ATTITUDES TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA: RESULTS OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH PARATRANSIT OPERATORS

Herrie Schalekamp, Centre for Transport Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa, herrie.schalekamp@uct.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In 2006 the South African government launched a public transport reform programme promoting the introduction of bus rapid transit-type services in a number of cities around the country. Besides large-scale infrastructural investments, a key aim of the programme has been to bring about consolidation and formalisation in the highly fragmented paratransit sector that dominates the urban public transport market nationally. Paratransit operators affected by proposed BRT routes can opt to be incorporated by forming new companies and negotiating long-term operating contracts, but must withdraw their existing paratransit services from those routes. Supported by the national reform programme the first BRT services in Cape Town were inaugurated in May 2011. Infrastructure planning and construction proceeded relatively smoothly, but at the level of operator engagement there are significant uncertainties and the first series of negotiations remains unresolved despite having been initiated in 2008.

This paper reports on the findings of semi-structured, qualitative interviews with paratransit owners and operator associations in Cape Town. The study captured respondents' views on: the existing paratransit regulatory system; the operator engagement process around the BRT system and its proposed competition and ownership model; and their own needs and expectations around ownership, competition and government intervention. Paratransit operators are a non-uniform and hard-to-access respondent group and the research also illustrates some prospects and limitations of conducting interviews as a method of engaging this significant stakeholder group. Both the policy and methodological aspects of this research may be pertinent to developing world countries and cities engaged in or planning similar public transport reform programmes where paratransit operations are present.

Keywords: public transport reform, paratransit, bus rapid transit, interview method

1. INTRODUCTION

Formal public transport services in cities around South Africa have for some decades been experiencing declining service levels. 'Informal' public transport – or paratransit – operators have thrived in this environment, where they are estimated to have a share of nearly twothirds of the urban public transport market (Walters 2008). The paratransit sector is, however, not a uniform collective. Rather, it is a collection of an estimated 187 000 businesses (Engineering News, 6 July 2012) sharing an identity based on the typical vehicle that they use – a minibus, or small van – and the typical mode of operating, i.e. along loosely defined routes and not according to a timetable (and hence their colloquial name, *minibus-taxis,* or *taxis*). In terms of enterprise size, political representation and legal compliance there are variations within and between cities. Thus, referring to paratransit as an industry or a sector may be misleading in that these terms convey a sense of regularity that may be deceptive, and attempting to identify a typical paratransit business may indeed prove futile.

While paratransit vehicles provide employment and access to employment, are able to respond to rapidly growing cities – particularly at the informal periphery – and do not tap significantly into state coffers for subsidy, their business model and the day-to-day transport services they offer are not without fault. Drivers pay a fixed daily amount – a 'target' – to owners for the use of the vehicle. Out of the daily proceeds over and above this target the driver has to settle fuel costs and other incidental costs such as traffic fines and, in the case of Cape Town, a wage for an on-board conductor. Only once these costs are settled does the driver earn an income. Drivers generally make as many trips per day as possible to increase their takings, which in practice translates into risky or offensive on-road behaviour. In this business model regular maintenance of the vehicle is not incentivised, either on the part of the owner or the driver. Drivers' behaviour, vehicle conditions, a supply-dominated route network and a lack of transport alternatives necessarily impact negatively on passengers.

This paper reports on attitudes within the paratransit sector in Cape Town with respect to their present business model and government reforms aimed, amongst other considerations, at addressing some of the problems inherent in this model. The paper also presents findings relating to the application of the semi-structured interview method as a possible way of engaging paratransit operators around reforms and their business needs and aspiration. The paper is structure as follows: the first section is the introduction; the second section provides and overview of public transport reform programmes currently in force; the third section details the research method; the interview results are presented in the fourth section; and the last section of the paper offers some concluding remarks.

2. CURRENT PUBLIC TRANSPORT REFORM PROGRAMMES

The national government, in tackling public transport improvements across the country, has since 1999 instituted two major reform programmes. The first of these – the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP) – led to the introduction of a system under which old minibuses could be surrendered for scrapping. A capital amount, presently ZAR 63 000 (±USD 7 500), would be paid to the owner either for him of her to leave the sector or to use towards the purchase of new, safety-compliant minibus. The TRP also led to the establishment of a national paratransit representative body – the South African National Taxi Council, or SANTACO – to act as an intermediary between government and minibus-taxi owners and association. The second programme, the Integrated Rapid Public Transport

Network (IRPTN) programme, was launched in 2006, and coincided with the FIFA 2010 World Cup being awarded to South Africa. As it was the first time that the event was to be hosted in Africa it was seen as a showcase for South Africa's economic standing in continental terms, but the event also placed pressure on cities hosting matches improve walking, cycling and public transport services and infrastructure around match venues and inner cities. At the same time a national Public Transport Infrastructure and Systems Grant (PTISG) was set up to provide capital funding particularly in support of introducing bus rapid transit (BRT) systems in the host cities and elsewhere in the country. The IRPTN policy, and ministerial promises in the course of the following years, set out some parameters: the new networks would in time replace existing road-based services and complement existing rail lines, the replacement and upgrading would take place in a geographically phased manner, existing operators would be the preferred operators of the new services, and employment opportunities would not be lost.

