The 8th Open Society Conference (OSC) 2026
Faculty of Law, Social and Political Science
Universitas Terbuka
DOI: doi.org/10.33830/osc.v4i1.9288 / ISSN: 3032-2227

Social Capital as Informal Mobility Infrastructure: Ride-Hailing Platforms and Transport Inequality in South Tangerang

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Abstract

Public transport is not distributed equally in South Tangerang. The problem is not only the limited number of transport modes, but also the difficulty residents face in maintaining everyday mobility when residential areas are poorly connected to major transport points. This study examines how residents respond to limited public transport through social networks and how these mobility practices change with the growth of ride-hailing platforms. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach, supported by secondary data and field observations in residential areas, transport corridors, and major mobility points in South Tangerang. The findings show that residents have developed informal mobility practices through neighbors, friendship networks, community groups, shared rides, informal pick-up arrangements, and community shuttle services. These practices function as informal mobility infrastructure that helps residents connect their homes with railway stations and other transport points. The growth of ride-hailing platforms has changed some of these practices by shifting mobility from reciprocal community-based arrangements toward individual paid transactions. Ride-hailing can help residents overcome immediate connectivity problems, but access to these services is also shaped by fares, smartphone ownership, internet access, mobile data, and digital literacy. The findings show that social capital has become an important response to gaps in public transport infrastructure, but it cannot replace the role of the state. The growth of ride-hailing also does not remove the need for affordable and accessible public transport that connects residential areas with major transport points in South Tangerang.

Keywords: *Informal Mobility Infrastructure; Public Transport Inequality; Ride-hailing Platforms; Social Capital; South Tangerang*

INTRODUCTION

When the government allows private developers to build new residential areas within a city, the development of housing should also be accompanied by adequate public infrastructure, including transport. In South Tangerang, however, residential development and population growth have progressed faster than the development of public transport infrastructure and services [1]-[3]. The rapid growth of South Tangerang as a satellite city of Jakarta has created increasing mobility needs, but public transport has not developed evenly across the city. The problem is not simply the number of available transport services. It also concerns where these services are located and whether they can reach residential complexes, small local streets, or kampung settlements. Many residents consequently rely on private vehicles to travel directly to workplaces or to the nearest railway station, contributing to increasing traffic pressure [22]. From a mobility

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DOI: doi.org/10.33830/osc.v4i1.9288 / ISSN: 3032-2227

perspective, where people live, what transport services are available, and what they can afford shape their ability to move through the city [6]. Public transport is important because it allows residents to reach employment, education, public services, and other opportunities beyond their immediate neighborhoods [7]. Mobility, therefore, needs to be understood as part of a wider urban question. It is also connected to how urban space is produced and how access to that space is distributed among residents [8].

South Tangerang's position within the Jakarta metropolitan region creates strong connections between the city and Jakarta, particularly through daily commuting. Population growth has increased demand for mobility, while urban expansion has produced different levels of infrastructure and service provision across the city [1], [2]. In 2023, South Tangerang had a population of 1,398,652, with a population density of 11,903 persons per square kilometer [9]. More than 1.2 million commuter trips were recorded across the metropolitan region in 2019, reflecting the scale of everyday movement within the wider urban system [10]. At the same time, different parts of South Tangerang have developed under different urban conditions. Large-scale developments such as BSD City and Bintaro Jaya have relatively extensive infrastructure and services, while other residential areas face more limited access to basic services and public transport [2], [3]. Research on transport development also shows that transport infrastructure and transit-oriented development tend to concentrate around particular corridors and nodes, including the Rawa Buntu area [4], [11]. These spatial differences matter because residents may have similar mobility needs but very different transport conditions around their homes.

