

INTERTWINING PLACE-MAKING AND STREET STORYTELLING IN RAJSHAHI'S CENTRAL SPINE: FROM ZERO POINT TO C&B NODE

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ABSTRACT

Rajshahi's Saheb Bazar Zero Point to C&B Mor is a vital urban spine connecting historic commercial hubs with modern civic nodes. This active stretch reflects the pulse of the city through intense pedestrian activity, informal vending, and obstructed vehicular flow within a dense urban fabric. A recent local survey revealed that fewer than one fifth of sidewalks in Zero Point and Moni Chattar meet minimum walkability standards, with many paths obstructed or absent due to street hawkers. Key urban issues include vendor encroachment, poor spatial connectivity, and chaotic traffic circulation. Deficiencies in infrastructure and transitional spaces reduce the area's overall functionality. The methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches including site surveys, activity mapping, user interviews, land use analysis, pedestrian tracking, and SWOT assessments. Through time-based activity mapping, five major intersections—Zero Point, Moni Chattar, Museum, Fire Service, and C&B Mor—were analyzed using a node-based system. These nodes recorded pedestrian flows, vending zones, vehicle movement, and civic use areas. Insights from local interviews and stakeholder workshops shaped the proposed urban design. The research proposal introduces non-motorized mobility paths and vendor-zoned sidewalks, transforming the corridor into a living heritage zone where architecture merges with public life. Key features include improved public seating, safer circulation zones, and enhanced accessibility for diverse user groups. The proposed plan aims to create an organized, safer, and more usable public realm while reinforcing the corridor's role as an urban connector. These changes aim to improve urban efficiency, mobility, and public space use. Stationery shops and structured vendor areas support sustainable street life. By redesigning the spaces, sidewalks and reducing vendor encroachments will make streets more walkable, encourages non-motorized transport and healthier urban transportation. By reclaiming pace for people, the area transforms into a vibrant, inclusive, and multifunctional urban spaces.

Keywords: Sustainable Urbanism, Urban Spine Regeneration, Pedestrian Walkability, Traffic & Pop-up Urbanism, Productive & Recreational Urbanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban spines come in very important ways in the sense that it is a dynamic intermediary of cities as it serves economic, social and cultural roles both in space and time. One of them is the downtown spine of Bangladesh, Rajshahi, also between Shaheb Bazar Zero Point and C&B Mor. It is a conclusion of the complexity of interaction between the former business-like vitality of the urban areas and infant civil actions. This spine is a contentious space and at the same time a collective urban memory too together with its high concentration of body traffic, informally operating vending economies that are desirable and perennial traffic congestion. The spirit of merchants and storekeepers is still swirling around the ancient bazaar and new civil buildings are the signs of the changing face of the city. The possibilities and the obstacles to get a sustainable city development are manifold and it oscillated between the old style of zoning by land use and the infrastructural modernity. This is a mixed-use roadway which is the center of business, organizations and transit but faces the difficulties of heavy traffic, conflicting land use, and missing pedestrian amenity.

Formal and informal activities (Sara Recchi, 2019) combine to give the city a dynamic and, at the same time, unstructured space where the comfort and safety of pedestrians are often compromised. Field survey shows that this one is not a good condition corridor and can only be used in the process of promoting movement. The sidewalks are broken, fractured, and generally covered by merchants informally, parked cars and structures of power line or telephone lines that stand on the path of vulnerable passers-by. The traffic congestion can be attributed to the poor management of the curbs, the disparity between loading and discharging, and the lack of distinguishing between mechanical transportation and people. These walls are those that obstruct the walking dead, destroy the quality of our environment and render the social space a nightmare. In spite of such struggle, the street is not a dead space. It is socially and economically a bustling place; business is done in an informal manner most of the day. It includes group and popular happenings. The major purpose of the presented study is to understand the spatial, social, and environmental situation that exists in the main spine of Rajshahi and suggest the design strategies that will be able to improve the walkability (Asaduzzaman, M., 2022), inclusiveness, and identity of the city.