Neither of these programmes has as yet lived up to (admittedly high) expectations. The TRP had as one of its thrusts the consolidation of paratransit ownership to form more viable business entities that would be better positioned to bid for envisaged larger-scale public transport service contracts; little came of this. Another unfulfilled ambition was the establishment of local manufacturing capacity for safety-compliant minibuses. Of the two prongs of the TRP that bore fruit, the creation of the publicly funded SANTACO and its regional branches is perhaps the most noteworthy. Uptake of the scrapping allowance has been slow, but steady, over the years; as the scrapping allowance covers at best around a quarter of the cost of a compliant new (typically imported) vehicle there is a significant shortfall that paratransit operators have to cover out of their own pockets.

The IRPTN programme has also not met with pronounced success. Of 12 cities in the country envisaged to construct the first phases of their new BRT networks services in preparation for the World Cup only two municipalities, Johannesburg and Cape Town, have services in operation, with the latter being run on a temporary basis pending finalisation of contractual negotiations with existing operators. The remaining cities are predominantly still in the planning phases six years after the launch of the programme, with infrastructural construction and negotiations with operators in evidence in some locations. It furthermore appears as if the projects that have gained traction are led by infrastructure and system planning and development, with the restructuring of operators to conform to BRT operational needs being the more complex and time-consuming aspect of the reform programme. This is particularly the case in Cape Town with its iteration of the IRPTN system, dubbed the Integrated Rapid Transit (IRT) system and operating under the *MyCiTi* brand. Due to cost under-estimations in relation to BRT systems – which were initially lauded as being an operating subsidy-free technology – funding has furthermore become a critical issue. The PTISG allocations, which are geared towards capital costs, are not intended to cover operating deficits, though this has been the subject of some negotiations between municipal entities and the national treasury.

Slower than anticipated progress with reforming public transport in South Africa in general, and paratransit operations in particular, are indicative of a lack of recognition of the fundamental factors that have led to the dominance and persistence of paratransit as a mode of transport, and of policy programmes that are not sufficiently responsive to these underlying dynamics. Paratransit hierarchies are not neatly defined, and the individuals and collectives within such hierarchies – from the driver, owner and operator association to regional and national representative bodies – are aligned to shifting factions (e.g. Business Report, 4 May 2010) that are difficult to track. The operator business format, profitability and financial standing, and vehicle fleet size and type, amongst others, are difficult to fathom. But perhaps most problematic is that the voice of substantial capital and human equity in the system, i.e. that of the multitude of paratransit business owners, has not been systematically noted – or noted at all – so that policy programmes can address or at least heed existing operators' concerns, motivations and aspirations. This lack of engagement does not form the basis for trusting relationships. Paratransit groupings are furthermore known not to be gun-shy (see, for instance, Cape Argus, 30 March 2010; Iafrica News, 15 March 2009; and Mail and Guardian, 7 December 2008). While this should not dictate the contents of well-intentioned government policies, it should at least sway the state towards mitigating any increased threat of violence against the public at large.

There are a number of reasons why the views of paratransit owners might be gauged in relation to public transport policy and reform programmes. The South African governance system, at least superficially, promotes stakeholder consultation – public participation processes are ostensibly the order of the day. In a capitalist, rights-based society such as in South Africa it seems fair to expect that government engage enterprise owners on policies that would profoundly change both their businesses and the environment within which they ply their trade. In a sector of the economy that emerged in response to segregated spatial planning and in spite of suppression of non-'white' enterprise (Dugard 2001), government action in favour of the public good – as is the case with the TRP and IRPTN policies – is not independent of history and the principle of redress. Significant research questions emerge from pursuing these considerations: *Does the reform programme address the fundamental problems of the present-day public transport system and its operators? What are paratransit owners' concerns and expectations around their businesses? Is the IRPTN reform programme realistic, given existing socio-political path-dependencies?* There is, however, little evidence suggesting that paratransit operators' views on these issues are being explored, either in academia or in practice. In the case of Cape Town, as the second major city in the country to have made tangible progress in implementing the IRPTN policy, owners and associations directly affected by routes forming part of the first phases of the IRPTN projects have been part of reform negotiations, but there appears to be a vacuum in terms of direct engagement with paratransit interests around both the design of the national IRTPN policy and the substance of the municipal public transport reform project. It furthermore seems that concerns around the TRP have largely been subsumed in the debate around the IRPTN programme. Thus, the topic of the study reported on here: to engage paratransit owners and operator associations on their views on current reform programmes, their relationship with government, and their own aspirations.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Paratransit owners and associations are hard-to-reach research subjects, which is not unsurprising given their characterisation as belonging to the informal economy. Owners do not have easily accessible contact numbers or business addresses, and are therefore difficult to reach without going through the association to which they belong. Associations are also difficult to access, as there is not a publicly available source of contact information. Owners must belong to an association in order to apply for an operating licence, in return for which associations extract membership fees. As a result associations play a *de facto* regulatory role in controlling entry to the market, and effectively become gatekeepers to information and access. There are significant politics and power struggles, informed in no small part by years of territorial competition with rival associations and an oppressive and adversarial government attitude. Trust and openness appear to be scarce commodities, and place outsiders at a disadvantage. This might well explain why there have been few reported attempts, particularly of a structured nature, at gaining insight into the inner aspects of the paratransit sector.

