THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF LOW INCOME POPULATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A SCOPING STUDY

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ABSTRACT

To date, the majority of studies of transport and its possible role in the social exclusion of individuals and communities have been conducted within a UK context (e.g. Church and Frost 1999, TRaC, 2000; Lucas et al 2001, Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Although there have also been a number of European and Australian studies of this issue more recently (e.g. Hurnie, 2006; Currie et al, 2007; Cebollada, 2009). This is in part because the language of social exclusion and its core policy agenda is primarily European. Essentially, the term describes a mutually reinforcing process whereby an individual or whole community becomes 'locked out' of accessing the basic resources with which to secure a reasonable quality of life.

The paper explores the same issue in relation to transport policy but in a development context, where it is the majority of the population which is experiencing the extreme hardships that comes from lack of participation in the formal economy and the financial exclusion and social disadvantage that usually ensues from this. The paper describes a scoping study, which was commissioned on behalf of the South African Department of Transportation to explore the potential links between a lack of transport and poverty amongst South African households. It presents the main findings of twelve focus group exercises undertaken with different sectors of the low income population living in rural, urban and urban peripheral areas of the Tshwane (Pretoria) region of South Africa. The primary motivation for the research was to identify and articulate the transport problems that very low income and socially disadvantaged people living in urban, peri-urban and rural contexts in South Africa experience on a daily basis and to demonstrate how this affects their livelihoods and wider life opportunities. Ultimately, the study outputs are to be used to facilitate dialogue between the RSADOT and social policy colleagues within other government departments and with Regional Transport Officers. It is hoped that this will engender more widespread interest in improving transport provision for this sector of the population as part of South Africa's Millennium Goals.

Keywords: transport poverty, social exclusion, South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Republic of South Africa Department of Transport (RSA DOT) became interested in the issue of transport and social exclusion following detailed analysis of their 2003 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) (Republic of South Africa Department of Transport, 2005). The survey was the first ever of its kind to be undertaken with a representative sample of the whole of the South African population. It identified that the vast majority of South African households do not have access to any regular form of transport and that this seriously undermines their ability to participate in key economic and social activities, such as work, education, healthcare and religious, cultural and leisure and family visits. In order to better understand the role of transport in the social exclusion process, the RSADOT commissioned a scoping study, the aim of which was to contextually explore affected groups' own perceptions of their local transport system and how 'travel poverty' affects their everyday lives.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCOPING STUDY

The initial aim of the study was to undertake a small, and predominantly qualitative scoping exercise, in one geographical region of the country in order to explore key issues and concerns from the perspectives of the affected individuals themselves. It is intended that this will inform further empirical research to identify transport disadvantage across the whole of South Africa at a later stage of the policy development process. The primary motivation for the research from the RSA DOT perspective was to identify and more clearly articulate the transport problems that very low income and disadvantaged people living in urban, peri-urban and rural contexts in South Africa experience on a daily basis and to demonstrate how this affects their livelihoods and life opportunities. The wider aim is to use this information to promote dialogue with social policy colleagues within central Government and with Regional Transport Officers and to thus engender more widespread interest in improving transport provision as part of South Africa's wider Millennium Goals. In this respect, the study is believed to be unique in recognising the transport needs of individual's as a core *social* policy issue within a development context.

More specifically for the purposes of this paper, the key objectives at the scoping stage of the study were to:

i) Identify if and in what physical and social circumstances people experience transport and accessibility problems;

ii) The types of problems they experience, e.g. lack of available transport, access onto the transport system, the cost of travel, lack of information, low travel horizons, the inappropriate location of activity opportunities such as employment, healthcare services, schools relative to their homes;

iii) The underlying causes of such problems and who is affected, when and how;

iv) The outcome of such problems in terms of the physical and mental well-being, of affected populations and the knock-on effect on key economic and social activities;

v) Identify locally appropriate solutions to these transport problems as suggested by the people who experience them.

Further supporting analysis of the quantitative RSA NHTS data is planned for 2010 in order to develop a National Index of Transport Disadvantage, the outcomes of which will be reported in a subsequent paper. It is hoped that this Index can run alongside the South African Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007, which has recently been developed for the RSA Department of Social Development by colleagues in the Department of Social Policy at the University of Oxford (Wright and Noble, 2009). This Index is constructed using data from the 2007 Community Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2007) but does not, for a number of reasons including data availability and compatibility, embrace consideration of transport disadvantage. Given the increased importance of personal travel and increased mobility in the everyday lives of citizens across the developing and developed world, it is considered highly pertinent to include its consideration within the development context.

