

Aggregator policy will protect Goan cabbies: TTAG

Team Herald

MARGAO: With the June 19 deadline for public feedback on Goa's draft Transport Aggregator Guidelines 2025 now past, the Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG) has pushed back against growing opposition to the proposal. The association argues that far from harming local taxi drivers, the guidelines are essential to protecting them from future exploitation by large ride-hailing companies likely to enter Goa's market.

Speaking to *O Heraldo*, TTAG President Jack Sukhija said the framework offers drivers a transparent, fair system with fixed per-kilometre rates and minimum assured earnings—benefits that will safeguard livelihoods as aggregators expand into Goa.

"There is a need for these guidelines to protect the interests of taxi drivers of Goa. It provides a more than fair and transparent rate that they would earn per km," Sukhija said. He warned that large aggregators often lure drivers with attractive initial schemes, only to later undercut them for profit. "This will protect them from exploitation

DRIVER PROTECTIONS FIRST: Proposed guidelines ensure fixed per-km rates and minimum earnings to protect local drivers from future exploitation

GOA MILES HAS JUST 26% SHARE: Limited availability of Goa Miles makes it unreliable—highlighting the need for broader, regulated aggregator options.

RESISTANCE TO TECH HURTS CABBIES: Despite repeated appeals, taxi unions have resisted app adoption, while younger drivers face union pressure to stay offline

HARASSMENT OF APP-BASED DRIVERS: Even local Goa Miles drivers face hostility and are often blocked from hotel premises by traditional operators

when such companies eventually enter Goa," he added.

Echoing this view, TTAG North Goa Vice-President Aakash Madgavkar said the government was taking a proactive step by laying down rules before big aggregators establish a foothold. "At some stage, these aggregators, after following due process and perhaps legal means, will enter Goa as it is a big market. Without any guidelines in place, the interests of our Goan taxi drivers will not be protected," he noted.

According to TTAG, the state-run Goa Miles service is already proof that app-based models can work in Goa, offering affordable, transparent pricing and ease of booking.

Our suggestion to the taxi drivers, in their best interests, is to help improve these proposed guidelines rather than opposing everything as these guidelines will help protect them, if and when, the big aggregators enter Goa by legal or other means

— Jack Sukhija, TTAG President

However, they estimate that only about 26% of the state's taxis are on the platform, making availability inconsistent. "Unfortunately, Goa Miles has only around 26% of the taxis in Goa, so availability is an issue and customers cannot always rely on it," the association said.

The association criticised local

taxi unions for their continued resistance to technology and app-based services. "Taxi driver unions have just been opposing apps blindly, when what they need to do is provide constructive suggestions on how to improve a system that is failing tourists and locals daily," Sukhija said. He pointed out that complaints about overcharging and misbehaviour are frequent, tarnishing Goa's image as a tourist destination.

Despite repeated government appeals over the years for drivers to launch their own apps, there has been little initiative. "The stance has been one of 'we do not want apps,'" Sukhija said. "In every sector, there is technology and apps. Almost everyone has a smartphone. It's essential for taxi drivers to embrace technology and progress with the times."

TTAG also highlighted the growing internal friction among drivers themselves. Local drivers operating through Goa Miles are reportedly being harassed by others for using app-based services, with some denied access to hotel premises. "They inconvenience and force guests at those hotels to walk

to the entrance to avail of their taxi booked on the app," the association said.

A generational divide is evident within the taxi community, TTAG noted. Younger drivers are open to digital platforms but often face pressure from unions to stay off apps, being told they would have to leave the union if they joined one. "Apps are part of daily life—for groceries, food, shopping, bus, train, and plane tickets. Why not taxis?" a TTAG official asked.

Sukhija urged taxi drivers to see the guidelines not as a threat but as a safeguard. "Our suggestion to the taxi drivers, in their best interests, is to help improve these proposed guidelines rather than oppose everything. These guidelines will help protect them if and when big aggregators enter Goa."

The association has recommended that the government implement the guidelines without further delay, stating they are "fair and open to minor adjustments" based on stakeholder feedback. Successful implementation, they believe, would mark a shift toward transparency, better service, and alignment with national goals.

VENZY BACKS CABBIES, WANTS TAXI APP GUIDELINES SCRAPPED

Team Herald

MARGAO: Benaulim Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Venzy Viegas has conveyed to the government his strong opposition to the draft Transport Aggregator Guidelines 2025, warning that the policy would undermine local taxi operators. He has called for the proposal to be scrapped and instead pushed for a collaborative approach involving coastal MLAs and stakeholders to digitise the gazetted taxi fares.

Viegas, who recently met Chief Minister Pramod Sawant along with taxi owners, submitted a memorandum to the Governor outlining his concerns. He argued that allowing multiple private aggregators would create confusion and harm the interests of Goan drivers.

"Tomorrow every third person will start their own app. In the end, locals who rely on this trade will be left behind," he said.

The AAP legislator suggested a single digital platform that reflects government-notified fares and ensures transparency for tourists and locals, without ceding control to external players.

