

Hope back on the seat

Mototaxis appeared in Lins in mid-1997. To start with, the service was restricted to acquaintances. The idea soon spread and agencies emerged, offering this service by phone, which was advertised in fliers and on radio stations. Due to its growth, the City tried to curb this informal means of transportation by motorcycle.

It was no use. Mototaxis were legalized in July 1999.

It was during Carnaval 1998 that mototaxis first appeared in Camocim. As an alternative for generating jobs and income, 37 unemployed offered this service. Soon after that, an association was formed to try to legalize mototaxis with the City government. But the law was passed only in 2002.

There are no buses in Camocim, due to lack of passengers.

It is hard to establish exactly when mototaxi services first began in Franca. However, in 1997, the City government no longer curbed the service and started working to legalize it. A City councilman, representing the traditional taxi drivers, was the big proponent of quickly legalizing the service. He feared predatory competition. At the same time, the city bus system was going through a difficult restructuring process.

The population was confused, and the mototaxi service took advantage of it.



Risky Business

Mototaxis meet the need for quick and inexpensive transportation, but involve political and security problems



After the first day on her new job, Carla took a mototaxi home. She was tired and had no money – she had spent everything on lunch.

She told the driver that as soon as she got home, she would run inside and get the money to pay for the ride. This kind of deal would not have been possible if she had taken a bus, which was her normal means of transportation.

It was to serve passengers like Carla that the mototaxi service was first established in Franca. The city (with 300,000 people, located in outstate São Paulo) had made no plans for this service. For passengers, it is a fast, reasonably-priced, door-to-door service. For drivers, it represents a job opportunity.

In 1997, the people quickly adopted this means of transportation around Franca. Many passengers switched to the service because they were confused by the restructuring of the bus system, which changed from district-to-district lines to routes serving a central hub. According to Orivaldo Donzelli, the City's transportation consultant at that time, the institutionalization of the mototaxis was based on the fact that it was impossible to stop this means of transportation. It was better to guarantee some basic safety and planning for this service by regulating it, which came about in 1998.

There are no national statistics on mototaxis in Brazilian cities. But it is known that, with or without regulations, the facts are very similar throughout Brazil. The pace of 21st century living demands speed, and the distances increased with the growth of the urban areas. Thus, it is no longer possible to meet commitments quickly on foot.

Engineer Rafaella Violato researched mototaxis in Lins, another city in outstate São Paulo. According to her, most of the city's passengers do not have a very high income: about

42% earn approximately US\$ 120 a month, 70% of them do not have a driver's license, and 83% do not own a vehicle. "These people have no independent means of getting around," says Violato. "This means of transportation, although not classy, meets the needs of the people who cannot afford to stand at a bus stop waiting for a bus,

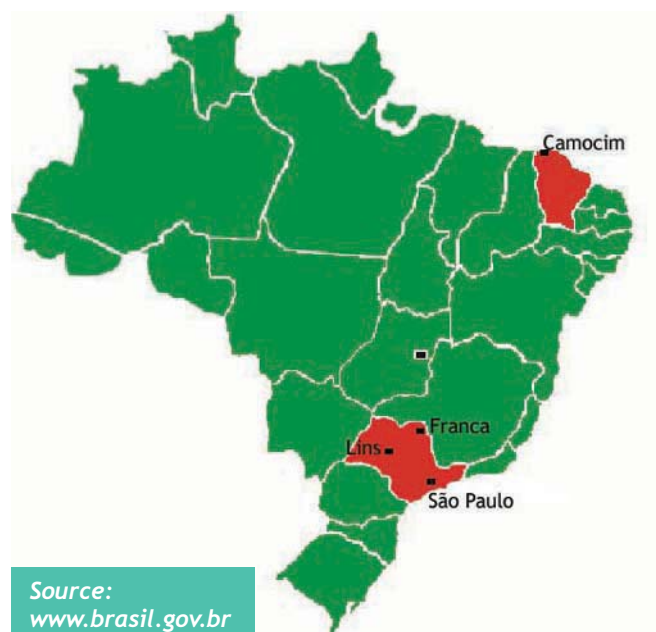
without knowing whether it will come in the next 5 minutes, half hour or even two hours.”