METHODOLOGY

The scoping study was entirely qualitative in nature, but was informed by previous in-depth analysis of the RSA NHTS data by the RSA DOT Research Unit. It was based on a similar approach to that adopted in several similarly focused UK and European studies undertaken by the author over the past ten years. The fieldwork methodology involved eleven, two-hour, professionally facilitated focus groups with between eight to ten people in each group. The groups were undertaken in five different areas in the Tshwane (Pretoria) Metropolitan Region: one in inner city Pretoria, two in the smaller urban townships of Mamelodi and Danville, one in the urban periphery in Shoshanguve and one in Winterveld, a semi-rural settlement.

Prior to these fieldwork exercises, the author, members of the RSA DOT Research Unit and some of the fieldwork consultants made a study tour of a number of the areas that were to be sampled for the focus groups. These visits were made using public transit (train, bus and kombi-taxi) and a number of different local facilities were visited, for example the local shopping plaza, open air market and medical centre at Mamelodi, the shopping plaza, tertiary education college and medical centre in Shoshanguve and a village health clinic, local police stations, a shopping centre and a rural homestead in the adjoining more rural Mpumalanga region.

Informal conversations were held with a number of workers and local people at these venues, generally focusing on what it is like to live and work in the area and about people's experiences of transport. This was an extremely useful recognisance exercise, as it allowed both the civil servants and the fieldwork team to familiarise themselves with the local areas, identify possible recruitment locations and also to get a feel for the type of issues that might

arise in the formal focus group discussions. The information that was gathered was also extremely helpful in formulation of the topic guide for the focus group exercises.

The focus groups themselves took place between July and August 2008. People were recruited on-street and at local centres using the following sampling framework:

Mamelodi
- Unemployed adults (excluding students, housewives and pensioners), i.e. people who are considered economically but cannot find work;
- Single parents;
- Low income workers earning less than R1000 per month;

Shoshanguve
- Heads of household who are younger than 18 years (i.e. no adults in the house);
- Students at tertiary institutions;

Danville
- Unemployed adults;

Pretoria city centre#
- People with permanent or temporary disabilities or conditions that make it difficult for them to independently travel to activity centres such as work, health care or shops;
- People who do not work and are responsible for the care of young or old family members

Winterveld
- Unemployed adults;
- Low income workers earning less than R1000 per month;
- Older people (65+) who do not work.

These groups and areas were identified by the RSA DOT as being the most relevant in terms of offering the experiences of people from a range of different socially disadvantaged groups and settlement types based on the RSA NHTS.

All eleven groups comprised a mixture of both males and females. All the participants in the Pretoria city centre, Mamelodi, Shoshanguve and Winterveld groups were entirely comprised of black African participants and the Danville group was entirely comprised of white African participants. All the participants were recruited on-street or in local centres (such as health or community centres) and, in most instances, were local residents of these areas. The focus groups were held in a home or community centre in a convenient location for where the participants were recruited, with transport being arranged for anyone who needed it. The group discussions were run by experienced professional facilitators employed by African Response (the market research company who had won the RSA DOT tender) and were conducted in the local language, audio recorded and later transcribed and translated into English for the purposes of analysis.

In total 102 people participated in the group discussions, however, the study makes no claims to be representing the wider population at this stage. Quantitative analysis of the data is not intended, however, as this would be inappropriate with such small sample sizes. Rather, the study designed to offer policy makers a vignette into the lives and experiences of the participants in order to help them understand how transport disadvantage affects this. It will also serve to guide further quantitative analysis and modelling of the RSA NHTS data using a social exclusion lens.

Before presenting the initial findings from the focus group exercises, it is first relevant to consider the wider academic context for the research and how the South African study emerges from this.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF TRANSPORT AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

To date, the majority of studies of transport and its role in the social exclusion of individuals and communities have been conducted within a UK context (e.g. Church and Frost 1999, TRaC, 2000; Lucas et al 2001, Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), although there have also been a number of European, Australian and Canadian studies of this issue more recently (e.g. Cebollada, 2009; Hurnie, 2006; Currie et al, 2007; Paez, *et al*, 2009). This is in part because the language of social exclusion and its core policy focus is a primarily European agenda arising from French social policy of the 1970s, (Burchardt *et al*, 2002).

In the latest Levitas *et al* 2007 definition for the UK Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) social exclusion is identified as involving:

> '… the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.'