Previous studies have approached urban transport in South Tangerang and the wider metropolitan region from several perspectives. Research on transport planning has examined issues such as smart mobility, transport integration, infrastructure development, and mode choice [4], [5], [11]-[13]. Other studies have highlighted the importance of public transport in supporting metropolitan mobility and reducing dependence on private vehicles [7]. The literature also shows that transport systems are closely connected to broader questions of urban inequality. Hidayati et al. [1], for example, demonstrate how transport-land use policies can produce path-dependent forms of mobility inequality in Greater Jakarta. From a broader theoretical perspective, mobility is shaped by social relations, spatial location, and unequal access to the resources needed to move [6]. Sheller [6] describes these conditions through the concept of mobility justice, while Harvey's [24] discussion of the right to the city places access to urban resources and infrastructures within a wider question of spatial justice. Public transport, in this sense, is not simply a matter of operational efficiency. Its distribution also affects residents' ability to participate in the social, economic, and spatial life of the city.

At the same time, the social dimension of transportation is still less visible than technical approaches in much of the Indonesian transport literature. Existing studies frequently emphasize transport efficiency, sustainable transport systems, mode choice, infrastructure, and planning [4], [5], [12], [13]. These approaches are useful for understanding how transport systems are designed and operated, but they provide less explanation of what residents do when formal services do not adequately reach their neighborhoods. Research on integrated public transport and accessibility has also emphasized the importance of information, service integration, and users' ability to understand available transport options [14]-[16]. Yet there is another practical question.

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What happens when residents cannot fully depend on the formal transport system in the first place?

Residents do not necessarily wait for formal transport services to solve this problem. They may ask neighbors for a ride, share vehicles with friends, arrange pick-up points, or use community communication groups to coordinate everyday trips. Such practices are particularly relevant in residential areas that are physically separated from railway stations, major roads, or other transport nodes. Social relationships can provide access to vehicles, information, coordination, and mutual assistance that are otherwise difficult to obtain. These relationships can therefore have a practical mobility function. Bourdieu's [17] concept of social capital helps explain this process by showing how resources can be accessed through durable social networks and relationships. In the context of transport inequality, social capital can thus operate as an informal form of mobility infrastructure. It does not take the physical form of roads, stations, or buses, but it can perform a similar connecting function by helping residents bridge the distance between their homes and formal transport networks.

One example can be seen in residential communities where residents use WhatsApp groups to coordinate shared rides, communicate travel needs, or organize community-based shuttle arrangements. Such practices can connect residential areas with major mobility points such as railway stations. Their operation depends on trust, reciprocity, communication, and the ability to coordinate vehicles and travel schedules. In this sense, mobility is partly sustained through relationships among residents rather than through formal transport provision alone. Community-based arrangements should not, however, be romanticized as a simple alternative to public transport. They require time, social relationships, vehicles, and the willingness of residents to participate. Their availability may therefore also vary between communities.

The emergence of ride-hailing platforms introduces another way of organizing these everyday trips. Services such as Gojek and Grab allow residents to request a ride directly from their homes through a digitally mediated transaction. This can be particularly useful when public transport does not reach local residential streets or when residents need flexible access to a railway station or other transport point. Studies of digital and platform-based mobility show how transportation can increasingly be organized through commercial and digitally mediated services [18], [19]. Research on sustainable transport and urban mobility in Indonesia has also raised questions about how online transportation interacts with existing public transport systems and urban mobility management [12]. Ride-hailing therefore does not simply add another transport mode. It introduces a different mechanism for obtaining mobility. A trip that might previously have involved asking a neighbor for a ride, sharing a vehicle, or arranging a community pick-up can instead be fulfilled through an individual paid transaction.

This shift is important because access to ride-hailing is itself uneven. The ability to use a platform depends on more than the physical availability of drivers. Residents need a smartphone, internet access, mobile data, sufficient digital literacy, and the financial capacity to pay for individual trips. Digital access can therefore become part of the conditions that shape mobility [20]. At the same time, repeated ride-hailing trips can transfer part of the cost of connecting residential areas to transport nodes from the public transport system to individual users. For residents who can afford and access the service, ride-hailing may reduce the immediate difficulty of reaching a station or arterial corridor.