At the bus terminal in Franca, Eliana Cristina agrees: “I use the mototaxis because the service is fast. But when I’m not in a hurry I prefer the bus. It’s more comfortable and less dangerous.” Ednamar Cristiane, who also is waiting for a bus, is more adamant: “I prefer something safer than a motorcycle. One never knows who is and who is not a responsible driver.”

Surprisingly, mototaxi driver Marcos Rafael Veronez, also from Franca, agrees. “I hate motorcycles. I don’t like them, because they are a very vulnerable means of transportation. My riders may take drugs, and may even deal in drugs, so I take too many risks. But I don’t have a better way of supporting my three children. If I worked at my profession, I’d make US\$ 100 a month. This isn’t enough to support my family.” He works up to 17 hours a day to make US\$ 150 a month. And sometimes the income does not cover the daily mototaxi-center rate, insurance, and motorcycle maintenance.

Carnaval with a helmet on

Even those who have enough courage to try out the typical Northeastern Brazil stingray stew think twice before putting on a helmet in the equatorial heat of Camocim, a sunny little town on the coast of the State of Ceará. The law requires wearing a helmet, but many have a false sense of safety in the town’s calm traffic and wind up carrying their helmets on their elbows. According to mototaxi driver Saturnino Araújo, almost one-third of his clients have given up taking mototaxis because of the need to wear helmets, which heat up too much and, because they are shared by many passengers, may transmit scalp diseases.



Source:
www.brasil.gov.br

Mototaxi service first began in Camocim during Carnaval 1998, and the number of drivers grew from the original 37, to 184. This increase has fostered complaints among the mototaxi drivers themselves, because the greater number of people offering this service has led to smaller incomes. According to Araújo, the small town of 55,000 inhabitants should have no more than 100 mototaxis. The mototaxi drivers say that, after the regulations went into effect, openings are created and distributed by the City in exchange for political advantages. Araújo states that “just before elections, there are way too many openings granted: the politicians use this kind of service for their own benefit.”



Because of the equatorial weather, mototaxi users in Camocim don't like to wear helmets, which are mandatory

When the bumper is your head

Jaime Waisman, professor of transportation engineering, says that mototaxis can be fast and cheap, but they are not safe. "When you ride a motorcycle, the front bumper is your forehead," says Waisman. "Motorcycles weren't made to transport passengers."

Motorcycle manufacturers assure that motorcycles were designed to carry two people. "The mototaxi can be a service just like any other, as long as the professional has received special training, and knows how to instruct passengers, especially on curves," says Moacir Alberto Paes, executive director of Abraciclo (Brazilian Motorcycle Manufacturers Association).

"The mototaxi drivers are good, and handle the machine better than other motorcyclists," says Antonio Carlos da Silveira, a lieutenant in the Franca Fire Department. In his opinion, however, mototaxi drivers don't try to prevent risky situations.

If all motorcyclists tend to take chances on the streets, riding at high speeds and cutting in and out of traffic, the mototaxi drivers speed up even more, in order to handle more rides. "Safety must be improved, and this comes through traffic education and inspection," Silveira adds. He believes that if these items are followed to the letter, this means of transportation will be safe.

Many initiatives have been taken in an attempt to lower the risk of motorcycle accidents. In addition to the helmet and special courses for mototaxi drivers (which generally

include law and first-aid classes), some cities require exhaust pipe protection to prevent burns, hygienic head coverings to reduce the risk of transmitting disease, and antennas to protect motorcyclists from being decapitated by kite strings. In Franca, professionals must have insurance on themselves and their passengers (see sidebar). The use of a safety belt with side straps, worn by the driver to give passengers a better place to hold on to, didn't appeal to users.

