On top of that, the preferred travel times of the customers from the survey designated during 30-45 minutes will be set as service target. A summary of the travel times from all routes is presented in Table 2 below. The minimum travel time is 21.03 minutes for the morning of the single load plan, while the maximum is 42.19 for the afternoon of the mixed load plan, which does not violate the customer requirement.

In addition, the travel times can be comparatively distinguished by zone, by types of plan, or by time window in the following Figure 4. Examining the confidence intervals of the travel times, they do not significantly differ between the school zones, types of plan, or time window, except the travel time of the morning single load plan in zone 1. Details of travel time confidence interval are also illustrated and again no violation in the customer requirement from our design.

3.2.2 Number of trips in the specified time window

The initial design was based on each route will be served by one bus so there will be 9 buses in the system. Table 1 will clarify how many trips will be operated for both zones during each time window. Overall, single load plan can generate more trips, as well.

3.2.3 Bus waiting time at red light

Likewise, the bus waiting times at traffic lights are predicted for the system performance, based on real traffic data. This is an advantage of using simulations to assess the designs. Figure 5 exemplifies a situation of the bus waiting time in the afternoon trip, in which the longest expected bus waiting time is in zone 2 (bus 1) with a time between 611.63 and 921.97 seconds. Also, the rest of the results can be realized from below figure.

3.2.4 Total number of served students

The total number of served students can be seen in Figure 6, presented in the total of students served per day. It can be observed that the mixed load having higher students served than the single load recognizably appeared only at School 6 (Zone 2, Route 1) and School 4 (Zone 1, Route 4). Nevertheless, the single load plans mostly provide greater service than the mixed load. It is not clear cut that the single load plan would guarantee better service than the mixed load plan. Also, such outputs might be concerned with the uncertainties in the simulation model. However, Park and Kim (2010) concluded that a mixed load plan has advantages in high flexibility and cost savings, whilst a single load plan could require an excessive number of buses.

3.2.5 CO_2 Emission assessment

Last, of all, the assessment of CO2 emission was performed to finalize the study and involve the city sustainability issue which is a concern of the modern transport project. It can be presented in Figure 7 and Figure 8 for the results of the assessment in this project. Figure 7 illustrates the relation map between "zone-route" and "CO2

Emission (tons/year)”, while figure 8 similarly presents the relationship between “zone-route” and “CO2 Emission per Passenger (kg/person)”. The shades in each figure are relative to the degree of CO2 Emission either “ton/year” or “kg/person”. It seems like there is a higher degree of yearly emission for a “single load plan”. However, emission per passenger has a milder degree than the "mixed load plan" due to the higher number of students served.

3.3 Economic Feasibility Study

In the technical feasibility section, we are relatively unable to make a definite choice between “mixed load plan” and “single load plan”, yet we decide to propose the mixed load plan to the school bus project because of its advantages in flexibility and cost savings of the project.

An economic feasibility analysis of the “mixed load plan” will be presented in this section. Three scenarios of the business model were considered under the economic feasibility study. The first scenario is passengers pay 16 THB per trip or 32 Baht per day (round trip). This ticket rate was set based on the demand survey. The second scenario is marking up for profit by 50% from the total service cost, including investment cost and operating cost. And last scenario is providing as a public service without charge to those who use the bus service. Results of the economic feasibility are summarized in Table 3.

The result of feasibility analysis can provide the economic insights of the project; which it seems this project is not so interesting. The output shown in Table 3 indicates that the project is infeasible under scenario 1 since all NPV and IRR results are negative, except for the case with electric buses having IRR 1.56, but this is still lower than MARR.

In contrast, with scenario 2 it was found that NPV of diesel bus and NGV bus are negative while electric bus is positive, since service costs of diesel and NGV buses are higher than of electric buses. On considering scenario 2 under IRR criteria, it can be seen that all bus types have IRR lower than MARR (20.75%), which means the project is still not feasible. About scenario 3 which is proposed as a public service, all economic indicators are not calculated. Simply, the total accumulated expenses of servicing school buses for 10 years are reported as 71,754,201 THB, 61,101,888 THB, and 54,518,275 THB for diesel buses, NGV buses, and electric buses, respectively.

