



SUSTAINABLE
TRANSPORT
AWARD

2026 STA Spotlight:

Salvador, Brazil

Winner

STAward.org



BRT
SALVADOR



Context & Background



Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia in northeastern Brazil, has seen significant changes in its public transport system over the past decade as the city responds to evolving mobility patterns and growing travel demand. With approximately 2.4 million residents at its core, the Greater Salvador metropolitan area and the capital serve as the region's principal mobility hub. In recent years, Salvador's urban expansion has reshaped travel patterns and increased pressure on its transport infrastructure.

As urban development spread beyond the city center to coastal and inland districts, travel distances increased, and many lower-income communities were pushed farther from the city center. At the same time, many communities became increasingly dependent on the city's public transport network to access jobs, services, and other activities. Combined with the region's steady population growth and increasing vehicle congestion, these dynamics have created mounting challenges for Salvador's broader mobility network.

In response to these pressures, the municipality launched a series of transport reforms aimed at strengthening and modernizing the public transport system. In 2014, through a competitive bidding process, a public transport tender marked a major restructuring of the city's bus system, reorganizing transport routes, improving efficiency, and modernizing service provision across the network. This reform was complemented by the 2016 revision of the city's [Urban Development Master Plan \(PDDU\)](#), which introduced new planning instruments to better integrate land use, mobility, and transit-oriented development.

Further guided by the city's [PlanMob mobility plan](#), these reforms and policies focused on improving network connectivity, expanding capacity, and enhancing service quality by developing a more integrated, multi-modal network across public buses, Metro, rail, and beyond. Improving public transport in Salvador required more than just expanding infrastructure or adding new vehicles; it also demanded stronger institutional coordination to align planning, land use, operations, and investments that could ensure that new projects genuinely improved connectivity and efficiency.

COVER IMAGE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.

THIS PAGE: Jefferson Peixoto via Secom, Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.

For Salvador, this meant strengthening the physical network through **bus rapid transit (BRT)** corridors that complemented the Salvador Metro (launched in 2014), while also improving public space around all transit hubs, with more cycling and pedestrian circulation and new community areas for surrounding neighborhoods.

investing in more inclusive governance and greater participation by women in the workforce. Through this integrated approach, Salvador has continued to transform its public transport system in recent years into a more connected, reliable, and people-centered model for other Brazilian cities to learn from.

Beyond the physical interventions, it also meant preparing the public transport system operationally for **bus fleet electrification** and



Salvador's bus rapid transit (BRT) system reduces travel time and improves traffic. SOURCE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.



The BRT enhances comfort and accessibility, and integrates with the wider public transport network. SOURCE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador (Before) and ThalesAntonio via Shutterstock (After).



Salvador is the densest major metro area in Brazil—a key factor that supports good public transport and cycling and walking trips (atlas.itdp.org). Access to sustainable transport in Salvador has risen significantly in recent years due to these reforms. In 2019, 5% of residents lived near high-capacity public transport; in 2025 18% of residents have access. Over the same period, people living near safe cycle lanes also increased from 19% to 28% (mobilidados.org.br).

Because of the city's density, Salvador's residents have broad access to essential services, with over 60% (2024) living within a kilometer of key amenities such as healthcare and education. Thus, improving essential connections between transit, walking, and cycling is key to ensuring that more people have safe, reliable, and sustainable access to such services and opportunities. Collectively, these indicators paint a picture of a dense, dynamic city where public transit and active mobility access have improved in recent years, but where more targeted investments and policies are also needed to sustain progress.

Since 2024, with stronger political leadership and institutional engagement, mobility reforms have been instrumental in charting a promising path forward for Salvador. The city and its municipal mobility authority, [SEMOB](https://semob.org.br), have continued their commitment to expanding public transport to better serve the needs of a growing population and economy, leading to the city receiving the 2026 Sustainable Transport Award (STA).

The following sections highlight several key initiatives that earned Salvador the STA honor—from expanding its BRT, to piloting electric buses, to developing inclusive workforce programs.

New e-buses are equipped with air conditioning and adapted for people with limited mobility. SOURCE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.



Moving Toward Integrated, Zero-Emission, and Inclusive Public Transport

Delivering an Integrated Network

Public transport in Salvador comprises the city's Metro, bus, ferry, and light rail as a unified mobility network. [The Salvador Metro](#), which serves as a backbone for the city's high-traffic areas, connects key neighborhoods and interchanges directly with other systems across its two-line, 38-kilometer network. Crucially, the Metro includes key connections to hubs for [BRT Salvador](#) and the general bus network, sharing stations that can complement coverage and access in corridors not served by the rail.

This integration goes further, with coordinated services between regional bus operators such as [Transalvador](#), an intercity ferry overseen by [Internacional Travessias](#), and municipal water transport and funicular lines managed by SEMOB. Collectively, these provide users with more public transport options that extend beyond the road and immediate city.

Additional public transport projects being planned include the conversion of a former railroad into a new [Salvador LRT](#) (light rail) network, the expansion of suburban cable car networks ([Teleférico de Salvador](#)) to connect more hillside communities, and the extension of water transport options to better serve coastal and island communities. These improvements are poised to connect with existing Metro and BRT hubs to expand access to more areas and deepen network connectivity and service.

As part of the effort to strengthen public transport, Salvador focused on expanding the reach and effectiveness of its BRT by improving how people access the system. Initially concentrated along the Rodoviária–Pituba/Itaigara axis, BRT Salvador's first corridor had a relatively limited-service footprint and fewer direct connections to vital destinations and transfer points.

