First introduced in the 1920s, the first drivers of these minibuses had been Hindu, who placed a deity in the front for good luck, leading locals to refer to the vehicles as a whole as “chivas” (from Shiva the Hindu goddess\(^1\)). Some chivas lasted alongside other forms of transport into the 1980s – being displaced by newer types (typically Toyota minibuses, as used by the so-called “pirate” operators of current times) and the *diablos rojos* (“Red Devils”) former US school buses. Originally charging 5 cents per passenger, they had 2 wooden benches, so that passengers sat facing one another.

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\(^1\) [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shiva](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shiva)  
\(^2\) [https://www.elistmopty.com/2021/08/antigua-bus-station-panama-canal-zone.html](https://www.elistmopty.com/2021/08/antigua-bus-station-panama-canal-zone.html)  
Typical Chivas minibus – a 1939 Chevrolet in 1945

Chivas (minibuses) in central Avenue, Panama City in the 1940s
The Motor Transportation Division of the Canal authorities was to introduce a Public Transportation System, with 175 privately-owned buses on contract to the Canal authorities, and which was organised in early 1943. This provided assigned transport routes for the general public. It was intended to meet increased demand, supplement transport provided by official vehicles and ferry labourers to and from construction sites. It also relieved some of the pressure resulting from wartime petrol and tyre rationing.³