Even though the school bus project is not worth the investment, a school bus service could assist parents to reduce their travel expenses. Based on the survey of demand feasibility, transportation to school takes about 58 minutes on average, per student per day. The average distance per student per day is 24.56 kilometres, which translates to fuel consumption of a car worth 12,157 THB per student per year, or for motorcycle 2,820 THB per student per year. Thus, this project could be considered as public service, such as scenario 3, that benefits and impacts many individuals. It can help reduce family expenses, fuel consumption, traffic problems, as well as accidental rates. It also promotes health and quality of life for Hat Yai people as in previous studies. The increased traffic congestion has a negative impact, due to vehicle emissions, on air pollution, which can be harmful to inhabitants' health in urban. There are several studies such Levy, Buonocore, and von Stackelberge (2010), Zhang and Batterman (2013), and Requia et. al. (2018) evaluated health impact or assessed health risks due to traffic congestion. Levy, Buonocore, and von Stackelberge (2010) estimated the economic impact of $PM_{2.5}$-related mortality attributable to congestion and Requia et. al. (2018) also performed a health risk assessment of $PM_{2.5}$. The results of both studies pointed out a significant impact on human health and the economy because of $PM_{2.5}$ emissions from traffic congestion. Zhang and Batterman (2013) studied the characteristic of traffic risk for on- and near-road populations, focusing on NO_2 concentrations. The study disclosed health risks from traffic congestion are potentially large. So public transport such as the school bus can mitigate populations' health risks. Hence this project remains worth consideration for the stakeholders in Hat Yai City. Consequently, in further study, such stated benefits may be embraced in the economic feasibility study for the sake of accurate analysis.

4. Conclusions

This research study was intended to plan, design, and analyse a school bus project in Hat Yai City Municipality to inform the assessment. The project feasibility framework was adopted for the approach, including demand analysis, technical analysis, and economic analysis which were integrated with simulation modelling to enable the focus on the decision. In technical terms, this research problem is comparable to the SBRP. The integration of GIS technology and computer simulation technology facilitated a straightforward and foreseen feasibility study supporting assessment by stakeholders. The benefits of a simulation model supplementing basic SBRP include accounting for complexities and stochastic fluctuations in the problem. The forecasts based on simulations were produced for the school bus system performance indicators and applied for the assessment process. Last but not least, not only does the research provides valuable insights for decision-makers regarding the school bus project for safe, effective, and efficient transportation of students, but also the proposed method can be adopted by other public projects.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the Southern Regional Center of Geo-Informatics and Space Technology, Prince of Songkla University, for providing instruments.