The paper focuses the current challenges, evaluates the functionality of the pedestrian network and the re-organisation of the space to improve functionality without interfering with the livelihoods based on the street. The other activity is to make a structure that will ensure that place making, vendor management, and mobility planning are integrated in a single urban system. As a component of sustainable development, recent research on walkability and connectivity of cities has determined the relevance of the necessity to employ systematic, readily available, and well-laid ped routes. In most medium-sized cities (such as Rajshahi), pedestrian infrastructure is usually discontinuous and not given a priority. Despite playing a very significant role in the economy of the localities, informal vending develops unchecked without the presence of spatial planning which causes circulation problems. The problems show why the integrated approach to planning is required and capable of sustaining spatial efficiency, as well as cultural and economic practices.

To overcome this problem, it requires the design and policy strategies that will take into account the two aspects of the streets as economic networks and space of the people. During the design, a consideration should also be done on the cultural and social aspects of the common spaces. Rajshahi streets are not just access roads. They describe the local memories and social identity. The aspect of civic affiliation which is required can be addressed via the inclusion of cultural values, sensory experiences and the involvement of community in the design activities. Spatial interventions are well located such that they do not harm or damage the cultural and historical material, rather on the contrary they contribute in the enhancement of the experience to enable local character being an element of the urban enhancement. In order to find the solutions to these complex problems, the study uses a mixed-methodology of determining the spatial continuity, activities trend, user survey, and stakeholder interview and review of policies using a study of five key places, Zero Point, Moni Chattar, Museum, Fire Service and C&B Mor. In the study, it is concluded that the place-making and street storytelling

weaving honor the local story, scenescapes, and lived heritage. It can be the castle of both built (non-motorized routes of movement and substituted sidewalks of vendors) and non-built strategies (memory mapping and storytelling programs). With the help of activities mapping, user interviews, and pedestrian behavior observation and land use and spatial connectivity analysis combined with SWOT analysis, the research has described the key challenges of the city in Africa and employed a node-based analytic model (using five major intersections). The suggested reworking reinvents the corridor as a way of not an infrastructure of movement, but a living heritage zone and a place-making civic site. The anticipated result is one design framework that improves the pedestrian experience, assists the street-based business, as well as, the culture value of the urban spine. The study is aimed at developing an open, accessible, flexible, and reads civic space through the integration of nonstop pedestrian lanes, vendor-specific sidewalks, inclusion of non-motorised transport, enhanced microclimatic layout, walkable (Hasan, S., & Mahmood, M., 2021), and community-friendly place-making. Finally, by demonstrating how livelihoods, identity and accessibility can be aligned with each other as a component of the entire urban design-based approach to sustainable change, the study can be contributed to broader debates on sustainable urban change.