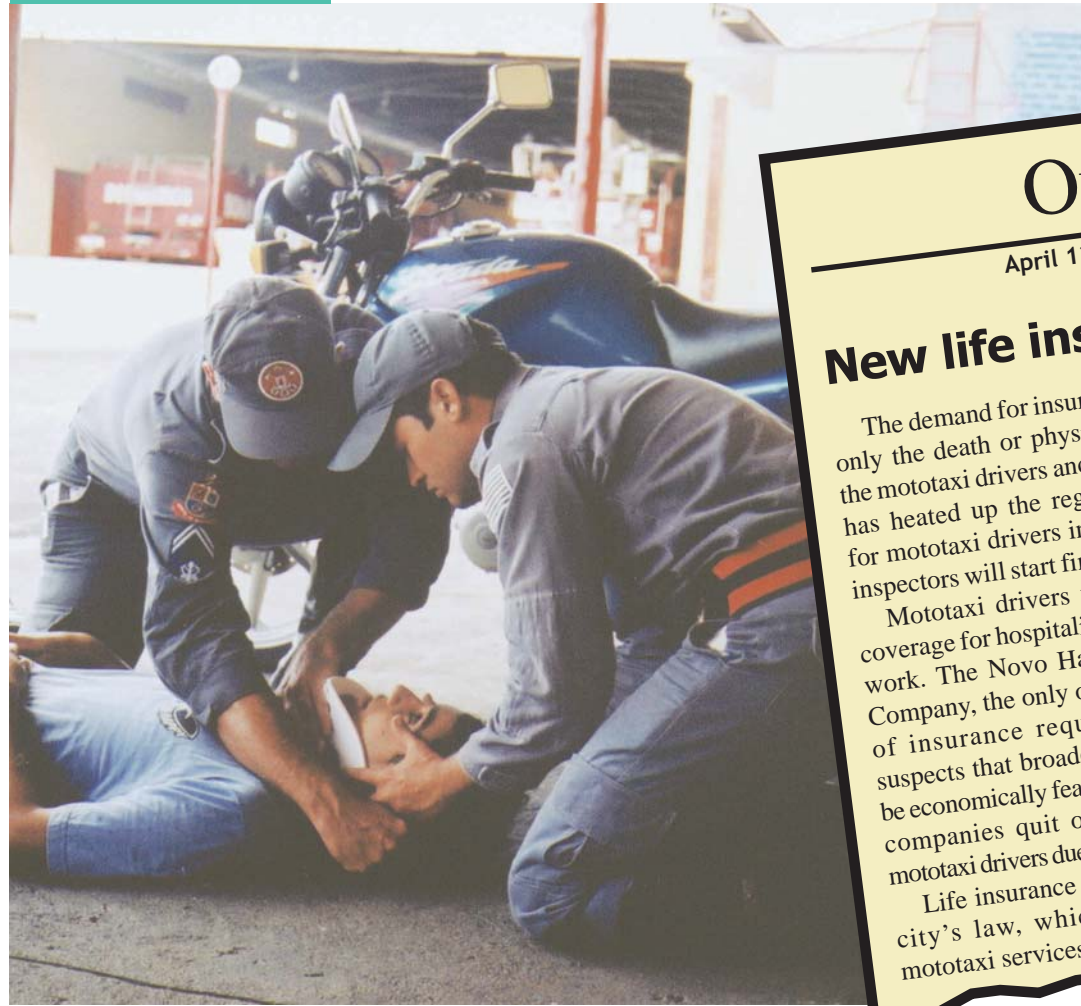
Regulations

For City governments, regulations were the only solution for controlling this kind of service. And this involved a certain amount of improvisation. "At first, no one was aware of this kind of service," explains Gustavo Urquiza, Franca's traffic coordinator.

At the Federal level, however, it was never clear if mototaxi services are legal. Back in 1997, the National Transportation Council classified the motorcycle as an inappropriate means of transporting passengers. Nevertheless, the National Department of Transportation (the executive agency responsible for this area) passed the responsibility for implementing this service to the cities.

In 2002, the Federal Supreme Court deemed the service unconstitutional, declaring that this means of transportation "does not offer the minimum conditions of health and safety to its potential users." Yet, many cities take advantage of loopholes in the Brazilian Traffic Code, to support local regulating legislation.

Firemen simulate a rescue. In Franca, motorcycle-related accidents scared away insurance companies



Outstate news
 April 13th, 2004 - Franca - São Paulo - Brazil

New life insurance heats up polemics

The demand for insurance that covers only the death or physical disability of the mototaxi drivers and their passengers has heated up the registration process for mototaxi drivers in Franca. The city inspectors will start fining transgressors. Mototaxi drivers want to have also coverage for hospitalization and days off work. The Novo Hamburgo Insurance Company, the only one to offer the kind of insurance required by the City, suspects that broader coverage may not be economically feasible. Other insurance companies quit offering coverage to mototaxi drivers due to the high injury rates. Life insurance is provided for by the city's law, which began regulating mototaxi services in 1998. According to

Marcelo Ferreira, Franca's Secretary of Urbanism, the law has attempted to improve the service, demanding greater safety and hygiene, plus life insurance. He is aware, however, that it is hard to fulfill the legal demands. Therefore, he proposes that the workers get together to change the law.