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For others, the same service may remain inaccessible or too costly for regular use. Ride-hailing can thus respond to an existing transport gap without necessarily removing the underlying inequality.

Against this background, this study examines how residents of South Tangerang develop everyday mobility strategies in conditions of limited public transport provision and how the growth of ride-hailing platforms changes these practices. The study brings together Harvey's [8] concept of the right to the city and Bourdieu's [17] concept of social capital. The right to the city is used to understand unequal access to urban space and transport infrastructure as a question of spatial justice, while social capital provides a framework for examining how trust, reciprocity, and social networks become practical resources for sustaining everyday mobility. Bringing these perspectives together shifts attention from transport infrastructure alone to the social arrangements through which residents respond to infrastructural gaps.

The study argues that social capital can function as an informal form of mobility infrastructure, particularly where formal public transport does not adequately connect residential areas with major transport points. At the same time, the expansion of ride-hailing changes how this mobility function can be accessed. Some forms of reciprocal community mobility can increasingly be replaced or supplemented by individually purchased platform-based services. This does not mean that ride-hailing simply replaces social capital, nor does it mean that community networks disappear. Rather, the two operate through different logics. Community mobility depends on relationships, trust, and reciprocity, while ride-hailing depends on digital access, matching, and payment. Examining their relationship helps show how residents adapt to transport inequality while also revealing why technological access to mobility cannot substitute for equitable public transport provision.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how residents in South Tangerang respond to gaps in public transport and how everyday mobility practices are changing with the growth of ride-hailing platforms. South Tangerang was selected as the study setting because of its rapid residential expansion, high population density, and strong commuting connections with the wider Jakarta metropolitan region. These characteristics provide a relevant context for examining how residents maintain everyday mobility when formal transport services do not adequately connect residential areas with major transport points.

The empirical material was developed from field observations in residential areas, local roads, transport corridors, railway station access points, and other locations where different forms of everyday mobility could be observed. The observations focused on the relationship between residential areas and formal transport networks, including the availability of local public transport, walking connections, pick-up arrangements, shared rides, and access to railway stations and major transport corridors. Informal conversations with residents and regular commuters were used as contextual accounts to clarify how these mobility arrangements were organized in everyday situations. These conversations were not treated as a formal interview dataset. Instead, they were used to complement direct observations and identify recurring mobility practices and explanations provided by residents.

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Secondary data were used to establish the broader spatial and transport context of South Tangerang. These included population and population-density statistics from Statistics Indonesia, studies of residential expansion and urban development, and research on transport planning, smart mobility, transit-oriented development, and public transport in South Tangerang and the Jakarta metropolitan region [1]–[5], [9]–[16]. These sources were not used to measure individual mobility behaviour. Their function was to situate field observations within the wider pattern of population growth, urban expansion, transport infrastructure, and metropolitan commuting.

The analysis proceeded through a thematic reading of the empirical material. Particular attention was given to three connected dimensions. The first was the spatial relationship between residential areas and formal transport infrastructure. The second was the role of social relationships in helping residents overcome gaps in transport connectivity. The third was the changing role of ride-hailing platforms in everyday mobility. These dimensions were then interpreted using Harvey's concept of the right to the city and Bourdieu's concept of social capital. The right to the city was used to examine unequal access to urban space and transport infrastructure, while social capital was used to understand how relationships, trust, reciprocity, and community networks provide practical resources for mobility.

The analysis does not treat ride-hailing as the direct cause of transport inequality. Instead, ride-hailing is examined as a platform-mediated response that operates within an already uneven transport environment. This distinction is important because the study focuses on how different forms of mobility coexist and interact. Formal public transport represents institutional infrastructure, community-based mobility represents informal social infrastructure, and ride-hailing represents an individually accessed, digitally mediated form of mobility. Comparing these forms allows the study to examine how residents adapt to transport gaps while also considering how the growing availability of platform-based services changes the social organization and cost of everyday mobility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Production of Urban Transport Inequality: Density, Spatial Coherence, and the Limits of State Provision