2.METHODOLOGY

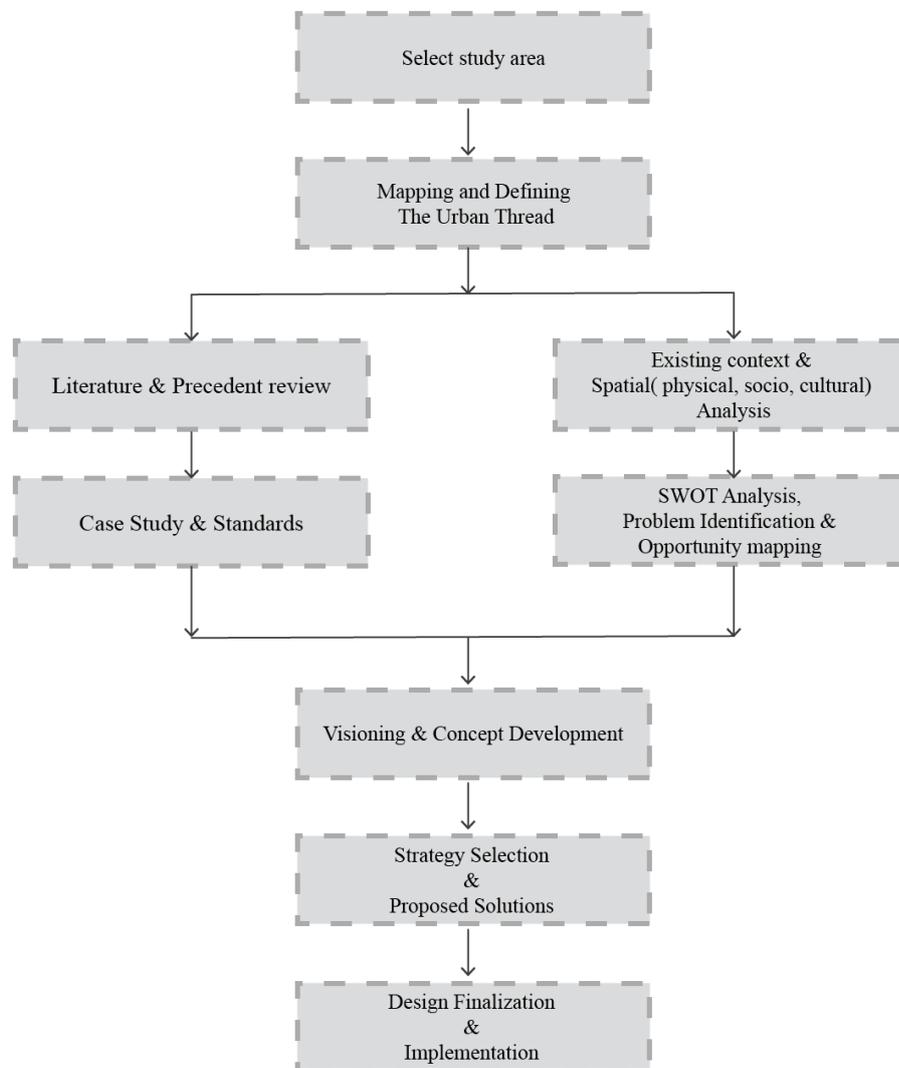


Figure 1: Methodology Diagram
Source : Author

The approach to this plan of the city was people and place based and it aimed at making an older trading street more lively and safer as a support system. This was selected using field selection that led to identification of cars, pedestrians and unofficial sellers along the spine of the space and circulation showing the multi-layered conflict. The interventions were anchored with the five major nodes, which incorporated Zero point, Moni Chattar, Museum, Fire Service and C&B and the urban thread was layered in order to curtail the daily rhythms and peak traffic. Systematic observations of each of the nodes in the morning, midday and evening over a couple of days were used to measure the daily rhythms and peak traffic. The photography and vegetation and land-use audit, modal surveys, and time-based walking counts showed that the pedestrian flows were over 1200 people per hour during the peak time. Combined with the GIS maps of sidewalks, groups of vendors, loading and unloading zones, and two and three-wheelers parking pressures, a layered image of density and conflict was formed through the overlay of these quantitative records with a qualitative research, whose goal was to listen to people who were living in the corridor. The perceptions of the demands of safety, accessibility and livelihood were demonstrated in the stratified interviews and focus groups of the students, shopkeepers, vendors, truckers, housewives, and older citizens. In order to ensure that the SWOT analysis was not based solely on the strengths and weaknesses that can be measured, their stories were thematically coded and paralleled to the evidences in the field. In addition to the need to zoning the vendors and the enhancement of crossings and micro-civic enclave, this triangulation made it possible to define underutilized civic pockets in the sidewalks and develop context-sensitive approaches based on these concepts. The second concept, which suggests node-based micro-plazas, special non-motorised lanes, and vendor performances, is called Weaving Urban Life. The piloted interventions based on the reversible measures, that is, the specified two-wheel parking areas, the experimental one-way traffic and staggered regulation strategies, were checked with the help of community feedback and the counts repeated. In spite of the fact that the process of validation was increased, through photographic audits, professional review, and maintenance of the local stakeholders, such ethics as informed consent and anonymization were observed. Movement, memory, culture, commerce became again part of the spine, and development of design turned the concept into a set of practical strategies that can bring a compromise between the human-centered narrative and the quantitative accuracy. The new methodological elements (sample windows, GIS mapping, triangulation, pilots, ethics) are, however, introduced in the flow of narration of your old technique (story-like, design-driven, weaving tensions into solutions).

