

# GOA'S TAXI TUSSLE: A ROADBLOCK ON THE STATE'S TOURISM SUPERHIGHWAY

Goa's tourism numbers may be soaring, but its taxi system remains stuck in a time warp. Despite repeated promises of reform, the sector is mired in political resistance, fragmented operations, and a reluctance to digitise. As tourists demand seamless transport experiences, Goa risks undermining its biggest economic engine

**TEAM HERALD reports**



Goa's golden sands, vibrant culture, and charming hospitality may continue to lure tourists in record numbers, but behind the glitz lies a transportation crisis that threatens the very core of the state's tourism economy. The taxi service, a lifeline for over 1 crore tourists annually, remains fragmented, only partially digitised, and embroiled in political and social contention. In 2025, the irony of a digitally advanced India watching one of its premier tourism hubs wrestle with analogue transport policies is difficult to ignore.

According to official data from the Goa Tourism Department, tourism has seen an encouraging upswing. The year 2024 recorded 1,04,09,196 tourist arrivals, up from 86,28,162 in 2023. However, this growth story is not without its creases. While the state celebrates its expanding tourism footprint, the fractured taxi service tells a different tale - one of resistance, politics, and missed opportunities.

Goa boasts of around 20,000 taxis of varying permits and services. However, only 2,500 or 13.5% operate through app-based platforms like Goa Miles, the government-backed aggregator. In contrast, app-based services are the standard in most major Indian and global tourist destinations. For Goa to remain competitive and deliver seamless service, the state's inability to streamline and digitise its taxi system is increasingly viewed as a serious liability.

Recently, the situation escalated publicly on April 17, when a group of tourists at Zuri Resort, Varca, witnessed protests from local taxi drivers for opting to book an 'outside' taxi service to the airport. 'Outside', in this case, was not a cab service from outside Goa, or not even from the North district — the taxi that arrived to pick up tourists was reportedly from Margao.

What should have been a smooth departure turned into a confrontation, with videos of the incident going viral. The visuals embarrassed the state and prompted Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to assure the public that "every taxi in Goa would soon come under the app-based system."

Despite repeated promises, action on the ground remains sluggish. Each new incident triggers recycled statements from the



North and South Goa Taxi Drivers Association representatives



Taxi owners

transport, tourism, or chief ministerial offices, yet the issue remains unresolved.

Following the CM's statement on April 23, a strong backlash came from the North and South Goa Taxi Owners Association, which opposed any aggregator-based approach. They claim such moves threaten local livelihoods, alleging that successive governments have failed to meaningfully consult them or ensure fair systems that include local realities like poor mobile networks in parts of Goa, including Mopa.

The impasse is worsened by Goa's hyper-local political calculations. In small constituencies, where a margin of 400-500 votes can make or break an election, taxi drivers represent a vocal and organized vote bank. Consequently, many MLAs, including those in power, have either stayed silent or actively backed the anti-aggregator stance.

BJP MLA Michael Lobo (Calangute) has openly declared that aggregators will not be allowed in his constituency. Venzy Viegas

(AAP, Benaulim) echoes a similar sentiment, stating that forcing traditional taxi drivers to adopt the app would be unfair. Even Pravin Arlekar (BJP, Pernem) took swift action to restore the Blue Cab counter at Mopa Airport after its closure, a clear sign of political allegiance to local taxi interests.

While associations argue that the taxi business is one of the last bastions of local employment after the mining ban and COVID-19 disruptions, others point out that lack of transparency, inconsistent pricing, and intimidation of external taxi operators are severely harming Goa's reputation.

Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho contends that some local operators charge up to four times the standard fare, citing examples where a Rs 500 ride is inflated to Rs 2,000. He believes this kind of behaviour, left unchecked, erodes tourist trust and undermines Goa's standing as a global destination.

Godinho also argues for wider adoption of Goa Miles, citing that 60% of the users and 95% of the drivers are Goan, and that

## QUOTEROOM

“In a few days, we will improve the taxi service across the state and bring every taxi driver under the app-based taxi service”  
– Pramod Sawant, Chief Minister

“The government is asking us to join the app-based taxi service, but doesn't the government know that many parts of Goa still don't have mobile network? If one of our drivers goes to Mopa at 10 pm with an app booking, who guarantees a return fare?”  
– Sunil Naik, President, North and South Goa Taxi Drivers Association

“Some operators charge Rs 1,800-2,000 for a Rs 500 trip. This attitude denies people the option of affordable and convenient travel. GoaMiles generates Rs 10 crore in revenue annually, but the government loses Rs 100 crore every year due to unregulated taxi services”  
– Mauvin Godinho, Transport Minister

“We will not allow taxi aggregators to enter Calangute and surrounding areas”  
– Michael Lobo, BJP MLA, Calangute

“It would not be right to force every taxi driver to download the app. Locals should continue running their business from hotel taxi stands”  
– Venzy Viegas, AAP MLA, Benaulim

“It is a tragedy that Goa is lagging behind in this service. This is hurting the tourism industry.”  
– Jack Sukhija, President, TTAG

“We are also locals. We want a government-sponsored aggregator that benefits both customers and drivers.”  
– Devendra, Member, All Goa Drivers Union

“We have legal licences. We operate legally. If travel agents are booking us due to our service quality, what is our fault?”  
– Sheikh Ahmed, President, All Goa Drivers Union

the platform generates Rs 10 crore annually in revenue through GST and TDS. In contrast, the rest of the taxi sector, operating largely outside formal systems, reportedly leads to a loss of Rs 100 crore per year to the state.

While one camp resists aggregation, another less politically connected, embraces it. The All Goa Drivers Union and numerous all-India permit taxi operators are in favour of a government-regulated aggregator. Their reasoning: standardisation, transparency, and better service for tourists.

This division among drivers reflects a larger issue, class stratification within the taxi sector itself. Some local operators run large fleets backed by external investments, while others struggle to pay off loans taken to buy high-end vehicles in a competitive market.

A unified, state-mandated aggregator

with fixed pricing could level the playing field, enhance service quality, and revive trust among tourists. But unless supported by political will and grassroots consensus, such reform remains aspirational.

In today's digital-first travel environment, tourists expect on-demand mobility solutions. Booking a cab at the touch of a button is not a luxury. It is an expectation. Goa's failure to meet this standard results in poor reviews, viral controversies, and ultimately, lost business. As Jack Sukhija, president of the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), aptly notes, “This is hurting the tourism industry.”

The problem is no longer one of technology or resources. It is one of political courage. If Goa is to protect and nurture its tourism sector, which now serves as the main economic engine post-mining, then a unified, digitally enabled, and transparent taxi service is non-negotiable.

What Goa needs is not just another policy announcement but a comprehensive resolution strategy, one that involves all stakeholders and is implemented without fear or favour. It must acknowledge the local concerns, offer training and inclusion, but also firmly discourage unlawful behaviour, overcharging, and anti-competitive practices.

As the state levels up with new infrastructure links like Zuari Bridge, Atal Setu, and the Porvorim Flyover, its taxi services must keep pace. Goa cannot afford to let medieval disputes derail a modern economy.

The clock is ticking. Whether the government steers this issue toward resolution or lets it spiral further into chaos will define the next chapter in Goa's tourism journey.



Local taxi owners who don't want aggregators



Local taxi owners who are ready to go with aggregators