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Kerala's Priyadarshini Free Bus-Travel Scheme for Women

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Source: ujjari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources **HOW**

WHY IN NEWS

Kerala has launched the **Priyadarshini scheme**, offering **free travel** on most **Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC)** services to **all women and transgender persons**, effective **June 15, 2026**. The state will bear the cost, estimated at around Rs 2 crore a day. The move places Kerala among the states that have introduced free bus travel for women, an occasion to examine gendered mobility and the welfare-versus-fiscal-sustainability debate.

THE SCHEME IN BRIEF

DETAIL	PARTICULARS
Name	Priyadarshini
Operator	Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC)
Effective	June 15, 2026
Beneficiaries	All women (income-agnostic) and transgender persons
Services covered	Ordinary, city ordinary, limited-stop and similar services
Excluded	Premium and long-distance services
Cost	About Rs 2 crore a day, borne by the state

The scheme is income-agnostic, covering women of all ages and economic backgrounds, and KSRTC has been directed to develop non-fare revenue streams to support its finances.

PART OF A WIDER TREND

Kerala joins a growing list of states that have rolled out free or subsidised bus travel for women.

MARKER	DETAIL
Earlier movers	Other states have introduced similar free women's bus-travel schemes
Rationale	Mobility as a route to women's economic participation
The common debate	Welfare and empowerment versus the fiscal health of transport corporations

THE ANALYSIS: MOBILITY, EMPOWERMENT AND FISCAL PRUDENCE

- 1 Mobility and women's workforce participation.** Affordable, reliable transport is a documented barrier to women entering and staying in the workforce; free travel can raise female labour-force participation and access to education and healthcare.
- 2 Equity versus targeting.** An income-agnostic scheme is simple and universal, but raises the question of whether scarce funds should be targeted at those who most need support rather than offered to all.
- 3 Fiscal sustainability.** State road-transport corporations are often loss-making; loading free travel onto them, even with state compensation, raises concerns about their long-term financial health and service quality.
- 4 The freebies-versus-welfare debate.** Such schemes sit within a national debate, including before the courts, on the line between welfare that builds capability and freebies that strain public finances.

The way forward is to pair the social benefit with **fiscal discipline**: ensure timely and full state compensation to KSRTC, protect service quality, and evaluate the scheme's measured impact on women's mobility and workforce participation against its cost.

UPSC RELEVANCE

- GS Paper 2 (Governance and Social Justice):** welfare schemes, women's empowerment, the role of the state, cooperative and competitive federalism.
- GS Paper 3 (Economy):** fiscal sustainability, the finances of public-sector undertakings, the freebies debate.
- Prelims:** the Priyadarshini scheme, KSRTC, the beneficiary coverage.
- Mains:** gendered mobility and women's workforce participation; welfare versus fiscal prudence.

FACTS CORNER

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THE SCHEME:

Priyadarshini: free KSRTC travel for all women and transgender persons, effective June 15, 2026

Cost about Rs 2 crore a day, borne by Kerala; applies to ordinary and city-ordinary services, not premium or long-distance

THE CONTEXT:

Part of a wider trend of states offering free women's bus travel

Rationale: mobility raises women's workforce participation and access to services

THE DEBATE:

Welfare and empowerment versus the fiscal health of state transport corporations; the freebies-versus-welfare question

Sources: *The Hindu*, *Onmanorama*

Source: Kerala's Priyadarshini Free Bus-Travel Scheme for Women — Ujjari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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