3.0. SITE SELECTION

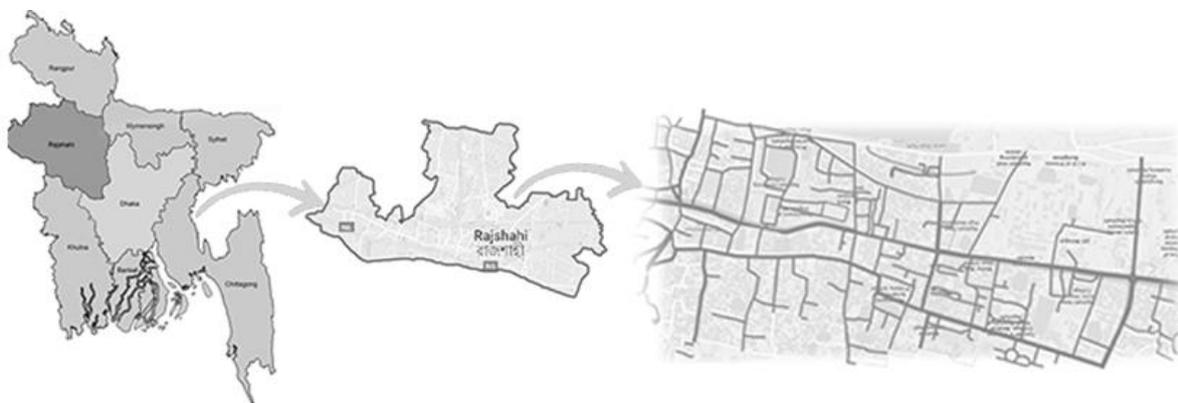


Figure 2: Site Map

The chosen area spans between Zero Point and C&B area and is one important urban corridor that connects major areas of the city. It also represents a buffer zone between institutional, residential and commercial areas, which has great potential of integrated development. A major strength is its excellent accessibility since the site is located next to major road systems and roads with access to the transport structure. The location of it is strategic and welcomes mixed-use development, open spaces, and

interventions that are pedestrian oriented. The environment surrounding the project comprises of schools, government buildings and green spaces which can be used to improve the connectivity, social interaction and quality of the environment by designing the space carefully.