The spatial distribution of population in South Tangerang reveals an important contradiction in the city's development. Areas with dense residential settlements are not necessarily the areas with the strongest public transport support. Pamulang, Ciputat, and East Ciputat, for example, have developed into some of the most densely populated parts of the city, with population densities reaching 11,468, 10,850, and 10,300 persons per square kilometer, respectively [21]. Yet the availability of formal public transport remains limited in these areas. South Tangerang does not operate an internal Bus Rapid Transit system, while the number of angkot units remains around 139 vehicles for a population approaching 1.4 million. The issue is therefore not simply that the city has a large population. The more important issue is the mismatch between where people live and where transport infrastructure is available.

This mismatch becomes more visible when the physical structure of residential areas is considered. A large proportion of the local road network consists of relatively narrow roads, which limits the ability of larger public transport vehicles to penetrate densely built residential areas. In neighborhoods such as West Pamulang and Pondok Cabe, residents

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may therefore need to walk some distance before reaching an arterial road or a more accessible transport corridor. At first glance, this may appear to be a minor inconvenience. For residents who make such journeys regularly, however, the distance between home and the nearest transport access point becomes part of the actual cost of mobility. Time, physical effort, and additional transport expenses accumulate before the main journey has even begun.

The consequences are not limited to the availability of public transport. High motorization and discontinuous public transport connections can reinforce residents' dependence on private modes of travel [5]. Field observations also identified recurring congestion during peak commuting periods, particularly between 06.30 and 08.00 in the morning and between 16.00 and 18.30 in the afternoon. Several transition points, including the Serpong-Bintaro toll junction in Tegal Rotan, Simpang Duren, and the Pamulang Permai–Viktor corridor, illustrate how local residential mobility becomes entangled with the wider metropolitan commuting system. These locations function not simply as traffic bottlenecks. They also make visible the spatial separation between residential areas and major employment and transport centers.

Seen from this perspective, the problem is not merely a shortage of vehicles or routes. It also concerns how urban space has been organized and connected. Harvey's [8] discussion of the uneven production of urban space helps interpret why transport accessibility does not necessarily correspond to population density. Urban infrastructure develops through particular patterns of investment and spatial development, meaning that residents in different parts of the same city can begin their journeys from very different transport conditions. The result is an uneven distribution of proximity to transport infrastructure. Residents do not start from the same spatial position, and they therefore do not face the same cost of accessing the wider city.

The development pattern of South Tangerang reinforces this condition. Research on the city has documented rapid residential expansion and the development of large-scale private urban areas, while transport infrastructure and transit-oriented development have tended to concentrate around particular corridors and nodes [2], [3], [4], [11]. This produces an urban landscape in which some residential areas are relatively well connected to major transport infrastructure while others remain dependent on smaller local connections. The issue is consequently not simply whether transport infrastructure exists somewhere in the city. It is whether residents can practically reach that infrastructure from where they live.

This is where the emergence of ride-hailing becomes particularly significant. When formal transport does not adequately connect residential areas with major mobility nodes, platforms such as Gojek and Grab can fill part of the immediate connectivity gap. Their services are convenient partly because they can operate at a much finer spatial scale than conventional public transport. A resident who cannot easily reach a station or arterial road can request a ride directly from a residential street. In practical terms, this can make mobility considerably easier. There is, however, a second side to this arrangement. The absence of a feeder connection is no longer experienced only as a public infrastructure problem. It can increasingly be converted into an individual transaction that residents have to pay for themselves.

This does not mean that ride-hailing itself creates the original transport inequality.

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Rather, the platform enters a mobility landscape that is already uneven. Its presence may reduce the immediate difficulty of reaching transport nodes for residents who can afford and access the service, while the underlying connectivity gap remains. This distinction is important. A platform can solve an immediate mobility problem for an individual without resolving the infrastructural conditions that produced that problem in the first place. Ride-hailing therefore provides an additional layer of mobility within an already unequal transport system. The question is not whether ride-hailing can move people. It clearly can. The more important question is what happens to the distribution of mobility costs and responsibilities when a gap in public transport connectivity can increasingly be filled through privately purchased services.