> (Levitas et al, 2007: 9)

The particular rationale for adopting a social exclusion approach to transport disadvantage is that it helps policy makers to recognise that: a) the problem is multi-dimensional (i.e. can be located with both the circumstances of the individual who is affected and processes, institutions and structures within wider society;, b) it is relational (i.e. that disadvantage is seen in direct comparison to the normal relationships and activities of the rest of the population; and c) it is dynamic in nature (i.e. it changes over time and space, as well as during the lifetime of the person who is affected). In policy terms the concept also it forces a focus not only on the experience of disadvantage but also on the associated economic and social **outcomes** of this condition. In other words, the documenters of this phenomenon are less interested in the fact that there is no transport available to people *per se* but rather the

consequences of this in terms of their (in)ability to access key life-enhancing opportunities, such as employment, education, health and their supporting social networks. In this way, there is a move away from the traditional systems based approach to transport provision, towards a more people-focused and needs-based social policy perspective, which asks question about equality of opportunity, equity of outcome and begins to raise the issue of redistributive justice (see Lucas *et al*, 2004 for more on this).

In the UK, the Social Exclusion Unit's identification of such an approach in its 2003 report and the subsequent development of cross-departmental guidance by the Department for Transport (Department for Transport, 2006) have been hugely influential in shaping the thinking of transport and non-transport professionals in terms of how transport provision impacts upon delivery of the wider social policy agenda. It has also clearly had resonance within the wider Europe context (see for example Ohmnmacht *et al*, 2009) and on academic and policy thinking in Australia (e.g. Curry *et al*, 2007), Canada (e.g. Paez, et al 2009) and New Zealand (e.g. Rose *et al*, 2009). However, it is unclear how useful such an approach to transport disadvantage would be in the 'development' context and/or in terms of helping to deliver Millennium social goals. Part of the aim of the RSA DOT scoping study, therefore, was to explore this issue.

TRANSPORT DISADVANTAGE IN THE SOUTH AFRICA CONTEXT

Venter (2009) identifies a growing interest in the issue of transport disadvantage throughout the developing world. As in the developed world, transport expenditure tends to be regressive, in that, although they spend less overall, poorer households spend a greater proportion of their income on travel than richer households and also pay more for public transport trips than rich households. This is part due to the greater distances over which low income populations tend to travel in order to access employment, goods and services, due in part to a spatial mismatch between the urban peripheral locations in which they most often are forced to live and the more central city locations of these key activities. It is also a result of the high cost of the transport on which they most often rely, which is usually informal, unsubsidised and largely unregulated. This situation is even more emphasised in the South African context, where the geographical legacy of apartheid, which forced South African non-Whites into peripheral and isolated settlement sites, still remains (Scheidegger, 2009).

The literature identifies that there are four key underlying causal factors in people's transport disadvantage in the South African context:

i) The housing location of low income populations
   In urban areas, these settlement patterns are largely the legacy of the old apartheid regime, where Black and Coloured populations were pushed into urban peripheral townships and informal ghettos on the outskirts of the main city centres. A large proportion of the South Africa's most deprived populations also live in isolated rural areas, which are poorly served by roads and rail infrastructure. Transport

infrastructure investment was also concentrated on the needs of White populations, rather than on serving the needs of the non-White population (Dibben, 2006).

ii) Affordability issues

The RSA NHTS identifies that the majority of households in the lowest income quintile spend between R1 and R100 of their monthly income on public transport (63%). However, as small minority of the lowest income households (5%) spend over R200 a month on this, which would account for approximately a half of their total monthly income. The RSA NHTS identifies that in 2003, 22% of households had a monthly income of less than R500 and 24% had an income of between R501-1000, so the low income population accounts for just under half of the total population[1].

iii) Poor access to private vehicles and public transit services

The RSA NHTS identifies that the majority of poorer households also experience extremely poor access to private vehicles and public transport services. On average, only 26% of all households had access to a car, more than 75% had no access to a train station and nearly 40% did not have access to a bus service. Whilst the majority of the White population (83%) hold a driving licence, only 10% of the Black population, and 21% of Coloureds[2] and just over half of the Asian population (56%) do so. This is likely to be indicative of the affordability of owning and driving a car.

iv) Over-reliance on taxis

The RSA NHTS identified that about two-thirds of all transit riders travelled in a kombi-taxi. There are considerable problems with this provision, however, as Dibben (2006) identifies. Many of the vehicles are old, dangerous and over-crowded and there are regular complaints about bad driver behaviour, including drunkenness, rudeness and in extreme cases violence and sexual harassment (Dibben, 2006).