4.1. SITE VISIONING

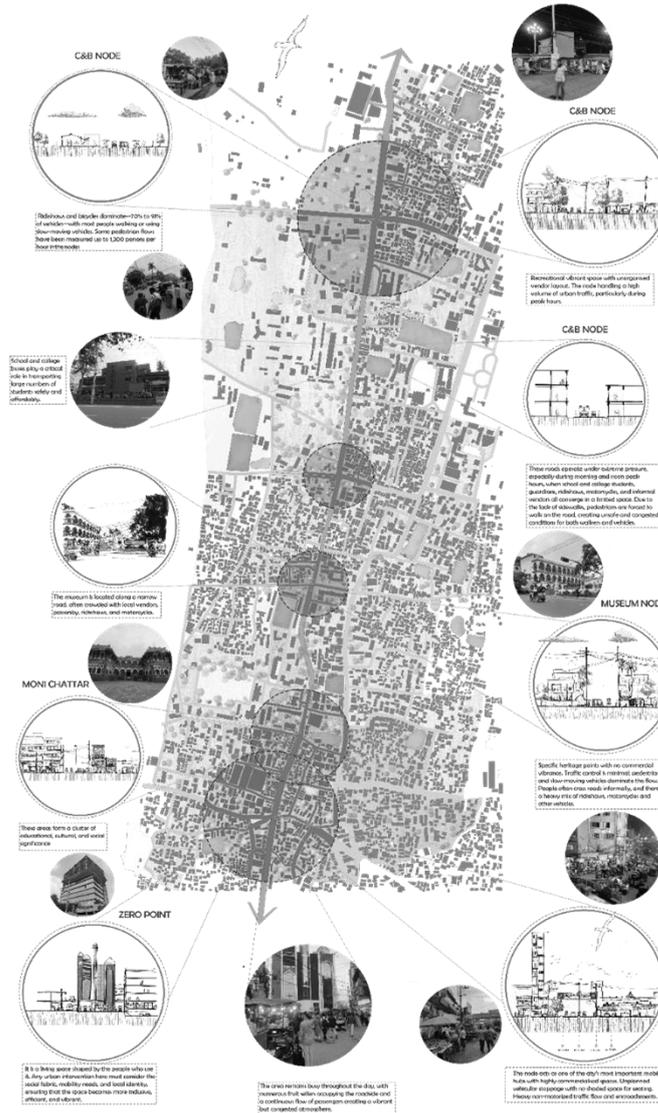


Figure 3: Existing plan

4.2. PROBLEM SPECIFICATION

Zero point Node

There are many vehicles as well as sellers on the road resulting in a lot of traffic jam. The footpath is used by the vendors and this takes up the pedestrians on one side of the road, thus adding more congestion.

Moni Chatter Node

Parking is disorganized close to the footpath. The pond is not being utilized in a good manner. The traffic jam is caused by vehicles that are waiting too long to take in passengers as well as road side merchants.

Museum Node

Outside the museum the seating area is in the walking walkway, thus making the people use the road. There are opposite side vendors that obstruct the footpath and road. On the one hand, there is a bamboo stall that is set up along the narrow one-lane road; on the other hand, there is a mosque situated on the other side, which forms a tightly-packed streetscape between the fire service and the museum.

Fire Service Node

The fire service is on one side of the road, and on the other, there are many vendors which make the place crowded and congested.

C & B Mor

Although there is a college in the vicinity, the unsafe crossings are compelling students to walk on the road.

The pedestrians are blocked by an overbridge and the food sellers facing the restaurant occupy space leading to obstructions that hinder movement of the pedestrians and visitors.

Suppliers are placed on either side of the road thus forming a massive traffic of customers.

4.3. PROPOSED SOLUTION

1. C&B Mor

i. Recreational Urbanism(Recreational urbanism incorporates play, leisure and relaxation into the mainstream urban centers): To make sure that the intersection is more people-friendly, small shaded seats, green edges, and small plazas are provided. (A.S.M. Shuaib, 2021)

ii. Pop-up Urbanism (Pop-up urbanism is an inexpensive and quick model of urban intervention, involving the alteration of public spaces and places of interest in the short term to test new ideas, renew abandoned spaces, and respond to urgent needs of the community): Kiosks, stalls, and mobile cafes will fill in the street and bring it to life.

(The risks of Dhaka street vendors, 2022).

iii. Traffic Urbanism (Traffic urbanism is an approach to urban design and planning that emphasizes the regulation, minimization of traffic, and re-organization of traffic to improve the quality of public space, reduce traffic waste, and increase its safety): The application of crossings, signals, and cycling is imitated in such a manner that the flow of traffic and people is smoother and safer. Continuity is created through traffic organization, and the moments of slowing are created with the help of recreational edges and activities that appear between the traffic. The transition is also narrated figuratively by the intersection, where movement momentarily changes into social experience and goes back into disappearance. Footpath Design Guideline, 2022)

2. New Degree College

i. Educational Urbanism: The student courtyard and stationery shop at educational locations have been designed in such a way as to increase the durability of the process of education and help in the involvement of community. (Activity Mapping in Urban Design, 2022)