Mototaxi driver Marcos Veronez is one of the unstified. Although, he feels it will be hard to get his colleagues behind this issue. "If I were lying on the ground with a broken leg, and another mototaxi driver were to pass by, the first thing that would come to his mind is that I would be one less competing driver and, therefore, he would have the possibility of more work," he declares.



Nightfall noises

at a mototaxi stand

Here, everyone is dissatisfied. With the municipal laws, with inspections, with themselves. Teodoro* is the most hot-tempered, using harsh words, whether the camera is on or off. The others are a little reluctant. They seem to fear what foreigners may think of them.

But Teodoro is an exception. Sentence after sentence, he fires off direct and indirect criticism of public agencies and his colleagues, whose behavior only makes it harder for mototaxi drivers be accepted in the city.

"The inspections are weak. People with criminal records shouldn't be working. One was even handcuffed right here in front of us, for carrying crack." Teodoro is not worried that the colleague is standing only a few meters away, without approaching the others.

"Hey, Teodoro, you gotta tell them only the good stories," suggests Evandro*, who will not give interviews, yet he frequently whispers worriedly in his friends' ears. But Teodoro continues with his criticism. "The cops ridiculed the guy, and faced him down. They only needed two witnesses to lock him up for some time, but nobody here wanted to do it." Today, Teodoro regrets not having turned him in. In the same spirit of one who makes his own money, he suggests taking the law into his own hands.

"I've already beaten him up once. I beat the hell out of him. I kicked his face, he was all swollen up. If I had remembered that I had a jackknife in my pocket, I would have cut him, too. The next time, only one of us will survive."

His colleagues disapprove of Teodoro's big mouth, once again. They also recommend that he be more careful with his life. Nowadays, these issues are no longer settled by brute strength. They are settled by the trigger happy.

But it's no use. "I was born once and I'll die only once. I'm not afraid. My children are already grown and one of them is even working." Teodoro has two children: a 16-year-old son and a 10-year-old daughter.

By then, the camera is off, the notepads are closed and the pens are put away. The conversation flows naturally. Joelmir* has remained distant, but feels it is time for him to speak up. As if he knew what was said about him, he strikes back: "I do the dirty work and I admit it. But there are some around here who are even worse." Little by little, he reveals the job's temptations and how he was taken in by them: drug delivery can triple the monthly income of a mototaxi driver.

But this is not for everyone. Taking an addict to the point of sale and waiting for him to return is risky. Joelmir had to keep an eye out for the police and wait for his client, which drove him crazy. In order to earn more, and a little more safely, he began buying and taking the drugs to the users. "Do you want some?" he asked the reporters, who quickly refused.

There's always someone crying out "mototaxi?" at prospective customers. Mototaxi drivers depend on their motorcycles to make a living, as well as on loud voices and a speedy approach to get riders. Winner takes all. The rest remain – dissatisfied.

** In order to protect the mototaxi drivers, their names were replaced. All names mentioned are fictitious*



Arrangements for the crisis



Mototaxi business has grown in a context of economic crisis and deepening employment rates; fewer people are using the Brazilian public transportation systems

The mototaxi came into being in Brazil during a time when the economy was weak and unable to generate new jobs and income. In mid-1998, Brazil faced the Plano Real crisis: the currency was depreciated, and along with it economic growth dropped. From 1999 to 2002, the IBGE (Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute) estimates that average income dropped by about 14%.

A study done by IPEA (Applied Economic Research Institute) showed that, before the crisis, urban transportation represented around 8% of the expenses of poorer families. It was the main expense among public services. After the crisis, income went down, and fares went up. Information from the NTU (National Association of Urban Transportation Companies) shows that bus fares rose 25% above inflation from 1995 to 2002, with a corresponding drop in the number of passengers in this system in Brazil's main cities.

"In Brazil's main urban centers, the poor are being gradually forced to abandon the public transportation

system," says Alexandre Gomide, writer of a study for IPEA about urban transportation and social inclusion. In outstate cities, the picture is the same. The study by engineer Rafaela Viollato shows that in Lins, for example, the bus system does not provide good services for the suburbs. In Camocim, no public transportation system has even been implemented. Gomide states that this "results in aggravating urban poverty and the levels of social exclusion in the country."