v) Over-reliance on walking

As a result of both the physical lack of transport and its non-affordability, the vast majority of both the urban and rural poor walk. For example, Venter identifies that 40% of low income workers walk to work and the RSA NHTS identifies that 80% households undertake their food shopping trips on foot, 76% of learners walk to their place of education and roughly 40% of households access health care (traditional or medical) this way. It is also important to note that approximately 65% households in the lowest quintile and 63% of the second lowest quintile identified that they did not use any form of motorised transport over the 7 days prior to the survey week. Twenty-five percent of households also indicated that they spend nothing on public transport, although it can be anticipated that some people in this sub-sample do so because they only spend money on car travel.

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[1] Low income is classified in the RSA NHTS as households with a monthly income of less than R500 or roughly US$2 per day. The Millennium Development Goals for South Africa identify people in extreme poverty as individuals with an income of less than $1 per day.
[2] Coloured is still an official racial classification within the RSA NHTS

It is clear that this widespread transport poverty need to be set in the broader context of the considerable economic and social deprivation experienced across South Africa as a whole. For the 2007 South African Index of Multiple Deprivation, Wright and Noble (2009:8) identify that:

- 72% of people live in households that are income and/or materially deprived;
- 37.8% of the relevant working age population are unemployed or unable to work due to sickness/disability;
- 27.4% of the adult population aged 18-65 are educationally deprived (have had no secondary schooling);
- 67.2% of the population experience environmental deprivation;
- Levels of deprivation vary greatly by province, with the most deprived municipality being located in the Eastern Cap and the least deprived in the Western Cape, but that levels of deprivation also vary greatly within provinces.

The scoping study was designed to gain a better understanding of how important the considerable transport disadvantages that are evident the RSA NHTS data are to people on the ground in the context of this wider poverty and social disadvantage and in particular how they themselves describe their own personal circumstances and everyday lives and how transport relates to this.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE TSHWANE FOCUS GROUPS

This section of the paper outlines some of the key issues that emerged from analysis of the eleven focus group discussions. Six key themes were identified in relation to transport. These were generally reflected across all of the focus groups and tended to emerge in the following order of priority within each group[3] (although there was some variation in the order of priority, as identified in table 2):

1. The importance of transport as a basic need;
2. The high cost of transport relative to incomes;
3. The poor availability of public transport services;
4. Crime and fear of crime whilst waiting for and travelling on public transport;
5. The importance of transport to access to employment, healthcare and education;
6. The importance of being able to socialise and visit friends and family.

These are issues are now explored in greater depth in the correspondingly entitled sections below using direct quotes taken from the group discussions to better illustrate the issues that were raised.

1. Transport as a basic need

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[3] It should be noted that the absence of specialist transport for people with disabilities was also seen as very important by this group.

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Initial discussions about transport were allowed to emerge in an evolutionary manner from a wider initial discussion of the participants' wider concerns about the areas in which they lived. This was in order that any problems that they were experiencing with transport could be seen in relation to the wider difficulties they experienced with day to day living and would not be artificially inflated as an issue above their other concerns.

Table 1 identifies the issues that were identified as most important to people's livelihoods and well being in the order they emerged in each of the group discussions.

One thing that became very clear in the group discussions from the outset was that many people living on low incomes in South Africa struggle to simply put food on the table, let alone provide their children with clothes or an education.

In relation to this issue, one single mother in Mamelodi told us:

> *"We rely on handouts from people. There are times when you send your kids to different families to ask for things to eat."*

The psychological impacts of this poverty are obviously enormous. In the group discussions, participants talked about feeling a loss of control over their own lives and a subsequent loss of esteem about themselves as people and their ability to do things. Some people expressed feelings of loss or envy of others who are better off than they are. Others described feelings of depression and even spoke about thoughts of suicide, particularly in the rural groups.

Against this backdrop of considerable financial and physical hardship, it initially seemed unlikely that transport would be high on people's list of concerns. However, this was quite quickly proven not to be the case. The problem of transport and the impacts of poor transport provision on their own and their families' daily lives emerged early in most of the group discussions, as table 1 demonstrates. This is largely because many people need to travel relatively long distances from their home locations to access key activities such as employment and higher education and the areas in which they live are sparsely served by core services and amenities such as clinics, hospitals, libraries and other community and leisure facilities, as demonstrated in table 2. This means that most regularly people rely on some form of motorised transport service on a fairly regular basis in order to carry out their basic daily activities and do so despite the high cost of using transport in relation to their monthly incomes.

