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by Lionel martin

havana, nov 26, reuter -- the city of havana, plagued by an inadequate and often inefficient system of urban transport, has begun a feasibility study for the construction of cuba's first metro.

fernando perez, the engineer who heads the investigation, declared that soviet specialists are helping to design a rapid transport system for havana which includes an underground system.

the lack of an adequate urban transport system has been a chronic problem in havana over the past decade and a source of constant complaints by the population. long queues and jam-packed buses riding close to the ground or inclining perilously because of the excess and badly distributed weight are common sights during havana's rush hours.

guillermo garcia, a revolutionary hero who is now the cuban minister of transport, told a national television audience recently that at least part of the urban transport crisis in havana is due to the huge increase in the number of passengers over recent years. he said that the number of trips on city buses in havana had jumped from eight million a day in 1977 to 10.5 million daily at present.

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havana also observe that bus drivers exceed the speed limit, brake too abruptly, come to a halt far from the bus stops and take curves in a way calculated to destroy the springs of any bus and make the lives of passengers intolerable. +it is the spirit of machismo that makes them drive that way,+ one havana bus driver commented.

city officials hope the bus situation will improve when an assembly plant for hungarian +ikaro+ buses goes into operation shortly near havana. but some believe that there will never be enough buses, if they are mistreated and inadequately maintained.

ideally, the officials say, a system of rapid, underground transport would be a step toward a permanent solution to one of havana's major problems.

+the saving grace,+ a daily bus rider from havana commented, +is the cheap price of public transport here.+ a bus ride to any point in havana costs only five centavos (about seven cents u.s.)
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