Survey of illegal structures along Salcete highways stalled due to demarcation issues

Team Herald

MARGAO: The ongoing drive to identify illegal structures built on government land along national highways and major roads in Salcete taluka has stalled in several panchayats due to the lack of clear demarcation of government-owned land, which has left local bodies unable to accurately verify encroachments.

Following a recent directive by the High Court, panchayats and municipalities were instructed to conduct surveys to identify illegal structures along highways, main roads, and even those in agricultural areas like paddy fields.

While some progress has been made, many panchayats have been unable to complete the task due to

Out of the 30 panchayats in Salcete, only about half have managed to carry out the verification process. According to information officials, the Nuvem panchayat has identified the highest number of illegal structures, with 43 constructions found along the roadside. Rumdamol has reported 32 illegal structures, followed by Raia with 10, Navelim with 7, and Curtorim with 2

unavailability of land demarcation details from the Public Works Department (PWD).

Out of the 30 panchayats in Salcete, only about half have managed to carry out the verification process. According to information provided by the Block Development Office (BDO) in Salcete, the Nuvem panchayat has identified the highest number of illegal structures, with 43 constructions found along the roadsides. Rum-

damol has reported 32 illegal structures, followed by Raia with 10, Navelim with 7, and Curtorim with 2.

Meanwhile, a few panchayats such as Carmona, Camurlim, Cavellissim, and Loutolim have reported a small number of cases, ranging from 1 to 3 illegal structures each. Interestingly, several panchayats including Betalbatim, Colva, Orliim, Rachol, Seraulim, and Varca have reported

no illegal structures within their jurisdiction.

An official from the BDO office revealed that most panchayats are struggling with a lack of access to accurate data showing the boundaries of government-owned land. Many local bodies have formally written to the PWD, requesting the necessary land demarcation maps or data, but the department has yet to provide the information. This delay has brought the survey work to a standstill in many areas.

Despite the setbacks, some panchayats have managed to complete their surveys and submit preliminary findings. However, without PWD's support in defining government land boundaries, the overall completion of the survey across Salcete remains uncertain.

State gets tough on dilapidated buildings as monsoon picks up

Collectors ordered to take action under Disaster Management Act

Team Herald

MARGAO: The Goa government has issued strict directions to identify and act against old and dilapidated buildings that may pose a danger to life and property, especially during the monsoon season.

The directive was issued by Agnelo D'Souza, Under Secretary (Revenue-III), under provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, following recent incidents involving unsafe structures collapsing in Margao, Mapusa, and other parts of the state.

With reports of visibly deteriorating buildings in densely populated areas, the government has moved to avert potential disasters during the ongoing rains.

The order empowers the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) to take immediate preventive and remedial action. The Collectors of North and South Goa, as Chairpersons of the respective DDMAs, have

- #### KEY DIRECTIVES
- Comprehensive verification within districts to detect unsafe structures
 - Coordination with local bodies, such as municipal councils and panchayats, to update and maintain lists of such buildings
 - Mandatory structural safety assessments by qualified engineers or technical experts
 - Issuance of notices to owners or occupants of identified dangerous buildings
 - Implementation of safety measures like barricading, evacuation, or demolition where necessary

been directed to initiate a systematic drive to identify buildings that are structurally unsafe, abandoned, or unfit for habitation or public use.

The circular also warns that if local bodies fail to act promptly, district collectors are authorized to directly invoke powers under the Disaster Management Act to ensure action is taken. This includes the right to demolish hazardous buildings or initiate other preventive or punitive steps to

protect the public. "The recent structural failures in parts of Goa have highlighted the urgent need for systematic checks and enforcement. The safety of residents, particularly during the monsoon, is of utmost importance," the order states.

Collectors have been asked to submit compliance reports to the Revenue Department, which will place the matter before the government for further review.

Dirty, delayed and unsafe: Law student flags derelict state of KTC buses on Margao-Panjim route

Team Herald

MARGAO: A concerned student from V.M. Salgaocar College of Law, Miramar, has raised the alarm over the deteriorating condition of Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) buses plying on the Margao-Panjim route.



torn seats, loud engine noise, and even roof leakages that result in water dripping inside during the rainy season.

"Passengers are often left soaked and uncomfortable throughout the journey," she said.

Rebello added that bus breakdowns mid-route have become increasingly common, resulting in delays that particularly affect

school children, senior citizens, students, and daily office-goers. "The reliability of the public transport system is being severely undermined due to lack of maintenance," she remarked.

Cleanliness is another major concern raised in the complaint. The student reported that buses are often littered with plastic wrappers and leftover food

Public transport should ensure comfort, hygiene, and above all, safety. Sadly, this is not the case in KTC buses. Passengers are often left soaked and uncomfortable throughout the journey. There is clearly no effort being made to clean the buses on a daily basis. If no action is taken, I'll be compelled to approach the High Court in the larger interest of public welfare

— Avena Rebello, commuter from Chinchinim

items, both on seats and the floor. "There is clearly no effort being made to clean the buses on a daily basis," she added.

She emphasised that these recurring issues are a direct reflection of the absence of regular servicing and basic upkeep. "Public transport should ensure comfort, hygiene, and above all, safety. Sadly, this is not the case on the

Margao-Panjim route," she stated.