Table 3 identifies the core transport concerns that emerged for each of the groups and table 4 the expressed problems people said they experienced with the different forms of transport that were available to them. Although this paper cannot go into any detail on this issue, what also became apparent from the discussions was that many of the issues and concerns raised by the groups were remarkably similar to those that people on low incomes in UK studies have identified (see for example TRaC, 200 and Lucas, 2001), albeit that they related to quite significantly different physical circumstances and levels of transport provision.

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Table 1: The issues that were identified as most important to people's lives and well being in the order they emerged in the group discussions

Group*		Meeting basic needs	Employment	Education	Transport	Health	Crime/ fear of crime	Family/ children	Community	Local environment	Religion /Spirituality
1	Low income workers (Mamelodi)	2	1	6	3	4	8	5	7	9	
2	Low income workers (Winterveld)	5	1	4	6	8	9	7	3		2
3	Unemployed adults (Mamelodi)	8	2		4	9	5	6	7		1
4	Unemployed adults (Winterveld)	3	2	7	4	5	8	1			6
5	Unemployed White* adults (Danville)	5	2	1	3		4		7		6
6	Students 16-25 years (Soshanguve)	3	6	2	1	8	4	5	7		9
7	Full-time carers (Pretoria)	2	1	4	3	6	7	5			
8	Child head of household 16-19 years (Soshanguve)	7	3	2			1	5	4	8	6
9	Female unemployed lone parents* (Mamelodi)	2	1	3	6	7	9	4	5		8
10	People 65+ years (Winterveld)	4				2	6	3	1	5	
11	People with disabilities (Pretoria)			3	2	5	4	1			

* All the focus groups were conducted with Black South Africans, except in the case of the one indicated with unemployed White adults in Winterveld. All groups comprised a roughly equal mix of men and women, except in the one indicated with female lone parents in Mamelodi

Table 2: The need for more local facilities as identified by group and type of local facility

Group		Type of local facility									
		Employment	High schools	Housing	Hospitals/Clinics	Libraries	Community facilities	Sports facilities	Shops	Police stations	Better transport
1	Low income workers (Mamelodi)	1	5	4	6	2	3			7	8
2	Low income workers (Winterveld)	3		5	2		7	4		1	6
3	Unemployed adults (Mamelodi)	6		7		4	3	1	2	8	5
4	Unemployed adults (Winterveld)	2			1	4	5	3			6
5	Unemployed White* adults (Danville)	6	8		2		1	4	7	3	5
6	Students 16-25 years (Soshanguve)	6		4	3		5	1	2		7
7	Full-time carers (Pretoria)	1	8		3	7	5	2		4	6
8	Child head of household 16-19 years (Soshanguve)		6			4	1	5	3	2	7
9	Female unemployed lone parents* (Mamelodi)	5	3		2				1		4
10	People 65+ years (Winterveld)			1					3		2
11	People with disabilities (Pretoria)	2		1			4				3

Table 3: The core transport themes emerging from focus group discussions in the order in which they emerged

Group		Transport as a basic need	Non-affordability of transport services	No access to pubic transport services	Personal safety/Fear of crime (walking)	Personal safety (train)	Personal safety (taxis)	Type of activity it is difficult to access						
								Work	High school	Hospital/ clinic	Police station	Library	Visiting family	Post office
1	Low income workers (Mamelodi)	9	1		2	8	6		4	3	7	5		8
2	Low income workers (Winterveld)	1	2	7		8	9	6	4	5			3	
3	Unemployed adults (Mamelodi)		1					2	3	4			5	
4	Unemployed adults (Winterveld)		1		2			3			4		5	
5	Unemployed White* adults (Danville)		1		2			6		3	4		5	
6	Students 16-25 years (Soshanguve)		1						2				3	
7	Full-time carers (Pretoria)		3				1						2	
8	Child head of household Soshanguve)		5				1		4		3		2	
9	Female lone parents* (Mamelodi)	2	1							1			2	
10	People 65+ years (Winterveld)		2	3*						1				
11	People with disabilities (Pretoria)	2	5	1*				3	4	6				