Social Capital as Informal Mobility Infrastructure and Its Commodification by Ride-Hailing Platforms

When public transport cannot reach all residential areas, residents do not simply stop moving. They look for other ways to travel by drawing on resources that are already available within their social environment. In South Tangerang, relationships among neighbors, friendship networks, and everyday communication between residents have become part of how people deal with limited transport access. Bourdieu [17] describes social capital as resources embedded in relatively durable networks of relationships through which individuals can obtain benefits from their social connections. Applied to mobility, this concept is useful because the benefits of social relationships do not remain confined to social interaction itself. Networks can provide information, help organize journeys, facilitate ride-sharing, and, in some situations, allow residents to reach destinations when formal transport options are limited.

Field observations illustrate how these mechanisms operate in everyday life. In residential areas such as Graha Raya, residents use WhatsApp groups to communicate about travel needs and coordinate carpooling arrangements. Residents also organize shared shuttle services whose costs are collectively covered by the community. Viewed simply as neighbors helping one another, these practices may appear ordinary. Yet they perform a specific mobility function. When adequate transport connections are unavailable between residential areas and major transport nodes, residents develop their own mechanisms for bridging that distance.

At this point, social capital is no longer simply about maintaining relationships with neighbors. It becomes a resource that can make mobility possible. Carpooling, for instance, requires a certain degree of trust because residents share vehicles and adjust their travel schedules with one another. Communication groups allow information about travel needs to circulate, while collectively financed shuttle services enable transportation costs to be distributed among participating residents. In this way, social relationships support functions that would otherwise have to be provided through formal transport arrangements. Roads and vehicles are still necessary, but the social networks behind them help determine how those resources are accessed and coordinated. This is why social capital can be understood here as a form of informal mobility infrastructure.

This finding also shows that informal mobility infrastructure is not simply an individual resource. It is produced through repeated interaction among residents. A neighbor can provide a ride because a relationship already exists. A WhatsApp group can coordinate a trip because residents recognize one another as members of the same

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community. A shared shuttle can operate because participants are willing to contribute to a common arrangement. The infrastructure is therefore social as well as material. Its capacity depends on trust, communication, reciprocity, and the willingness of residents to coordinate their mobility needs.

These arrangements do not exist outside the broader development of digital and platform-based mobility. As ride-hailing services become increasingly available in residential areas and around transport nodes, residents gain another option for journeys that were previously difficult to make. The growing use of ride-hailing also reflects changes in urban travel choices, with platform-based services increasingly used alongside public transport and private vehicles [23]. Field observations around Jurangmangu Station illustrate the presence of ride-hailing activity around a major transport node. For users, the convenience is straightforward. A journey can be requested through an application without depending on whether a neighbor happens to be traveling in the same direction or whether a community shuttle is available at the required time.

The issue, then, is not whether these services are useful. For residents who need a quick and direct journey, ride-hailing offers a form of convenience that is not always available through the public transport system. What is more important is what happens when these services enter spaces where community-based mobility arrangements already exist. In carpooling or communal shuttle systems, mobility is organized through reciprocal relationships and agreements among residents. In ride-hailing, travel needs are matched with drivers through a digital platform and completed through an individual transaction. The physical journey may look similar, such as traveling from home to a railway station, but the social relationship through which that journey is organized is different.

This difference does not mean that using Gojek or Grab automatically eliminates social capital. Residents may continue to communicate through community networks and maintain the same social relationships even when they use platform services. What changes is the function that some of these relationships perform. Mobility needs that were previously met through neighbors' assistance, shared vehicles, or collectively organized journeys can increasingly be fulfilled through services purchased individually. Under these conditions, the ability to move depends on different forms of resources at the same time. Residents may rely on social networks, but they may also need sufficient economic resources to purchase mobility services.