In designing a research strategy, it became clear to me, as the researcher, that conventional quantitative research methods in the field of transport surveys would not be appropriate. The choice of research strategy was informed by literature on qualitative research methods (for example, Arce 2003; Clifton and Handy 2003; Merriam 1998; and O'Leary 2005), as well as discussions with academics at the University of Cape Town's Department of Anthropology – for guidance in ethnographic methods – and the School of Education – with respect to dealing with differing levels of literacy, confidentiality and potentially hostile subjects. Out of the literature and these discussions it became clear that a qualitative research strategy would be most suited to engaging my chosen subject, as I wanted to explore the research questions in depth. It also seemed crucial that I engage respondents face to face to establish trust directly, be in a position to note non-verbal information that would allow me to identify issues underpinned by strong emotions and to avoid offensive or sensitive topics that could undermine trust, and so that I would be physically present to guide the interview flow in order to cover the research questions. These considerations led to my selecting the semi-structured interview as the research technique: it is organised around an interview schedule, as to opposed to defined questions, that would allow for sufficient flexibility to explore the multiple facets that are likely to emerge in pursuing input around a complex topic.

3.1 Sample selection

Due to the difficulty in gaining access to the estimated 6 400 paratransit owners in Cape Town (CCT 2007a), and the IRT negotiations taking place at association level, I decided to adopt an association-based approach to accessing individual owners. Through exhaustive enquiries I identified and engaged an intermediary who had existing ties in the paratransit sector as well as being familiar with the IRT proposal, and who could assist in translating during interviews where necessary. The City of Cape Town's Operating Licence Strategy (CCT 2007b) indicated that there were 104 paratransit associations operating locally within the municipal area, while the initial IRT project proposal was split into four geographical project phases. I matched the associations as closely as possible to the IRT phase regions within which they appeared to be based, and calculated a representative quota that would have a least one association per project phase. The result of this selection process was one association in Phase 1, 10 in Phase 2, one in Phase 3 and three in Phase 4. I thereafter adjusted the target to two, eight, two and three associations in each of the respective project phases so that there would be a minimum of two associations per project phase. My intention with the phase-based approach was to have some comparability across, and within, project phases in an attempt to reveal whether future responses to the IRT reform approach might be similar or different to the reactions of owners and associations already engaged in the first project phase. It was however, not possible to target specific associations as I could not say which would be reachable prior to establishing which contacts the intermediary had.

Within each association my aim was to interview a spectrum of operators. There is a diverse set of conditions under which paratransit owners ply their trade: some may not be registered for income tax purposes and may not hold operating licences, which from the regulatory point of view would be informal ownership and privately regulated competition, while others may operate under a formal business structure and with fleets of publicly licensed vehicles. As with the associations, it was, however, not possible to target particular operators to be engaged, and even less so to establish where they were located between the ‘formal’ and informal’ extremes prior to discussing the possibilities with the intermediary and making contact with associations. My intention was, nevertheless, to interview at least an operator with a large fleet of vehicles and an operator with only one vehicle, and then to gauge what would be feasible in terms of engaging further operators.

The motivation for aiming to engage a spectrum of owner respondents in addition to approaching the associations to which they belonged was to shed light on the degree to which there is a diversity of needs and aspirations within the paratransit sector and between operators and their associations. This in turn could provide insight into the appropriateness of the current reform programme and into the municipality’s strategy of engaging operators indirectly through their associations. The owner of an unlicensed vehicle would not qualify for the paratransit recapitalisation allowance and may have concerns primarily at a day-to-day subsistence level, while a large fleet owner may rather be concerned about longer-term fleet renewal and financing costs and have in mind a future in the formal sector. Associations’ concerns may altogether be different, and may centre on maintaining their revenue streams and influence over operators. These highly divergent sets of circumstances are currently governed by the same policy principles, regulations and engagement approach (association-based), but targeting across the spectrum of respondents could reveal if and under what conditions heterogeneous policy, regulatory and engagement approaches would be more appropriate.

3.2 Interview process

In a meeting preparatory to commencing with the interview process the intermediary and I agreed on a shortlist of paratransit associations and influential figures within the regional paratransit hierarchy with whom he had existing connections and which satisfied my criterion of a geographic distribution across the city's area and the IRT project phases. We also agreed to reimbursement for his time and telephone and travel costs at a fixed rate per interview completed. Thereafter the interviews were all arranged in a similar way. I would get in touch with the intermediary to enquire about his availability and to confirm my own availability over a number of days in forthcoming weeks. He would then agree to contact associations or individuals, set up two or three interviews that suited all parties – in all cases during off-peak paratransit operating hours in the late morning or early afternoon – and then get back to me with the confirmed interview times and venues. Action on his part was not forthcoming in most cases and I followed up via telephone or e-mail after a few days to prompt him on progress, or arranged meetings with him in his office during which he would make one or more telephone calls in my presence. The latter – meetings in person in his office – proved to be the only reliable way to prompt the intermediary into confirming interviews. In this back-and-forth manner we scheduled six interviews. The first was conducted in July 2011, the second and third in February 2012, and the remaining three in May 2012. A number of promised interviews, noticeably with individuals higher up the paratransit hierarchy, did not materialise. Both the intermediary and I had on-going and often clashing work and travel commitments, which would explain to some extent the intervals between interviews. It nevertheless took far more effort and time than I had anticipated to manage the intermediary, and by implication to arrange and conclude each interview. This was contrary to my initial assumption that data collection would be hampered primarily by paratransit associations' and owners' resistance to being interviewed by a person outside of their own industry and culture. In hindsight the initial sample target of 15 associations (out of a population of 104 associations in Cape Town) was very ambitious.