* Largely due to poor vehicular access for disabled and mobility impaired people

Table 4: Expressed problems with different forms of transport

Group		Type of difficulty																				
		Trains				Buses				Taxis				Walking				Cycling			
		Av	Aff	Co	Sa	Av	Aff	Co	Sa	Av	Aff	Co	Sa	Dis	Aff	Co	Sa	Av	Aff	Co	Sa
1	Low income workers (Mamelodi)	*		*	*	*	*	*			*		*	*			*				
2	Low income workers (Winterveld)				*	*					*		*								
3	Unemployed adults (Mamelodi)							*		*		*	*					*			
4	Unemployed adults (Winterveld)	*		*	*	*					*		*				*				
5	Unemployed White* adults (Danville)				*		*	*		*	*		*	*			*				
6	Students 16-25 years (Soshanguve)			*	*			*			*										
7	Full-time carers (Pretoria)	*			*			*			*		*								
8	Child head of household 16-19 years (Soshanguve)	*			*	*	*	*			*		*								
9	Female unemployed lone parents* (Mamelodi)	*				*					*		*								
10	People 65+ years (Winterveld)	*				*	*				*			*				*			*
11	People with disabilities (Pretoria)	*				*				*	*			*				*			

Key: Av = Availability; Aff =Affordability; Co = Connectivity; Sa = Safety; Dis = distance

2. The high cost of transport relative to incomes

Given that all of the participants were living on household incomes of less than R1000 per month and that most were responsible for supporting anything between two to seven other household members on these incomes, it is unsurprising the high cost of transport was a key concern.   For example, one low paid worker in Mamelodi told us:

> *"Transport is expensive, when I come this side it is R12 and when I go to town it is R20"*

This was in reference to the kombi-taxi fare, but an unemployed Danesville resident also remarked on how expensive the public bus is:

> *"The bus [needs to be] cheaper and more reliable … for one person to pay R9 to town!"*

Most participants identified that they needed to use a public transport or taxi service at least once a week for shopping trips or to visit a clinic and many needed to find daily fares in order to get to work or school. This meant that once the money to pay for food (and often water), electricity and rent had been found each month, the additional cost of transport was seen as a considerable financial burden. One of the inner city group participants even suggested that the cost of living is cheaper in the city because people can walk to where they need to go and so don't have the added burden in their lives of having to meet these travel costs:

> *"It's cheaper to live in the township [on the outskirts of the city centre]. The problem is transport. You have to use taxis to come to town on a daily basis and we cannot afford that money. If we are here, at least we can walk or use a train and therefore we spend less on transport"*

(Unemployed person, Pretoria)

3. The poor availability of public transport services

Across all the groups identified that, when they are available, trains and buses are always seen as preferable to the kombi-taxis because fares are generally much cheaper, and buses are safer, more comfortable and spacious (some even have toilets on board).

> *"[The bus] is more comfortable and there is even a toilet inside compared with a taxi whereby they always squash you in by putting in 4-4 and you can't even stretch your legs"*

(Student, Shoshanguve)

On the other hand, buses were said to be irregular and often stop too early in the evening for people to use them for coming home from work. Services are also often not available at the

weekends and these two factors in combination mean that people often view them as only for higher paid inner city office workers or students.

> *"I would request more buses because they only leave early in the morning and again come late in the afternoon"*
>
> (Unemployed person, Mamelodi

People generally have to walk long distances (20 - 45 minutes and more) to access both trains and formal bus services. Trains were also described as very slow and unsafe due to both overcrowding and muggings.

4. Concern about crime and personal safety issues

Numerous people across all the groups raised the issue of exposure to high levels of crime in their local areas and worried about their own and their children's personal safety whilst both waiting for and using public transport. Generally, crime levels were perceived to be high in most of the areas in which the focus groups were held. This was often referred to in connection with a lack of local activities and facilities, especially for young people, because they hang out on the street instead. One of the Mamelodi participants told us:

> *"Our kids grow up on the streets…and adopt street lives. There are no places where kids meet to do different activities…no places like shopping centres, libraries"*

Participants described how they felt threatened whilst travelling on the trains at night:

> *"So in December I saw them robbing one person and she was with her child. They had a knife on her and they had her in the corner. They were searching her and taking her money and you don't know what to do. You can't shift or do anything and the other people are sitting a bit further away. You are just watching. It is not safe. You must always try to sit where there is a lot of people."*
>
> (Low income worker, Winterveld)

Most regularly, however, safety concerns were raised in relation to the largely unregulated kombi-taxis services that most people are forced to rely on in the absence of public transport services. The taxis were identified as unsafe both because of their poor physical condition and because of driver behaviour.   One low income worker commented:

> *"The taxis speed a lot and they don't care about our lives"*

They were also identified as noisy and uncomfortable to travel in, with music blaring, rude and unhelpful drivers and far too many people crammed into them. This issue is an important one when considering that many low paid workers use them every day to get to work and back, travelling considerable distances, in extremely hot weather and also at unsociable hours, such as very early in the morning or late at night after long (10 -12 hour) shifts.