According to transportation specialist Jaime Waisman, the mototaxis arose to cope the demands of the lower classes, who don't have access to other more efficient means of conveyance. Informal means of transportation, such as mototaxis, reach places where buses don't go, either due to the lack of paving, to violence, or because formal transportation does not find it profitable. "But we can't let this need be treated merely in a spontaneous way. After all, we are talking about people being transported," adds Waisman.



u n e m p l o y m e n t

If the need for transportation exists, so does the need for job opportunities. Most mototaxi drivers have little chance of returning to the professional job market, because they are too old, have criminal records, or don't have enough education. Therefore, they decide to become self-employed.

Miguel Resende is an exception. He finished high school and took two years of law school, but he had to give up the course because he couldn't pay the tuition. "The problem is that I can't stop working

for a long time to look for another job. If I do, I won't have money to eat," says Resende.

The NTU report adds: "several privatization and voluntary dismissal programs have led a considerable proportion of the population to set up their own businesses with the severance money they got."

In Lins, a sizeable number of mototaxi drivers are former phone company employees. The company dismissed them after being privatized. They were joined

by former employees of the meat packing plant, which is the city's main employer.

The mototaxi does not demand specialization, but only a driver's license and, sometimes, a specific course. And the capital investment is low. Because of this, it was seen as an option by many unemployed.

Mototaxi driver Daniel Alves says that he enjoys the freedom of working for himself. But he also says that there is no salary guarantee if something happens to him or to the motorcycle.

i n f o r m a l i t y

"Over the last 20 years, informality has become practically omnipresent in our economy," engineer Jaime Waisman explains. The formal economy grows very little, does not absorb manpower and suffers with the competition of cheaper products and services offered by non-regulated professionals. Without paying taxes or submitting itself to regulating authorities, the informal economy has been gaining ground in Brazil. Information from the IBGE shows that the informal sector now represents more than 40% of the occupation level in small and medium cities around the country.

According to the NTU, mototaxis handle 32% of the informal transportation, right behind vans that work as omnibuses. Like other areas of the informal economy, the mototaxi began without any planning

or control, generating protests from formal sectors. Marcos Bicalho, director of the NTU, which represents formal transportation, says it is necessary to distinguish regulation, which involves organization, controls and respect for the rules set by public services, from mere legalization. "The mototaxi is totally irregular, as well as unsafe. Therefore, we are taking this to court in the States which approve this service", he says. Unlike the vans, mototaxis have no specific route, taking passengers wherever they wish to go. Because of this, based on what can be seen today, it wouldn't make sense to say mototaxi is supporting the formal bus system. This would require adaptations.

Whether the system is formal or not, the mototaxi cannot meet the transportation demands of the handicapped,

children, and pregnant women. Neither does it give discounts to students and the elderly. According to Bicalho, services like this take advantage of the profitable parts of the system and make the bus system unprofitable.

For Marcelo Ferreira, Franca's Secretary of Urbanism, the mototaxi "hasn't disturbed" the other transportation services in the city. "The population accepted the system without any problem, and the number of bus passengers has increased daily."

Ferreira says that regular taxi drivers complain about the situation, but he thinks "there's room for everyone", since the number of mototaxis is limited by law. With the competition, regular taxis charge less, representing another advantage to the population.

d r u g s a n d e x c l u s i o n

Motorcycles move fairly easily around precarious urban areas, they are fast and able to hide. Their owners desperately need an income, don't have many prospects for the future and they are ready to take risks. This combination generates a dangerous result: it is common for drug traffickers to use mototaxis.

As the engineer Rafaella Violato sees it, people generally think that this profession is linked to crime, irre-

sponsibility and violence. The mototaxi driver Miguel Resende complains that, in the end, serious professionals pay the price of discrimination: "Because of some, all are looked upon as criminals. There are some people who don't get on a motorcycle, out of prejudice or embarrassment. And when you look for another job, if you say you are a mototaxi driver, the person doesn't even talk to you."

Alexandre Gomide's study shows that more than half of the poor urban

population belongs to families whose chief bread winners work in the informal market. These employees do not have legal work registration, and therefore do not have access to the discounts that formal transportation offers to workers. Because of this, it is generally true that informal market employees use informal transportation. "Mototaxi is a means of transportation offered by the excluded, and it targets the excluded, as well," concludes Violato.