In 2024, led by the City of Salvador (Prefeitura de Salvador) and implemented through SEMOB, the system was expanded with a new 7-kilometer corridor and eight stations, extending the BRT to Lapa—one of the city's main mobility hubs—and improving connectivity across dense urban neighborhoods such as Caminho das Árvores, Itaigara, Pituba, Brotas, and Federação.

Recognizing that high-quality public transport depends on safe, convenient access, the corridor expansion also included improvements for pedestrians and cyclists. As of 2025, Salvador has more than 240 kilometers of bikeways, about 40% of which are physically protected, according to ITDP's Atlas. Upgrades to sidewalks, street crossings, and segments of cycling infrastructure were implemented around several BRT stations, facilitating connectivity with surrounding areas and transfers to other modes. These investments represent important steps toward a holistic improvement to citywide mobility, from the Metro to the buses to the street.

Planning for Bus Electrification

Strong political commitment has played a key role in advancing Salvador's transition toward cleaner urban mobility. Guided by the city's [Plan for Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change \(PMAMC\)](#), which sets a goal of achieving carbon neutrality in the region's urban transport by 2049, the municipality adopted a forward-looking approach to decarbonizing its public transport.

Electrification was positioned not only as an environmental strategy but also as an opportunity to modernize fleet operations and improve service quality. Electrifying buses would improve air quality and reduce noise in surrounding communities, while also enhancing road safety through high-definition camera systems and integrated speed-control technologies that improve visibility and reduce blind spots.

The city began introducing electric buses into its BRT system in 2022, marking an important step toward implementing this strategy. Today, the system operates an initial pilot of eight electric buses as part of its broader fleet transition. To support longer-term electrification efforts, Salvador is also investing in foundational charging infrastructure, and it inaugurated Brazil's largest public electric bus charging terminal in 2023.

The terminal can charge up to 20 buses simultaneously and is located adjacent to the new BRT corridor dedicated to its electric fleet. The electro-terminal also allows buses to recharge within the system's operational footprint, reflecting the city's plan to roll out additional buses alongside improvements to system operations and future fleets.

The adoption of electric buses results in a quieter and more environmentally friendly system.
SOURCE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.





The BRT system has focused on safe design with ramps and level platforms for all passengers. SOURCE: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.

Public Transport for Everyone

Beyond the physical infrastructure, Salvador's transport reforms also emphasized making public transport more socially accessible through workforce development and user engagement programs. In 2022, Salvador's SPMJ (Municipal Secretariat for Policies for Women, Children and Youth) authority launched the “[Women Behind the Wheel](#)” program to train female bus drivers and address gender disparities in the local transport sector. SEMOB joined the initiative in 2024, aiming to expand opportunities for women in transport operation roles and build a more representative workforce to contribute to a safer, more inclusive environment.

Complementing these efforts, SEMOB adopted a human-centered approach to public engagement, introducing welcoming teams known as “[Posso Ajudar?](#)” (Can I help?) at

stations and collecting real-time passenger feedback through QR code surveys and social media. These initiatives help to strengthen trust between users and the system while supporting continuous improvements in service quality and safety.

Alongside these programs, the city also invested in improving the accessibility of its transport infrastructure. Several BRT stations were upgraded with elevators, tactile guidance, and level boarding to better serve passengers with reduced mobility, caregivers, and others. Improvements to the public spaces around the stations—including upgraded lighting, new community areas under elevated structures, and safer pedestrian crossings—help to create more comfortable and inclusive environments for all.

Impacts on Riders and Communities

Better Service, More Integration

- Travel times along the BRT Salvador corridor have been reduced from 45 minutes to under 18 minutes since its launch in 2024.
- The BRT Salvador system's operational fleet expanded by 75%, increasing service capacity and benefiting over 350,000 residents living in nearby neighborhoods since 2024.
- The expansion increased BRT Salvador's daily ridership by nearly 60%.
- Passenger surveys since 2025 show that more than 80% of riders report being satisfied or very satisfied with the BRT Salvador service.
- The share of the population living within 300 meters of a bikeway increased from 20% to 28% (2020–2025), based on ITDP Brazil's MobilIDADOS data (mobilidados.org.br).

- The share of the population living within 1 kilometer of high-capacity public transport increased from 6% to 18% (2020–2025), based on ITDP Brazil's MobilIDADOS data (mobilidados.org.br).

Safe, Inclusive Ridership

- The “Women Behind the Wheel” initiative has trained 26 women to join the workforce as bus drivers since 2024.
- Road safety has improved significantly: While fatal accidents were previously recorded along the corridor, no fatal crashes have been reported since the project's implementation.
- Since the new BRT corridor expansion was launched in 2024, it has reduced approximately 780 tons of CO₂ emissions, with further reductions expected as the buses expand their daily mileage up to 220 kilometers.

The Salvador BRT system currently serves 350,000 passengers daily. source: Joa Souza via Shutterstock





Plans for further BRT services will connect the city center to the international airport and waterfront. source: Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador.

Future Growth

Supported by the World Bank and partners, future actions have been planned to scale Salvador's zero-emission public transport by deploying an additional 100 electric buses on BRT corridors and adding advanced charging hubs. The program will also include investments to improve multimodal access by expanding cycling networks and deploying technological upgrades, such as traffic monitoring systems and smart

traffic signals. This expansion will continue to promote the [principles of high-quality transport](#) by enhancing Salvador's service quality, lowering emissions, and ensuring that more communities in the region have reliable, accessible mobility options.



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9 E 19th St, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10003

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