3. Jaikhana Mor

i. Recreational Urbanism: Unused roadbeds are converted into recreational landscape spaces in an effort to make the neighborhood more walkable and allow the community to have spaces to gather. (Hefei Wang, 2020)

4. Fire Station Area

i. Traffic Urbanism: Traffic patterns are redesigned to flow better and be capable of reaching emergency and crossings. (Julius Akotia, 2023)

ii. Recreational Urbanism: Soft landscape and small sitting areas are introduced to make the space vibrant and offer pedestrian comfort. (Public Space in Urban Asia, 2018)

5. Jadughor Mor

i. Pop-up Urbanism: Temporary events, stalls, and seasonal activities are arranged to keep the space active and adaptive. (The Power of Storytelling in Placemaking, 2025)

6. Sonadighi Mor

i. Traffic Urbanism: The pond is bordered with car parking and pedestrian networks without any disturbance to the peaceful environment. (A.S.M. Shuaib, 2021)

ii. Recreational Urbanism: Pondsides benches and shaded aisles are designed for recreation and relaxation. There are several signage boards that have bits of local folklore. (Public Space in Urban Asia, 2018)

7. RDA Market

i. Productive Urbanism(Productive urbanism integrates work, production, and economy into cities): Stall layout and public zones are improved to strengthen business activities.

8. Zero Point

i. Traffic Urbanism: The node is reorganized to restructure the moving traffic and make the location more walkable. The use of temporary storytelling elements enables visitors to slowly learn about local identity using maps, timelines and available digital stories.

ii. Pop-up Urbanism: Pop-up installations and kiosks are introduced in an attempt to make the entry point dynamic and friendly. Ground marks and direction signs are also used and are subtle enough to reveal Zero Point, a point of transition, where people feel oriented and enter the city. (The Power of Storytelling on placemaking, 2025).