Opinions of participants

The driver:

"This job helps me earn a little more money. It's not safe, but there is more freedom. I only finished the seventh grade. In my industry job, I earned less and was under much more pressured"

Daniel Alves
Franca mototaxi driver

The user:

"I take a mototaxi because it's faster. But when I'm not in much of a hurry, I prefer the bus, which is more comfortable and less dangerous."

Eliana Cristina
Franca resident

The competitor:

"Vans and mototaxis took over our customers. Some years ago, I used to have 6 or 7 customers a day. Now, sometimes, I don't get any."

Leopoldo Krenosz
Franca taxi driver

The specialist:

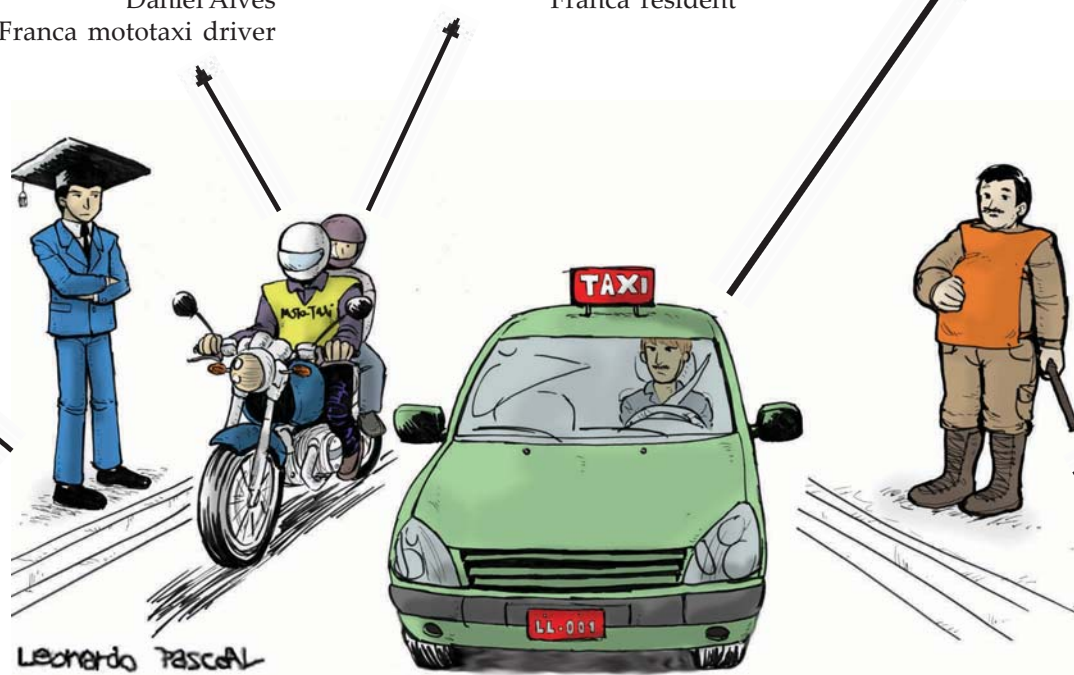
"Motorcycles were not made to transport passengers. Mototaxis can be cheap and fast but they are truly unsafe."

Jaime Waisman
transportation engineer

The administrator:

"Laws brought some control over the fees and established safety procedures. Although, for that to work, we still have to improve the inspections and stop the illegals"

Marcelo Ferreira
Franca's Secretary of Urbanism



Ideas for the future



Most of the mototaxi drivers are connected with a mototaxi agency. Agencies charge a daily fee from drivers to handle customer calls and direct drivers to the requested places. By stimulating agencies or representative entities for mototaxi drivers, public policymakers might have more control of the activity.



Mass transportation doesn't go through the suburbs, due to the lack of paving, to the steep streets, to violence, or because formal transportation does not find it profitable. A safer version of the mototaxi could be used to connect these areas to the train, subway and bus regular lines.



Mototaxis can be found in some of Brazil's main urban centers, such as Rio and Fortaleza. According to São Paulo councilman and urbanist Nabil Bonduki, a small, reasonably-priced public means of transportation would be very useful in big cities, where the streets are packed with cars. But Bonduki doesn't believe that mototaxis are the solution. Studies show that two motorcyclists die every day in São Paulo.



The public transportation companies believe that some informal transportation initiatives can be integrated into the transport system, as branches of the mass transportation trunk lines. But they don't think mototaxis serve this purpose.

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