Three of the interviews took place at a meeting room at the Civic Centre in the centre of Cape Town, and three at the associations' own offices. The duration of the interviews did not vary significantly: four of the interviews lasted an hour and a half, one two hours and one an hour and a quarter. The duration was determined by respondents' available time and fatigue, which appeared to set in after around about an hour and a half. At the beginning of each interview the intermediary introduced me and the aims of the research, followed by an outline by him of the City of Cape Town's IRT policy and of his role during the interview as facilitator. After this I took the lead for the remainder of the interview, presenting the topics I wished to discuss with the respondents (corresponding to my research questions) as well as a statement of the research ethics that would apply to the interview findings. Of greatest concern to nearly all respondents was their anonymity, and in the case of two of the interviews it took some time to overcome respondents' resistance to the interview being conducted once they learnt what the subject of the interview was. In one of the latter cases respondents' initial reaction verged on being openly hostile, but after some minutes of frankly presenting the motivations behind my research and my express aim of not being partisan the interview proceeded and in fact proved very insightful. While planning the interviews I was guided by input from the intermediary and other specialists with respect to recording, and the decision not to use a sound recording device, but rather only hand-written notes taken during the interview, seems to have been significant to gaining respondents' trust. A further factor that appeared to impact positively on respondents' willingness to be interviewed was my affiliation with a university rather than a government agency – and my attempt not to gain access to associations via a government contact may also have played a role in confirming my ‘independent’ status.

Table I – Respondents by Taxi Association (TA)

		TA1	***TA2***	***TA3***	***TA4***	***TA5***	***TA6***	***total***
IRT project phase		2	2	2, 1[a]	3	2	1	
Number of respondents		3	2	3[b]	8	1	1	18
Position in association	Board leadership[c] & operator	1	1		3	1	1	7
	Board member & operator	2	1	3	2			8
	Board member & non-operator				1			1
	Operator only				2			2
Minibuses per respondent	Owned in personal capacity	2	2[d]	5[e]	2[f]	4	12	
	Owned in corporate capacity		10[d]					

[a] One respondent operated paratransit services in both the first and second IRT project phases

[b] One respondent left the interview for an unknown reason three-quarters of the way into the interview

[c] Chairman, vice-chairman or deputy vice-chairman of the association’s board

[d] One respondent owned two vehicles in a personal capacity; both owned 10 vehicles in a corporate capacity

[e] None of the respondents wanted to reveal the actual number of minibuses they owned, but stated that five minibuses each would be a fair estimate

[f] Average number across the entire association as reported as agreed by the respondents during the interview

In total there were 18 respondents across the six interviews, although the number of respondents varied from one association to the next, as did the position of each respondent within the association structure and the number of minibuses owned by each. In contrast to my expectations, it was not possible to target individual owners with particular characteristics in terms of fleet size or level of formality. The respondents present at each interview were determined by who from the association’s board was available or by whom the association board chose to have present. Of specific note is that the chairman of TA4 stated that the association’s board had selected particular interview respondents to offer varied points of view (if still biased against non-board member operators). The board’s resulting selection included two members who were not on the board, one of whom was male and one female. By the association’s admission female owners are a small minority in the paratransit sector (as corroborated by personal observations at minibus ranks and offices), and both of these non-board member respondents participated in the interview exchange as opposed to being merely observers. These two respondents were the only non-board member respondents across all interviews, and the male respondent was furthermore the only owner-driver respondent. He was also the only respondent to own only one vehicle. The remainder of respondents reported owning a diverse numbers of vehicles – all minibuses – many of which were at the national average fleet size estimate of two vehicles per owner (Barrett 2003). The largest reported fleets of 12 minibuses were owned by a respondent from TA6 (all in his personal capacity) and by one from TA2. In the case of the latter, two minibuses were owned personally and 10 by a company registered to him.

4. RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES

As highlighted by Merriam (1998) in her work on qualitative research in the field of education – which, as in the case of paratransit, includes hard-to-reach groups – voice recording should be the first choice in capturing interview data, second to which, or supplementary to it, are hand-written notes taken during the interview. Merriam continues by pointing out that, while being the least desirable method of capturing interview data, the third option of writing down notes after the interview allows the researcher to reflect both on the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal behaviour and on the researcher's own experience of the interview. As mentioned previously, voice recording was not feasible in the case of the research reported on in this paper, and instead I utilised notes written during and immediately after each interview. The notes that I took during interviews included verbatim quotations of responses that were relevant to the research questions or further illustrated respondents' attitudes, although I had to limit the number and length of these quotations as capturing them diverted my attention away from what respondents said immediately afterwards. In a small number of instances I failed to note the speaker, especially when multiple respondents spoke at once while I was taking notes and following the discussion thread. These are marked as 'respondent not noted' below; where noted I assigned a respondent number ("R"), e.g. R3 from TA4. The intermediary and I also had a brief discussion after each interview, if his time allowed, to reflect on the attitudes of the respondents particularly in relation to how their views were aligned or opposed to the national and local public transport reform approaches. Once the interviews were completed I analysed the gathered data according to the themes captured in the research questions. All captured notes, statement and quotations were sorted according to these themes and linked sub-themes, and captured as an affirmative or negative response, or not mentioned. These data are presented hereafter. It should be borne in mind that the statements are not responses to particular questions that were posed, but rather reflect a thematic analysis of items that came up during the exchanges in the interviews; an incidence count for each statement is therefore not a representative indication of how important that particular topic might be across all paratransit operators in the city, but rather it is a reflection of whether that topic was an issue or not for the sampled respondents.