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Figure

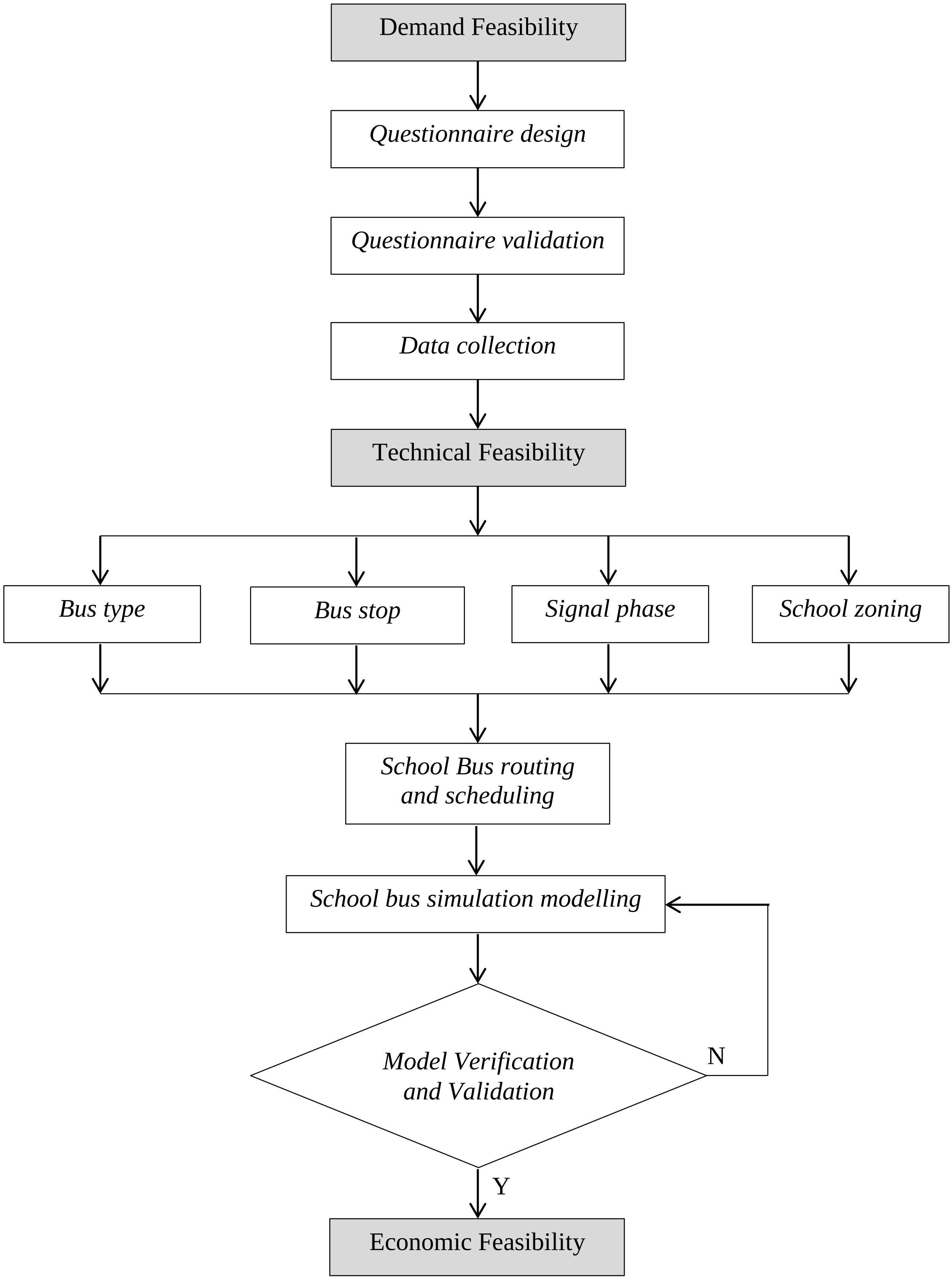

Figure 1 Research method.