This is where the relationship between social capital and ride-hailing platforms becomes particularly important. Social capital emerges as a community response to gaps in formal infrastructure, while platforms provide mobility through market-mediated mechanisms. Both can operate within the same urban space and may even be used by the same residents, but they are organized according to different logics. Social networks rely on trust, reciprocity, and relationships developed over time. Platforms rely on applications, passenger-driver matching, and individual payment. The change is therefore not simply a shift from one transport mode to another. It is also a change in how mobility needs are organized and fulfilled.

When residents previously relied on social relationships to reduce travel costs or overcome limited transport options, ride-hailing provided a more convenient alternative, but one that requires payment each time it is used. In the context of transport inequality, this distinction matters. Platforms can bridge the physical distance between residential

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areas and major transport nodes, but the cost of obtaining that connection is transferred to the individual user. A problem that initially emerges from inadequate public infrastructure can therefore become a question of whether an individual has sufficient economic capacity to purchase mobility.

From Bourdieu's [17] perspective, this situation reveals a more complicated position for social capital. Social networks can provide resources that help residents navigate spatial and infrastructural constraints. However, these resources operate within an urban environment increasingly shaped by market mechanisms and digital platforms. The analytical question is therefore not simply whether social capital exists, but how its practical function changes when some mobility needs can increasingly be fulfilled through commercial services.

The findings ultimately show that residents are not passive when confronted with transport inequality. They develop ways of maintaining mobility through the social networks available to them. Yet when ride-hailing platforms enter the same mobility environment and offer a more individualized solution, some of these arrangements can change. Mobility that could previously be sustained through reciprocal relationships can increasingly be obtained through individual transactions. On one hand, this transformation expands the range of available travel options. On the other hand, it can make everyday mobility more dependent on an individual's ability to pay for each journey. The significance of ride-hailing in South Tangerang therefore extends beyond technological innovation or transport convenience. It raises a broader question about who provides mobility infrastructure, who bears the cost of maintaining everyday movement, and how residents sustain their ability to move when formal infrastructure is not equally available.

CONCLUSION

When public transport does not adequately connect residential complexes, neighborhood streets, and kampung settlements with railway stations and other major mobility points, residents develop their own ways of maintaining everyday mobility. Practices such as getting rides from neighbors, carpooling, arranging pick-ups, and coordinating trips through social networks function as forms of informal mobility infrastructure. These practices show that residents are not passive in the face of transport gaps. They use trust, reciprocity, communication, and shared resources to bridge connections that formal transport does not always provide.

The growth of ride-hailing platforms has introduced another way of maintaining these connections. Journeys that could previously be organized through reciprocal relationships can increasingly be fulfilled through individual transactions. Ride-hailing can make every day travel more convenient, particularly when residents need direct access from residential areas to transport nodes. However, this convenience does not resolve the underlying inequality in public transport provision. Instead, part of the cost of connecting residential areas to major mobility points can shift from collective or public arrangements to individual users.

This finding also highlights the limits of both community-based mobility and platform-mediated mobility. Social capital can help residents respond to gaps in formal infrastructure, but it depends on the relationships, resources, and willingness to participate within a community. Ride-hailing provides greater flexibility, but access to the service

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depends on users' ability to pay and on their access to smartphones, mobile internet, and digital services. Mobility options are therefore not equally available to all residents.

The findings suggest that community social capital should not be understood as a substitute for public transport provision. It is better understood as evidence of how residents adapt to gaps in formal mobility infrastructure. Similarly, the expansion of ride-hailing should not be treated as a reason to reduce public responsibility for transport connectivity. Affordable and accessible public transport remains important because everyday mobility should not depend solely on whether an individual can purchase a ride for each journey. In South Tangerang, the coexistence of community-based mobility and ride-hailing illustrates how residents adapt to an uneven transport system, while also showing why informal and market-based solutions cannot replace the broader public responsibility to provide equitable urban mobility.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The author(s) used generative artificial intelligence (Claude) to refine sentence structure and improve readability. All intellectual content, arguments, and conclusions are entirely the responsibility of the author(s).

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