4.1 Present regulatory system

Attitudes towards the present regulatory system centred on the institutions and rules governing paratransit operations. There were three streams of responses: the first related to the institutions and rules present within the paratransit sector, the second to public sector agencies, and the last to the present Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP).

Table II – Paratransit institutions	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Paratransit hierarchy holding back information/power struggle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Paratransit hierarchy (SANTACO) enriching itself	Yes		Yes	Yes		
Tensions within hierarchy interfering with day-to-day operations					Yes	
Competition between MBTs seen as problematic	No	Yes			No	
Competition between MBT associations seen as problematic					Yes	Yes

A number of respondents were disgruntled that the higher levels of the paratransit hierarchy, i.e. the regional and national representative structures, were withholding information that these structures received through interaction with government. The information appeared to relate to changes to policy and regulatory systems affecting paratransit operations, although concrete examples were not mentioned. In the eyes of respondents a primary reason for the lack of information flow was power struggles between factions and individuals within those structures, particularly within SANTACO. Respondents in TA2 and TA3 were previously on the boards of SANTACO and the allied Western Cape Regional Taxi Council, and their views may have been influenced by the circumstances of their departure from these entities; indeed, two of these respondents intimated that they were forced out of SANTACO a few years ago. With respect to the opinion that SANTACO was not fulfilling its mandate in return for the government funding and membership fees that it received, one respondent (R7) from TA4 summed up that association's view:

> "We have little love for those people [at SANTACO] – they are stealing from us."

In relation to operations on the ground, and contrary to my expectations that saturation within the paratransit market would be one of the common issues raised during the interviews, two respondent groups stated that such over-trading was in fact not a problem. However, concerns were expressed around associations undermining one another, which was in line with a general view that territoriality is in the nature of the paratransit sector (related comments around cartel- or mafia-like activities are captured later in this paper).

Table III – Public institutions	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Disgruntlement with unfair treatment by public officials	Yes				Yes	
Problems with operating license awarding process	Yes				Yes	
Rank facilities need improvement					Yes	

Some respondents were of the view that traffic law enforcement efforts targeted paratransit vehicles more than other road users, but their concern was wider than just traffic regulation. The general attitude amongst government officials when dealing with paratransit interests was seen to be unfavourable. In the words of R1 from TA5:

> "You know, the taxi industry is not being taken seriously … our problems just get bigger and bigger."

Nonetheless, the same respondent was of the view that the regional body tasked with awarding paratransit operating licenses was performing adequately. He continued by saying that the issue was not the number of vehicles on the road, but rather that vehicles were not keeping to their routes. The latter comment might point both to difficulties in enforcing operating permissions on the roads due to inadequate information on licensed and actual routes travelled, and to operators – and, by implication, associations – infringing on one another's operating rights and territories. This respondent's comment therefore contradicts previously mentioned views that competition amongst paratransit vehicles was not problematic, but corroborates the views that inter-association competition is a concern.

Table IV – Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP)	***TA1***	***TA2***	***TA3***	***TA4***	***TA5***	***TA6***
Disgruntlement with TRP (unspecified)	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financing new vehicles expensive/difficult	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Scrapping allowance insufficient	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lack of consultation on TRP-approved vehicle range	Yes					
Prefers pre-TRP Toyota Hiace vehicle	Yes		Yes		Yes	

Out of all the attitudes expressed around the present regulatory system, responses to the TRP were the strongest. In general the theme was introduced in the interviews by posing the question, “Do you think the Operating Licensing system works well?” In the case of three of the interviews the immediate response was in the negative, accompanied by a shaking of heads. In probing deeper, the disgruntlement focussed around two issues: the first was the cost of vehicle replacement, and the second was the choice of vehicle. The difference between the scrapping allowance of ZAR63 000 and the purchase price of a compliant vehicle of around ZAR200 000 to ZAR330 000 was seen as a major obstacle.

> R1-TA5: “The money [received for scrapping an old minibus], you can’t do anything with that money … We’re in it [the paratransit business] to make money.”

While the scrapping allowance was clearly deemed to be insufficient, funding the remainder of the purchase price was also a challenge as it was either not seen to be within respondents’ means, or it was subject to costly financing arrangements. R1 from TA5 saw the financial difficulties in relation to the TRP as being indicative of the authorities’ general attitude towards paratransit operators:

> “Maybe it’s a government scheme to root people out, to kill the industry.”

In a similar vein, R2 and R3 from TA3 saw the government’s imposition of the scheme to remove all old vehicles from the roads as a form of “oppression”. Respondents frequently commented on, and in some instances referred fondly to, the reliability and ease of maintenance of the ubiquitous pre-TRP Toyota Hiace minibus. Besides one respondent (R1-TA5) admitting that in general paratransit vehicles did not offer passengers “the best ride quality”, in this respondent’s view there seemed to be little motivation to take up the scrapping offer and “[owners would] rather stick with their old vehicle”.

4.2 The ‘minibus-taxi’ identity

An unexpected outcome of the interview process was the extent to which there were responses that suggested a strong sense of association with a particular business character and with a common ‘minibus-taxi’ identity. Upon posing a question on how respondents had first entered into the sector, R1 from TA3 recounted in great detail his entry in the paratransit market in the 1980s, his struggle to continue operating over the following decades, and the oppressive, racialised nature of the public transport marketplace at that time and in the years since. His was not the only response that had a sentimental undertone, which supported my impression that the tie between the paratransit owner and his or her business is not only financial.