5. Access to employment, healthcare and education

Clearly people have different accessibility needs according to their physical circumstances, age, employment and household responsibilities, social and cultural needs and so forth. This was apparent from the different group discussions, as demonstrated in table 3. For example, participants in the Mamelodi and Danville groups talked a lot about their problems getting to the clinic and this was largely because there is no free clinic within easy walking distance of these two settlements. Most groups talked about the need to access shops. The younger student and child head of household participants were concerned about the cost and difficulties they experienced accessing education, while the unemployed participants were more concerned with access to employment and so forth.

In South Africa, most people must work to survive or must rely on others who have jobs, as the welfare benefits system does not extend to the unemployed, as this participant describes:

> *"My personal life is very challenging these days, because of unemployment. I am one of those who are busy searching for employment. I have challenges that I have to pay the electricity and water in my home. I don't have an income in my house and I don't have anyone to back me up"*

> (Unemployed person, Winterveld)

For most low paid workers, transport is the first thing they have to think about when they get paid. This is because they usually have to cover considerable distances each day, often travelling for more than two hours each way, to get from where they live to where they work. Unless they can cover their travel costs they will be physically unable to get to work and will lose their jobs and there are no currently travel subsidies for these low income workers:

> *"I look after my children and my siblings. One of my siblings is employed and the rest are at school. The other one of my siblings has two children. I earn too little and I have to pay rent, I have to pay for the bus and train in order to get to work and I earn little.*

> (Low income worker, Winterveld)

Another mother with two children, who also suffers from a disability, described to us how she has to find the money to travel to work even though she only earns R700 per month. She cannot afford to move closer to her job because of the higher rent she would have to pay for living in the city and also she would have no one to take care of the children while she is working. This quote eloquently sums up the extreme hardships she faces as a result of her low income, her disability, her family responsibilities and the spatial mismatch between where she lives and works:

> *"I have two kids and I have one foot and I work very hard. Instead of being paid maybe R1500 for the hard work that I do, I only get R700 and when I enquire about that I get told that it's because I get a grant as well. Things are very expensive and I*

am a mother and a father to my kids… I live in Mpumalanga [a semi-rural area about a 3 hour drive from central Pretoria where she works] and I have to buy a ticket to come to work as I cannot leave my kids on their own and get a place to stay closer to work. On that little money I earn, I have to travel"

(Disabled person, Pretoria)

The importance of access to healthcare for many people also emerged strongly from the data. Although the RSA NHTS identified that more than 40% of people walk to access a medical centre or traditional healer, many of the participants, especially those participating in the urban peripheral groups, identified that they travelled considerable distances and also experienced transport problems when seeking medical care:

"I walk to the taxi for 10 minutes and I wait for the taxi to get full and its takes the taxi 35 minutes to get to the taxi rank and then I get another taxi, but I don't wait for the taxi because it gets full fast. Then it drops me near to the clinic. Then I walk to the clinic for 35 minutes. It costs me R12 [one way trip]"

(Low income worker, Mamelodi)

This same difficulty was identified by one of the single parents in another of the Mamelodi groups, who told us:

"If you want to take your child to the clinic, there is no other way … you will have to use a taxi and it is expensive … there are many taxis available but the buses are only available to transport people who are going to work and students"

For the students and parents of students in the groups, the high cost and difficulty of accessing higher education was also noted. Although some students were able to travel on a free school bus service, many did not qualify for this service and this meant that they had to pay for a taxi to take them to school or college. One student in the Shoshanguve group explained how he was considering giving up his education because once he has paid for his travel he can't afford to buy food for himself during the school day:

"I am not happy because I do not have money even to buy food during break time. My mother passed away. I go to school because I want to. Sometimes it's not nice when people have something to buy and you cannot. I sometimes wonder what will make me continue because my background is very difficult … there won't be any money for me to further my education and go to TUT or other institutions of higher learning."