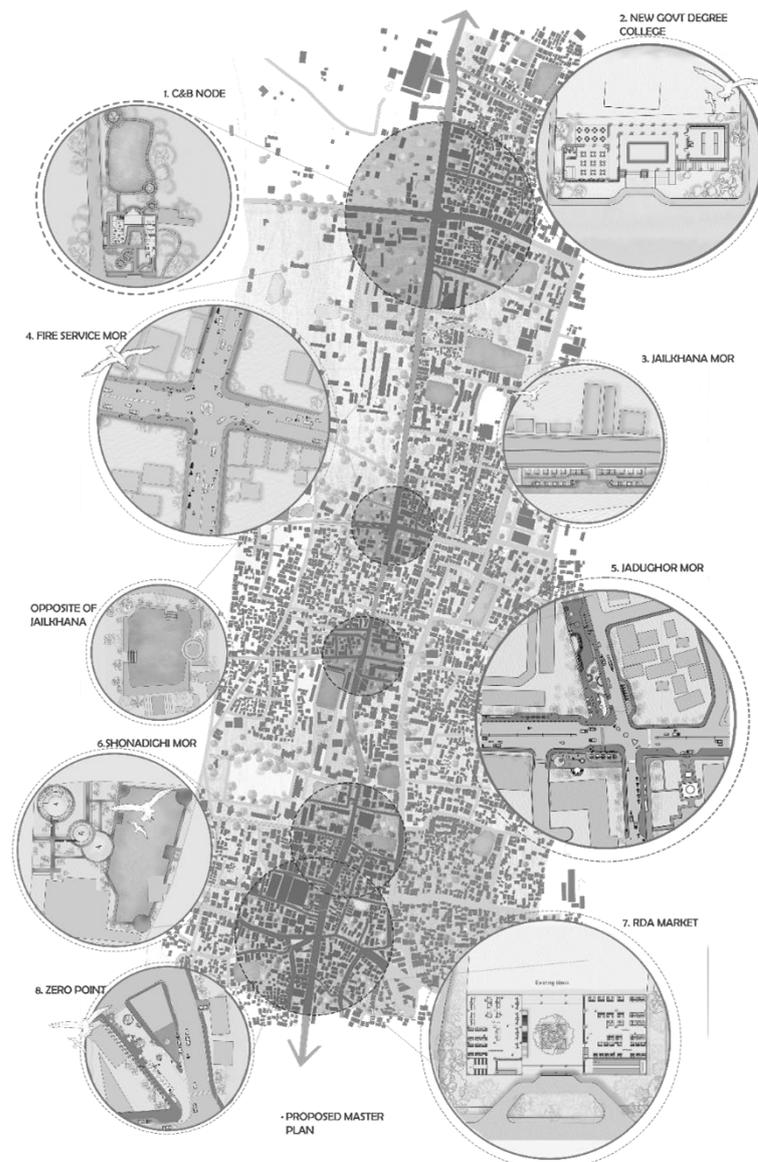


Figure 4: Proposed Plan

4.4. POLICY INTEGRATION

Policy measures play a decisive role in translating the proposed spatial strategies into operational and long-term urban interventions (Shaw & Ghosh, 2024; Islam, 2024). Rather than functioning as isolated

regulations, the corridor-based policies from Zero Point to C&B Mor are structured as spatial control mechanisms that directly address congestion, pedestrian vulnerability and unefficient land use patterns. At Zero Point, the introduction of a one-way lane system (Rahman, Chowdhury, & Huda, 2023) is not merely a traffic management decision but a spatial recalibration of movement hierarchy by reducing conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians at the city's most saturated node. Similarly, the RDA Market policy (Roy, 2021; Bangladesh Post, 2024) strategically relocates informal vendors from the market frontage through transforming an obstructed commercial edge into an organized, accessible public interface that enhances both economic activity and pedestrian permeability. At Moni Chatter, restricting loading and unloading activities between 7:00 a.m. and 12:00 a.m. (Footpath Design Guideline, n.d.; Asaduzzaman, 2022) functions as a time-based spatial regulation, ensuring uninterrupted pedestrian and vehicular flow during peak hours while retaining economic functionality during off-peak periods. Addressing junction-level congestion, the Fire Service Mor proposal (Islam, 2024; Siddique et al., 2024) expands the carriageway into four lanes as a result its role as a primary traffic distributor within the corridor and reducing bottleneck-induced delays. The Madrasha School Field policy (Tsenkova & Hutcheon, 2016) introduces a shared-use framework by allowing public access after noon, thereby activating an otherwise underutilized institutional open space and embedding community life within the daily urban rhythm. At the corridor's terminal point, C&B Mor adopts a zero-tolerance policy toward pedestrian blockage (Placemaking Europe, 2025)

Table: Policies and Strategies

Problem Identify	Intervention Point	Policy	Management Strategy
Traffic congestion, Unorganized parking & vehicular stoppages	Zero Point	Introduce one way lane	Introduced Traffic Urbanism & Pop-up Urbanism
Unauthorized vendors occupied footpath	RDA Market	Relocating vendors in front of the existing market	Introduced Productive Urbanism
Large amount of products are unloaded from heavy vehicles during morning period, lack of parking space, fruit sellers occupying roadside area & passers-by lack area of seating	Moni Chatter	No loading unloading during 7:00 a.m-12:00a.m	Introduced Traffic Urbanism & Recreational Urbanism
Lack of recreational spaces & specific seating area	Jadughor Mor	No Policy	Introduced Cultural Urbanism & Pop-up Urbanism
Narrow vehicular path made traffic congestion & lack of zebra crossing	Fire Service Mor	Creating four lane to avoid traffic congestion	Introduced Traffic Urbanism
Restricted open space & field inside madrasha which can be used as a urban pocket	Madrasha School Field	Public accessibility after noon	Introduced Recreational Urbanism
Lack of seating area along with no food stall nor resting spaces	Jailkhana Mor	No Policy	Introduced Recreational Urbanism
Lack of stationery shop and library	New Govt. Degree College	No Policy	Introduced Educational Urbanism