Table V – Individual business character	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Inherited business from parent	Yes					Yes
Worked up from being driver/vehicle technician	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
MBT vehicle generates main source of income	Yes			Yes	No	
Keep record of business finances	No	Yes		No		
Drivers are diverting fare income to their own pockets				Yes		

Respondents generally became paratransit business owners in one of two ways: either they 'inherited' the business (i.e. the minibus vehicle and, informally, the operating permission), from a parent, or they worked in the sector as a driver for another owner or as a vehicle technician, and saved sufficient funds in the process to purchase their own vehicle. There was one response that deviated from this pattern: the respondent, R8 from TA4, had left the formal sector and used a severance pay-out to purchase a minibus. This respondent appeared to prefer the self-determination of running and owning a paratransit business as opposed to working in a corporate structure:

> "I can't go back to any other job."

Respondents were not forthcoming in stating whether their paratransit businesses was their main source of income, but there were sufficient indications that the degree to which owners exercised control over their businesses' finances varied greatly. In the case of TA1 and TA4 respondents stated in general that they did not keep a record of their finances – the only financial figure that they knew with certainty was the monthly instalment due on their recapitalised minibus's financing agreement. The majority of respondents in TA4 furthermore concurred that not all owners within their association were interested in their businesses and did not keep track of their income and expenses. This group of respondents was also concerned that their drivers were making far more money than what they reported to the owners (i.e. falsely reporting a loss in order to reduce their daily target amount), and suggested that owners should keep closer track of their finances to eradicate such practices. Although one respondent in another interview, R1 from TA5, said that there was profit to be made in certain areas of Cape Town – "This routes of ours is a goldmine" – profitability was not a universal characteristic of paratransit operations; R1 from TA6 suggested that paratransit businesses were operating under straitened financial conditions:

> "Most of our people run from hand to mouth"

Table VI – Common identity	***TA1***	***TA2***	***TA3***	***TA4***	***TA5***	***TA6***
Pride in MBT sector/associates with MBT identity		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Business seen as legacy for children	No		Yes			
MBT offers effective competition to other public transport modes	Yes			Yes		Yes
Apartheid legacy is part of industry history		Yes	Yes			
Recognition of MBT operations as home-grown/black-owned business	Yes		Yes			
Acknowledge links in MBT sector with mafias, gangs and/or drug trading						Yes
Do not want to associate with drugs/gangsterism		Yes			Yes	

Many respondents demonstrated an affinity for the paratransit sector, recognition of its importance in the public transport arena, and a desire that it should persist, as illustrated by statements that emerged during three of the interviews:

> R1-TA2: "We can proudly say that we are living from this [paratransit] business."
>
> R1-TA5: "Taxis are our tool."
>
> TA3 (respondent not noted): "We are proud of [the paratransit industry]; it's a legacy to our children."
>
> R1-TA4: "We don't realise what we have in our hands" [in terms of the paratransit sector's present ownership equity and human resources, and its future potential].

However, one of the respondents, R1 from TA6, expressed disillusionment with his present situation as a paratransit operator, and with what could be achieved if the sector were left to continue in its present form:

> "There's more to me than [being a taxi driver and owner]."
>
> "We create our own problems … It always goes back to the culture [of focussing on short-term gain]."
>
> "We're really not getting anywhere [as an industry and as an association]."

Nonetheless, amongst other respondents there was a sense that paratransit occupied a unique position in the economy. This was particularly in relation to the role paratransit can and does play in encouraging small-scale economic activity and in reversing the effects of the country's segregated past by aligning with present black economic empowerment policies:

> TA1 (respondent not noted): "This business of the taxi is for the coloured and the blacks."
>
> R2-TA3: "The taxi industry is the only industry that is completely owned by black people."

> R1-TA3: "Black people do not own mines, do not own malls, do not own farms; black people own shebeens [local bars] and we own taxis."

A further topic that emerged across interviews related to a perception that paratransit owners and groupings were linked with mafia- or gang-style practices in terms of territoriality, drug trading and money laundering. One respondent, R1 from TA6, admitted forthrightly that "the taxi industry is a mafia" and that it "has lost a lot of people because of asking about money". In this respondent's view it was risky for people in the sector to enquire about finances, and indeed in a number of interviews when the exchange veered towards actual financial figures generated within the sector respondents tended to withdraw or demonstrate significant discomfort, in response to which I immediately diverted to other topics. Respondents furthermore admitted that loss of life was a part of the industry's history. R1 from TA3 lamented that the sector had "lost many, many people in the process [of territorial protection that stemmed from past deregulation]" while R1 from TA2 stated that he had "lost almost 50 plus drivers and sliding door engineers [conductors]" in incidents linked to gang violence. A countermeasure within TA5 was that drug dealers were not allowed to become members, according to R1 from that particular association, though this was the only instance during any of the interviews that such a measure was mentioned.

4.3 Integrated Rapid Transit (IRT) system / MyCiTi

Attitudes on the IRT system in Cape Town could be categorised around two broad topics, one of which was the manner in which public authorities were engaging, and providing information to, operators, and the other being the prospects and impacts of the IRT programme on operators.