Calling on the Kadamba Transport Corporation to take urgent corrective action, Rebello has requested that all buses on the route undergo proper maintenance and daily cleaning. She warned that if no action is taken, she would be compelled to approach the High Court in the larger interest of public welfare.

Sale of rotten fish halted at Seraulim, police deployed to prevent roadside vending

Team Herald

MARGAO: Following public outrage over the illegal sale of rotten and unhygienic fish near the Seraulim border, authorities finally intervened on Friday, bringing a halt to the unlawful activity.

Police personnel were deployed at the site early in the morning and actively prevented any vendors from operating in the area.

Locals expressed satisfaction over the prompt response and have urged the authorities to maintain strict surveillance to prevent a recurrence of such activities.

The issue gained momentum after local resident and activist Milagres Fernandes from Fatorda exposed the illegal sale. Fernandes alleged that rotten fish was being offloaded and sold to unsuspecting buyers un-



der unhygienic conditions, posing a serious health risk.

Following his intervention, Benaulim MLA Venzy Viegas, along with concerned officials, conducted an inspection of the site. Disturbed by the findings, the MLA demanded immediate action from district authorities.

"The unauthorised sale of unhygienic fish at Seraulim poses a serious health threat. I request the South Goa Collector to act

immediately to prevent potential health outbreaks," stated Viegas.

His swift response, along with Fernandes' efforts, appears to have pressured authorities into taking timely action. While the sale has been stopped for now, residents stress that such interventions must not be temporary.

They are calling for a permanent solution, including regular monitoring and stricter enforcement against illegal vendors.

Locals up in arms about 'illegal' food cart

Team Herald

MARGAO: Seraulim locals have complained about the operation of a "gadda" or food cart on the roadside. The gadda is allegedly functioning without a valid trade licence, and authorities have so far failed to act, say villagers.

Local resident and activist Milagres Fernandes has demanded immediate intervention by the concerned authorities. He pointed out that the gadda was not only a traffic obstruction but also raising questions about legality and public hygiene.

"This gadda is functioning without any trade licence and is set up right on a public road. What's worse is the inaction by authorities, despite it being in full public view," Fernandes said.

He questioned the apparent double standards in enforcement, stating, "If Goans are being harassed



and denied permission to carry out their businesses, how is this person allowed to run an illegal business so openly? Who is backing him?"

The issue has triggered frustration among locals, who believe such unchecked activities encourage lawlessness and affect the livelihood of genuine vendors who follow the rules. Concerns have also been raised about the impact on traffic flow and sanitation in the area, especially given the proximity to a major fish market.

A song, video and a family reunion: Louis' journey home after 30 yrs

AJIT JOHN

PANJIM: A song at the Panjim fish market changed everything for 74-year-old Louis Fernandes.

Homeless, penniless, and forgotten, Louis had been singing for coins and doing odd jobs near the Panjim bus stand. But when social worker Shreya Dhargalkar heard his voice and recorded him singing, she unknowingly set in motion a reunion decades in the making. She uploaded the clip online—and thousands of miles away, in Australia, Louis' niece saw the video and recognised him. She alerted her mother in Goa, and just like that, after thirty years, Louis was reunited with his extended family.

It was the homecoming he had longed for but never expected.

Louis was born in Penha de Franca and had a happy childhood in Brittona before his family sold their home and moved to Andheri East, Mumbai. He trained as a fitter at Standard Engineering in Marol and, like many Goans, left India for the Gulf in 1981 to seek better opportunities. He worked in Bahrain for 12 years, during which time he got married and



visited home periodically.

In 1993, when his father passed away, Louis returned to India and quit his job to attend the funeral. Life took another turn when he moved to Mauritius, working in Port Louis for another 12 years, doing everything from sandblasting to odd tasks. Then, his employer brought him to Hyderabad and later Nanded, Maharashtra, where Louis would quietly spend nearly two decades, cut off from his past.

He lost touch with his wife, son, and the rest of his family during this period. He wasn't paid for four to five years and lived off what little savings he had from Bahrain. When asked why he never reconnected with his family, he simply

declined to answer.

Eventually, the desire to return home led him to borrow money from his sister and board a bus to Goa. But time had blurred memories, and Louis no longer knew where his relatives lived. With nowhere to go, he began sleeping at the Panjim bus stand. There, he was robbed of everything—his passport, certificates, even his clothes. The police, moved by his story, let him stay.

Louis got by singing for his supper, washing dishes, selling fish, and helping vendors. "Sometimes they gave me Rs 10, 20, or even Rs 100," he recalled. "I sold fish for eight or nine months. Some asked me to watch their stalls. I sold the fish and gave them the money. All the fisherfolk here know me."

It was his voice—always spirited, always hopeful—that led him back to family.

Now reunited, Louis is grateful but hesitant to impose — he has decided not to burden his relatives or move in with them. "I will not go to Mumbai either. Shreya Dhargalkar will decide. Otherwise, I'll go back to the maidan. I don't like sleeping on the floor or on someone's knee," he said.