6. Socialising and visiting friends and family

It was clear that many participants placed a high value on the ability to socialise and be part of a community. However, many people said that they were simply unable to visit friends and family because they couldn't afford the transport costs, creating a gap in their family and

social support networks. This was particularly difficult for people who had moved away from their home villages into the urban area in order to find work or to look after a sick relative:

> *"Sometimes it takes me two or four months to visit them. It is very far and as a result it is expensive. If you go there it takes sometimes three to four hours sitting on a bus. It is even worse using the train. You just have to relax because it is going to be the whole day's journey"*

(Single mother, Mamelodi)

Clearly, this paper can only offer very superficial insights into the full range of issues and concerns that were raised within the focus groups and more detailed qualitative and quantitative evidence will be required before a full understanding of the transport and accessibility needs of low income populations in South Africa can be gained. Nevertheless, it is possible to reach some overarching conclusions for future policy and these are now identified in the final section of this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper has explored the transport needs and concerns of low income population groups in South Africa and set these within the context of their everyday lives. To this end, it has identified that, in addition to the considerable financial and physical hardships low income and marginalised South Africans face, transport and physical access to services is also a considerable problem for them. Travel costs eat into their already meagre incomes and add to the worries and financial burden of these households, often making it extremely difficult or impossible for them to afford to look for employment, attend education or seek medical attention when they need it.

Public transport options are often unavailable in the areas where they live or at the times of day (and night) when they need to use them and so most people rely on the services of informal kombi taxis-buses. The cost of these services is extremely high, especially in relation to people's incomes and can usually only be regularly afforded by the employed. In addition, journeys are overlong (anything up to a three hours one way trip to work is not considered unusual), uncomfortable and often unsafe and tiring. Most journeys also include long waits for taxis to arrive or fill up with passengers once they turn up.

In the focus groups, people described the public transport services that are available are better and cheaper but most journeys involve long walks to and from pick-up points and long waits in unsafe environments. Incidents of crime are high at stations, on trains and at bus stops. Travelling on the trains in peak hours is considered unsafe due to the extreme overcrowding, which means that people often get pushed off outside of the station. Unsurprisingly, given these circumstances many people on low incomes rely entirely on walking, often over long distances, to get to where they need to go. Local walking environments are poor outside of the city centre, where there are generally no proper footpaths or shade and fear of crime is also high.

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The participants identified that their 'transport poverty' results in reduced quality of life and life opportunities for them and their families, making it difficult to look for work or take-up the jobs that might be available outside of their local area. They identified that having no job literally means having no money and said that they find it difficult and disrespectful to survive on hand outs from friends and family. Students in the groups described how difficult it was for them to maintain their education without help with travel costs and how they often have to go without food to pay for transport.

Different people clearly have different accessibility needs and concerns according to their personal and physical circumstances and many of the issues that were identified in the focus groups are also well beyond the remit of transport policy to resolve. Nevertheless, it was evident from that most participants envisaged that they would gain considerable economic and social benefits from improved public transport services.

The many barriers to providing universal public transport services in South Africa cannot be overlooked, however, not least because currently such services simply do not exist in many areas and/or are unavailable at the times of day when people need them for getting to and from work, school or to medical services and other activities. The main challenges lies in building new networks that can provide people on low incomes with adequate connectivity between where they live and the places they need to get to in order to carry out their daily activities, such as work, school, college, medical centres, crèches and shopping centres.

Different solutions will be needed in different places and for different groups of people. It also needs to be re-emphasised that this cannot be a transport only agenda. Housing for low income families needs to be better located in places where people can more easily travel to work within reasonable travel times. Government also needs to ensure that where new housing is built there are adequate schools, medical services, shops, libraries and other facilities within easy walking distances. Places need to be properly policed so that it is safe for people to walk around during the day and night and so forth and car dependence amongst the white population needs to also be simultaneously addressed.

Public transport also needs to be affordable to people on low incomes, as well as safe, frequent, reliable and comfortable and, given the working hours and family commitments and responsibilities of many low income workers, probably also need to run 24 hours of the day, 7 days a week. Special consideration needs to be given to the needs of people who have disabilities, with space for wheel chairs on buses and the introduction of low-floor entry vehicles. Finally, the whole of the kombi-taxi sector needs to be properly regulated and this regulation properly enforced. This agenda does not, therefore, come at a low cost.

Clearly, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the Department of Transport to address such challenges without the support of both their Social Development colleagues in central government. As the UK experience has demonstrated, the magnitude of the task suggests that it can only be achieved with full cross-governmental political backing. In the South African context, this will be most readily achieved if transport inclusion can be

demonstrated as a key contributor to the delivery of core social welfare and Millennium Development Goals. It will require considerable, consistent and comprehensive investment and both central and local transport policy prioritisation over the next ten to fifteen years, but the economic and social benefits to South African's majority low-income population are potentially huge.

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