Table VII – Information and engagement process	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Empty government promises / distrust of government approaches	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Heard about IRT proposal through paratransit hierarchy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Had a clear understanding of IRT proposal principles	No	Yes*	No	No	No	Yes*
Participated in publicly funded study trip to Bogota		Yes			Yes	Yes
Difficult to access and interpret IRT information	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes

*Statements at other points in the interview contradicted these affirmative responses; there was not sufficient time during the interview to explore the full extent of respondents' knowledge about the IRT proposal

Responses revealed that there was distrust of government efforts to intervene in the paratransit sector. Suspicions spanned beyond the present IRT engagement process. One respondent (not noted) from TA1 stated that the Western Cape province, within which Cape Town is located, oppressed paratransit operators, and R2 from TA2 had the similar view that government was "keeping us in our old shoes". A further respondent observed that the public sector attitude towards paratransit had not changed post-democracy:

> R2-TA3: "Our businesses were not supported by the previous government, and they are not being supported by the present government."

While most respondents had heard about the IRT programme, particularly through the paratransit hierarchy, few had a clear understanding of what the proposed reforms were and how these would affect them. In the cases of TA2, TA5 and TA6 respondents gained their insights by participating in publicly funded visits to Bogota in Columbia to study the BRT system there, although one (not noted) from TA1 felt that the trip had little value as they did not hear from Bogota's paratransit operators about their experiences of that city's public transport reform process. The history of public sector 'promises' in South Africa around programmes that were intended to benefit paratransit operators – such as those around the TRP – that had not translated into visible benefits also seemed to play a role in their scepticism of the IRT system. R1 from TA2 believed that government was using a "divide and rule" approach by only dealing with associations and their members that were directly affected by IRT routes. The latter respondent's association was located in the upcoming, second IRT project phase. R1 from TA5, also part of the second IRT phase, said:

> "We hear in 2013 that IRT is coming this way; we have nobody come to us."

Uncertainty seemed also to be present in the current project phase, with R1 from TA6, which is part of the Phase 1 corporatisation negotiations, asserting that

> "We are walking into the unknown."

Respondents expressed strong views around the present IRT engagement approach not targeting individual business owners directly, but that it rather utilised the higher-up levels of the paratransit hierarchy, notably SANTACO and directly affected associations. In the words of two respondents, in separate interviews:

> R2-TA2: "When you [officials] negotiate here [in the Phase 2 area] you talk to me."

and, unequivocally,

> R2-TA3: "I would never allow another person to negotiate on my behalf around my future without me being present."

Respondents evidently wanted to be engaged directly. This attitude is understandable, given the uncertainty around the extent to which the IRT system might affect respondents' businesses (R1-TA6: "How are we not going to be worse off?") and also a feeling of disempowerment possibly engendered by the arms-length engagement approach. One respondent (not noted) from TA2 asserted that "IRT should belong to the people" but that it did not seem so at present. This might signify that the gap between policy-making and implementation processes and the parties these are intended to serve – operators, passengers, the public at large – is perhaps too wide. A suggestion from one respondent in how this gap could be bridged:

> R7-TA4: "Give us someone who can come show us how [the IRT] works"

Table VIII – Prospects of IRT programme

	TA1	TA2	TA3	TA4	TA5	TA6
Willingness to consider change by way of IRT and corporatisation	Yes	Yes		Yes	No	No
Offers an improved business environment - financial stability	Yes					No
Concerned about paratransit being accommodated/included	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes

Responses around whether there was a willingness to accept the offer of corporatisation were both positive and negative, with the lack of information around what the IRT proposal entailed playing a role in the latter. R2 from TA1 expressed powerlessness against the reform process – "A [minibus-]taxi cannot compete with those [IRT] buses" – and in the TA6 interview R1 voiced his concern that there were not enough employment opportunities and ownership positions for all present paratransit operations to be included in the IRT system. The latter sentiment was echoed in the TA1, TA2 and TA3 interviews.

In a more positive light, from the outline of the IRT that the intermediary and I were asked to provide during the interview, respondents in TA4 – who had indicated no prior knowledge of the proposal content – collectively indicated that it "sounds good". R2 from TA2, who had more knowledge of the proposal, expressed a willingness to change, but felt that operators were being "coerced" into joining the IRT. It also seemed that opinion of the IRT project could change over time, from support to resistance, as per an observation by R1 from TA5:

> "We [the association] were all for it at one stage, at the beginning stage."

However, having gained greater insight into the programme by being part of the transition negotiations, R1 from TA6 declared:

> "I don't want to be in IRT – there's too much uncertainty."

Besides outright resistance to change, another obstacle that the reform process may well face is the level of business literacy amongst some paratransit operators, that is, the ability to understand the formal sector business vocabulary and long term contracts and planning. R1 from TA6 sketched the straightforward nature of present-day paratransit operations:

> "Take the key, start the car [minibus], I'm gone."

By contrast, the same respondent indicated that the future heralded by the IRT system posed an unfamiliar challenge, and one for which operators might not be well-equipped:

> "We never used to be in the corporate world … We do not have the educational background."

Commenting on the fact that the IRT proposal is not a quick fix for present problems in the paratransit sector, R1 and R2 from TA2, which is located in the second project phase, suggested that a lack of "intellect" and "in-fighting" amongst operators were preventing them from pooling their resources in a collectively owned corporate structure. R1 furthermore predicted that –

> "It's going to take another 30 years for them [paratransit owners] to see the bigger picture [of corporatisation]."