Problem Identify	Intervention Point	Policy	Management Strategy
Vendors occupying roadside area, unauthorized vendors at footpath, lack of recreational spaces & specific seating area	C&B Mor	Zero tolerance of pedestrian blocakge	Introduced Traffic Urbanism, Recreational Urbanism & Pop-up Urbanism

5.0. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The proposed master plan offers a comprehensive and spatially responsive approach to improving pedestrian movement, urban comfort, and overall space efficiency along the Zero Point to C&B corridor. By introducing a continuous 1.8-meter-wide sidewalk combined with clearly designated vending zones, the plan significantly enhances pedestrian level of service, allowing smoother movement for nearly two-thirds of daily foot traffic while reducing conflicts between walkers and informal traders. This spatial reorganization not only improves walkability but also contributes to thermal comfort, visibility, and safer street edges. Feedback from vendors operating in RDA Market (Bangladesh Post, 2024; Roy, 2021), Jaikhana Mor and Shonadighi Mor indicates strong acceptance of regulated vending models and shared management frameworks. Traffic simulation studies at Fire Service Mor (Islam, 2024) and Jadughor Mor further suggest that adaptive signal control and optimized junction geometry can substantially reduce congestion during peak hours. The introduction of non-motorized transport (NMT) lanes dedicated to specific movement types strengthens circulation efficiency, minimizes modal conflicts and improves overall junction performance without requiring extensive road widening. Despite persistent challenges such as peak-hour congestion, initial vendor distrust and solid waste management, the long-term success of the master plan depends on a co-management approach involving vendors, municipal authorities and local communities. This collaboration supported by flexible policy enforcement, participatory oversight and digital surveillance tools which ensure accountability while allowing gradual behavioral adaptation.

6. CONCLUSION

The proposed master plan for the Zero Point to C&B corridor represents (Hasan & Mahmood, 2021; Shaw & Ghosh, 2024) a comprehensive approach to reimagining an essential urban spine of Rajshahi. Through this study of existing socio-spatial conditions, circulation patterns, and key activity nodes, the project addresses longstanding issues of congestion, poor pedestrian accessibility, fragmented public spaces and irregular commercial growth. By introducing targeted interventions solutions such as improved traffic management, pop-up urbanism strategies, pedestrian-first policies, and new recreational and educational urban pockets, the proposed plan aims to create a more balanced, efficient, and livable urban environment.

Each node within the corridor (Hameem et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023) , from Zero Point to the C&B area has been redefined as part of a coherent system of public spaces that support both mobility and community life. Enhancements in Jaikhana Mor, RDA Market and Shonadighi Mor demonstrate how sensitive design can strengthen identity while promoting safer and more inclusive daily movement. Meanwhile, institutional anchors like the New Government Degree College reinforce the social infrastructure necessary for long-term urban resilience.

Beyond physical improvements (Shaw & Ghosh, 2024; Tsenkova & Hutcheon, 2016) , this master plan emphasizes policy frameworks that encourage better vendor management, improved streetscape quality,

and the reclaiming of public space for people rather than vehicles. Ultimately, this research demonstrates (Placemaking India, n.d.; Urban Design Lab, 2023) that strategic, human-centered planning can transform a congested urban corridor into a vibrant, connected, and multifunctional civic realm supports economic vitality, cultural expression, and sustainable growth for the city of Rajshahi.

DECLARATION OF USE OF AI

All the study, field observations, interviews, data analysis, interpretation of findings, documentation, research design, conclusion and the figures (with citations) are real, designed and conducted by the authors. To bring out the right and authentic document, Microsoft Copilot AI was applied to organize the final document, check references, and paraphrase some sections that were keenly examined, edited, and subsequently approved after subsequent checks by the authors. One of the AI technologies that have been used is Microsoft Copilot. The AI tool was aimed at creating first drafts of the text that would be edited later and also checking grammar, reference, and paraphrase. Examples of grammar correcting tools are Quilbot, Gemini and Grammarly.

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