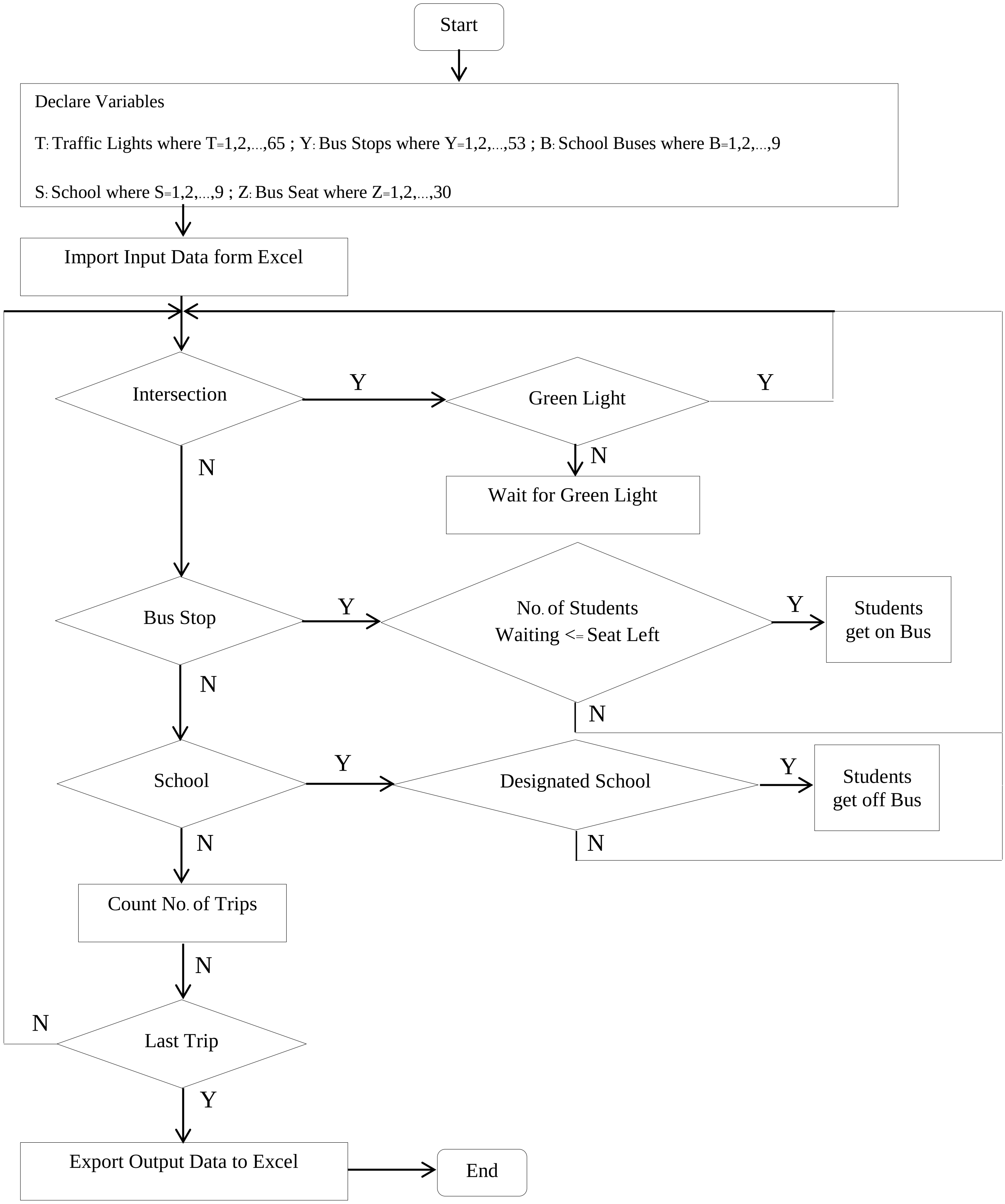

Figure 2 Simulation program flow chart. (**Kongyoung et al., 2017**)

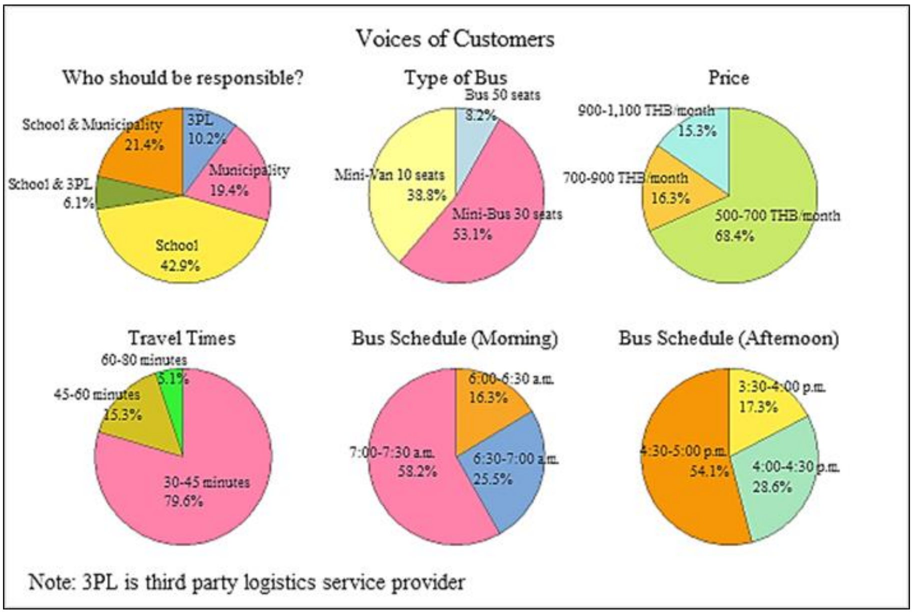

Figure 3 Voice of customers for school bus service.

