



Transport and Mobility

TRANSPORT AS JUSTICE

Jeremy Cronin, Deputy General Secretary, South African Communist Party

City Johannesburg / This way I salute you...”, the poet Mongane Wally Serote wrote in a celebrated 1970s poem. Saluting the city, as he travelled in from his black dormitory township, he parodied a traditional African praise poem: “This way I salute you:/My hand pulses to my back trousers pocket/Or into my inner jacket pocket/For my pass, my life.../I travel on your black and white and robotted roads,/Through your thick iron breath that you inhale/At six in the morning and exhale from five noon./ Jo’burg City.../That, that is all you need of me.../Jo’burg City, you are like death,/Jo’burg City, Johannesburg, Jo’burg City.”

‘Apartheid cities have unusual spatial contradictions’, notes the South African Cities Network, *State of the Cities Report*. On the one hand, they are sprawling realities with density levels too low for sustainable public transport. This encourages further sprawl and growing car dependence. On the other hand, there is high density in the populous townships and informal settlements on the peripheries of our cities. In the apartheid era, these townships were deliberately surrounded by highspeed freeways and rail-lines, like mediaeval moats but with the opposite intent – to protect what lay without. Marginalisation and containment, planned under apartheid, has often been unintentionally perpetuated in the postapartheid period. For instance, two million low-cost houses have been rolled out nationally since 1994. But to meet this ambitious target, the bulk of the housing has been located on peripheral land. Access and mobility inequities have been deepened.

This unwitting entrenchment of some of the apartheid spatial legacy has not been helped by neglect of public transport, or by a series of well-intended but inappropriate policies, tangled institutional arrangements and unsustainable interventions. The consequences are dramatically visible in our cities, not least Johannesburg. While only 37% of households in Johannesburg own a car, private car use to get to work has now surpassed other modes. On the other hand, the percentage of ‘stranded’ people in the city who walk to work (often in dangerous circumstances) for more than 30 minutes, because they cannot afford any form of public transport whatsoever, has increased. Another

staggering 46% of households in Johannesburg are spending more than 10% of their poverty-level incomes on transport.

Significant numbers of the poor in Johannesburg (as in our other cities) find themselves marginalised to the distant peripheries of the city where there are few jobs and few amenities. They are hostage to unsafe walking or costly and unreliable public transport. Recent Johannesburg household surveys find very high levels of dissatisfaction with public transport. Fare prices, crime on board and at terminuses and stations, taxi violence, and the danger of accidents, particularly in minibuses, are all listed as very serious concerns by around half of households. The persisting legacy of apartheid infrastructure also impacts dramatically on the lives of Johannesburg residents. In 2003 there were 1,076 transport-related deaths in the city, 42.1% of these being pedestrians. Among children younger than 15 years, pedestrian fatality is the leading cause of unnatural death.

How can the metropolitan authorities in Johannesburg begin to create a safer and spatially more equitable city? Unfortunately, for the moment, there are many challenges and constraints. Johannesburg authorities have little direct leverage over the public funding directed towards the main public transport modes in the city. Metrorail is a national public entity receiving R2.1 billion (US\$0.29 billion) as an operational subsidy. But the subdivision of this subsidy is decided upon nationally, as if the various city-based commuter rail systems were part of some national network. Bus subsidies of R2.4 billion (US\$0.33 billion) are handled by provinces. Again, Johannesburg has little leverage over any of this subsidy. It even finds its own municipal bus company competing on unfavourable terms with the provincially subsidised, privately owned PUTCO. Minibus taxis, the major public transport mode in the city, receive no operating subsidy. The national government has been endeavouring to implement a stop-start R7 billion (US\$1 billion) taxi recapitalisation programme for the past six years, however, it has been largely disconnected from any metrolevel transport planning. To complicate matters further, the Gauteng

provincial government is about to construct a R20 billion (US\$2.7 billion) rapid rail project. In the face of considerable public opposition, there are now attempts to retro-fit greater integration into this Gautrain project. But, in terms of route and its privileged and paltry target ridership, it remains essentially a costly, stand-alone project that will do little to transform the mobility inequities of Johannesburg and the province. Our public transport policies call for an integrated, multi-modal approach. They also call for appropriate devolution to municipalities, where such integration is most likely to be achieved. While there is some progress, our interventions have tended to be uni-modal, undeveloped and institutionally scattered. For all these reasons, the heartless, 'thick iron breath' of Jo'burg City continues daily to suck in and spit out millions of its inhabitants

URBAN AGE

*a worldwide series of conferences
investigating the future of cities*

*organised by the Cities Programme
at the London School of Economics and
Political Science and the Alfred Herrhausen Society,
the International Forum of Deutsche Bank*

more information on www.urban-age.net