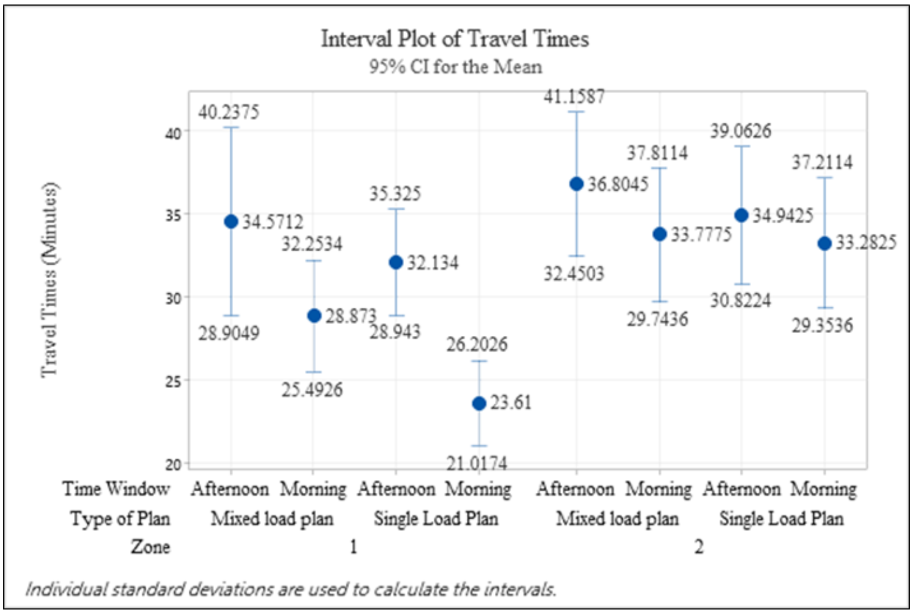

Figure 4 Bus travel times.

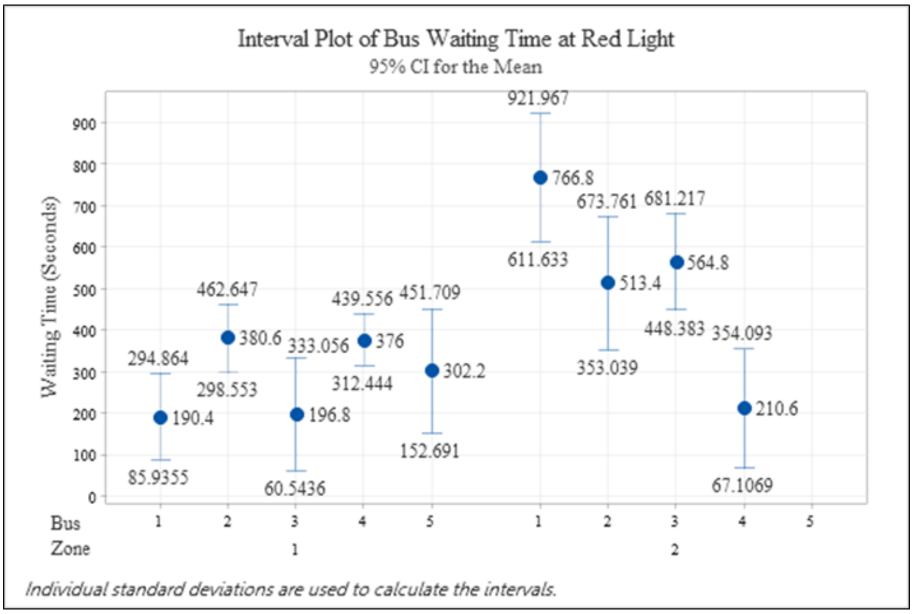

Figure 5 Bus waiting times in afternoon trip.

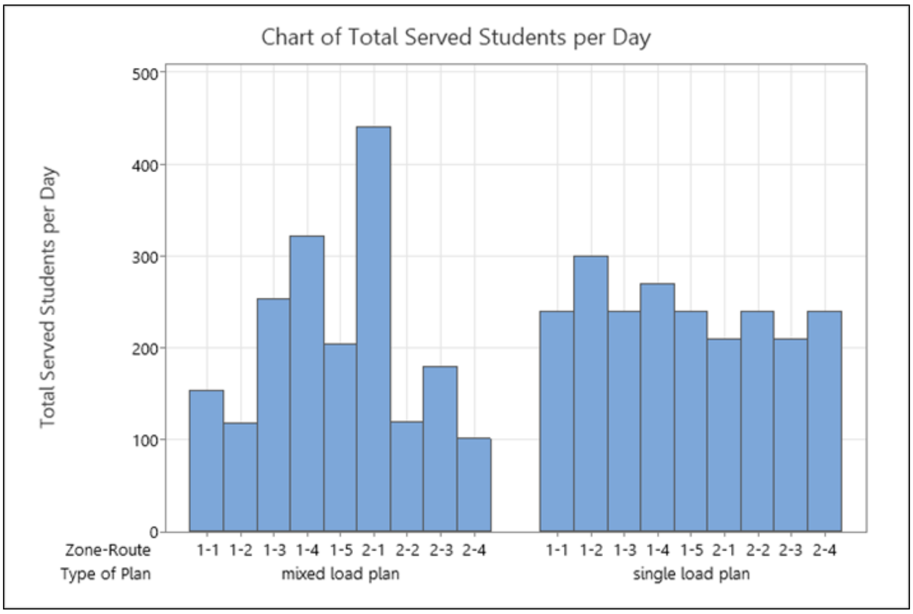

Figure 6 Total number of served students per day.

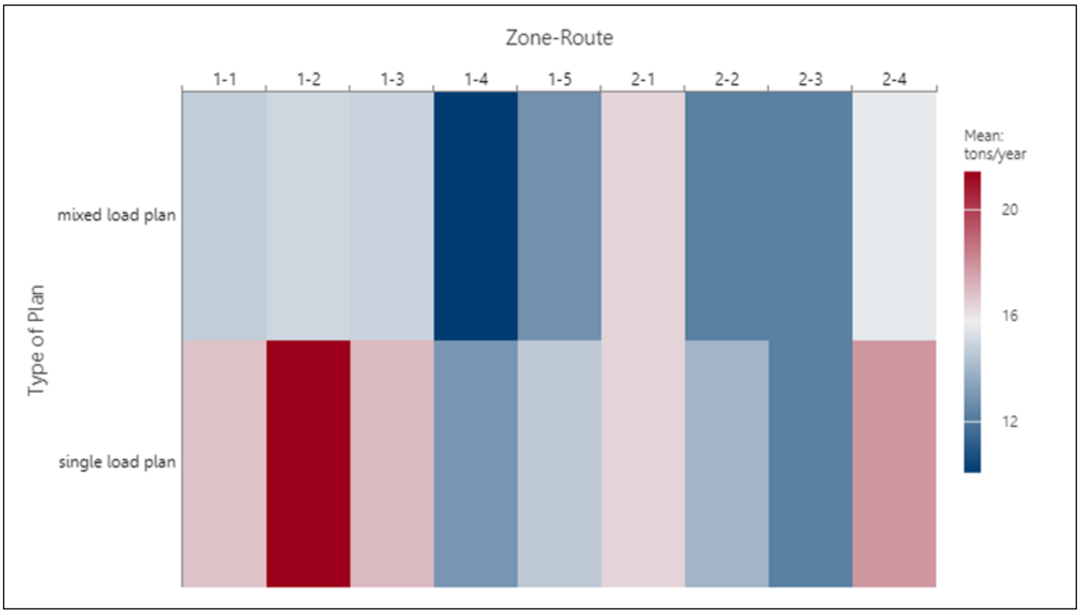

Figure 7 Ton of CO_2 Emission per year.

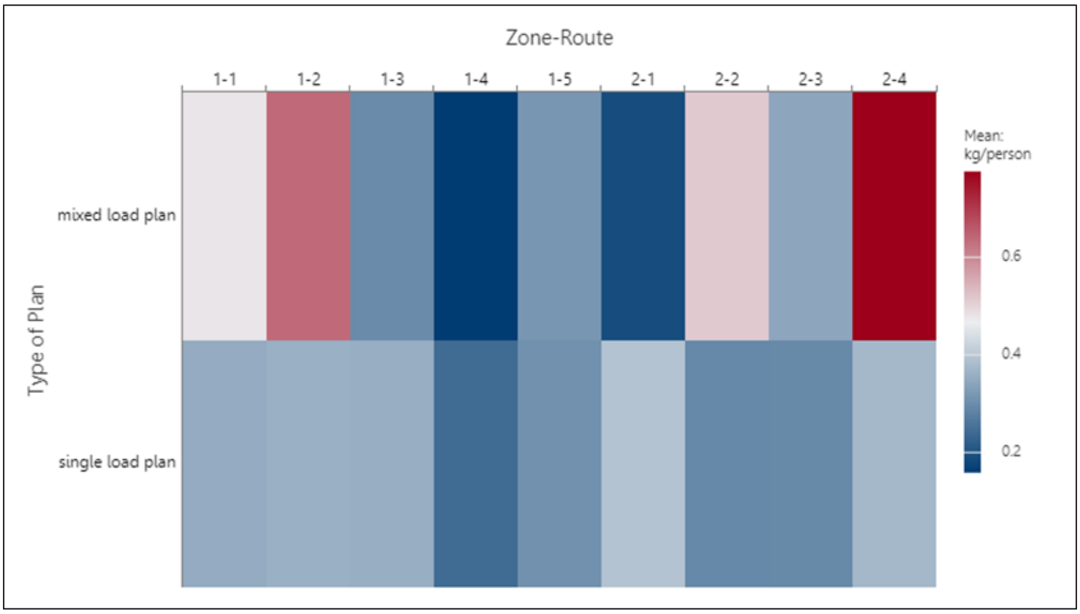

Figure 8 Kilogram of CO_2 Emission per passenger.

Table

Zone	Route	Number of Bus Stops	Number of Traffic Lights	Distance (km.)		Number of Trips			
				One Way	Round Trip	Time Window (6:30-7:50 am)		Time Window (3:30-7:00 pm)	
						Mixed -Load	Single -Load	Mixed -Load	Single -Load
1	1	10	11	14.987	29.974	2	2	5	6
	2	9	13	15.305	30.610	2	3	5	7
	3	11	17	15.199	30.398	2	2	5	6
	4	11	23	10.280	20.560	2	3	5	6
	5	10	15	13.034	26.068	2	3	5	5
2	1	12	8	16.717	33.434	2	2	5	5
	2	12	12	12.449	24.898	2	2	5	6
	3	12	18	12.510	25.020	2	2	5	5
	4	10	11	15.926	31.852	2	2	5	6

Table 1 Route information.

Plan	Time Window	Average (minutes)	S.D. (minutes)	COV	Sum (minutes)	Min (minutes)	Max (minutes)
Mixed Load	Morning	31.05	3.58	11.52	279.47	25.97	36.92
	Afternoon	35.56	3.82	10.75	320.07	30.08	42.19
Single Load	Morning	27.91	5.52	19.77	251.18	21.03	35.57
	Afternoon	33.38	2.83	8.48	300.44	28.62	37.34

Table 2 Travel times summary.

Scenario	Indicator	Fuel Type		
		Diesel	NGV	Electricity
1	Fare	16 THB/Trip	16 THB/Trip	16 THB/Trip
	NPV	-15,796,559 THB	-12,805,939 THB	-7,777,855 THB
	IRR	-6.36	-1.50	1.56
	Payback Period	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	Fare	26 THB/Trip	23 THB/Trip	20 THB/Trip
	NPV	-4,361,278 THB	-1,538,781 THB	3,489,303 THB
	IRR	5.95	8.73	13.51
	Payback Period	9 years 11 months	8 years 3 months	5 years 9 months
3	Fare	0 THB/Trip	0 THB/Trip	0 THB/Trip
	NPV	N/A	N/A	N/A
	IRR	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Payback Period	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: MARR Rate is 20.75 percentages

Table 3 Economic feasibility study under each scenario.