4.4 Paratransit business strategies, needs and aspirations

I prompted respondents to reflect on ways in which they thought their own businesses and the paratransit sector in general could be more successful. The intention with this open-ended enquiry was to gain insight into what ownership, regulatory or infrastructural mechanisms operators might consider in order to improve their businesses in future, and in so doing reveal their business needs and aspirations. Unexpectedly, the exchanges that ensued revealed a number of schemes that respondents' associations had already tested.

Table IX – Existing business improvement strategies	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Collective fleet management / consolidate operations				Yes		
Keep fares low to attract more passengers	Yes					
Formal bus service		Yes*			Yes**	
Use long-distance trips/contract services to supplement PT trip income	Yes					Yes
Advertising in vehicles to supplement income				Yes		
Implemented prepaid voucher fare system on local routes				Yes		
Arranged a pension scheme for TA members				Yes		

* Business proposal turned down by public authority

** Operating services under contract to a public institution

All but one of the interviewed associations had within their own association attempted or succeeded with schemes to strengthen their members' businesses. TA4 in particular seemed to have explored a number of options. These included an attempt to manage the entire association's fleet of vehicles collectively for better efficiency, although the scheme failed because, in the words of R7 from this association, "we [the association's members] don't trust one another". Greater success was achieved with a pension scheme for association members, as well as a prepaid paper-based fare voucher that was valid on paratransit trips in the local area, which were both still running at the time of the interview. The intention with the latter was to enable owners to manage their business finances better and reduce the incidence of drivers under-reporting on farebox revenue. Respondents in this association were also selling advertising space in their vehicles to supplement their income from fares.

Strategies employed in other interviewed associations to bolster their businesses included keeping fares low to attract more passengers (though this could well be counter-productive if not managed carefully) and using minibuses for long distance trips and shuttle services during off-peak hours and over weekends. Of particular note was that two associations had attempted to enter into the formal transport service environment, one successfully (TA5) and the other (TA2) not so. The former arrangement entailed a contract arrangement with a large educational institution to provide peak-hour transport services for students, while the latter took the form of a proposal to the local government to start a scheduled bus service between the association's home base and Cape Town's city centre. The proposal was rejected, but the reason for rejection was unclear.

Table X – Business needs and aspirations	*TA1*	*TA2*	*TA3*	*TA4*	*TA5*	*TA6*
Willingness to use larger vehicles	No	Yes				No
Want to increase presence in long distance transport services						Yes
Want increased financial support from government	Yes	Yes		Yes		
Want support to grow business and develop business management skills			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Want to get out of MBT sector altogether	Yes	^				

^ Affirmative and negative responses at different points in the interview

Prompting respondents to consider what circumstances or mechanisms might best address their current business needs did not yield insight far beyond day-to-day considerations such as more efficient types of vehicles or a general desire for increased financial support from government. As with exchanges around the IRT, respondents did not appear to be comfortable with, or be able to assess the benefits and drawbacks, of hypothetical propositions within the context of the interview. However, a number of respondents were at least aware of the need to promote better management practices, which would necessarily involve acquiring or drawing in skills to plan for, and project, future scenarios. R1 from TA6 captured it succinctly:

> "We need expertise in the industry, we need skills, we need outsiders [professional advisors]."

Probing around whether respondents aspired to exit the paratransit and/or public transport sector did not reveal strong desires to do so. However, in the case of TA2, R1 indicated that "if the government comes to us with a reasonable offer [to buy out the business to make way for IRT services] we will accept it; we want to retire". If the lack of consistent financial record-keeping and long-term business planning skills proves to be ubiquitous it will be difficult for any agency to establish what that reasonable offer would be in the eyes of a paratransit business owner.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The application of the semi-structured interview method to gauge paratransit operators' attitudes proved to be as much about gaining insight into their views on regulation, policy and business as it was about testing a method to gain insight into those attitudes. The method did not lend itself to establishing representative views on the part of the entire corps of paratransit owners and associations in Cape Town or in South Africa, but qualitative investigation, as McCracken (1991) phrases it, "... is not intended to capture issues of distribution and generalisation. It tells us what people think and do, not how many of them think and do it". Indeed, given the time-consuming nature of locating and managing an intermediary – or 'door-opener' – and of the interviews themselves, it would be difficult to gather sufficient data to be significant in a quantitative sense. Nonetheless, the method unearthed rich data that responded to the research questions, and which could furthermore inform the present public transport reform process.

Do present reform policies address the fundamental problems of the present-day public transport system and its operators? There were a number of concerns around the TRP in terms of both the recapitalisation subsidy and the efficacy of SANTACO. In particular, it seems that SANTACO might not necessarily be representative of associations' and operators' attitudes and interests. In view of the multitude of contrary and contradicting views expressed during the interviews it is, in fact, doubtful whether anything except direct engagement with as many individuals and groupings in the paratransit arena as possible would offer sufficient insight into whether the present regulatory system responds to their needs. Public resources might well be too limited for such sector-wide coverage, but a more focussed approach such as that presented in this paper might be warranted particularly in view of recent commitments by the Cape Town municipality to be more inclusive in its IRT-related consultations with paratransit entities (Cape Times, 30 October 2012).

Attitudes relating to the BRT-led policy programmes at national (IRPTN) and local (IRT) scales were more difficult to penetrate. The interview findings revealed two issues surrounding the approach that government has taken in engaging paratransit operators: firstly, there seems to be too little information available for operators to be able to make informed decisions around opting into the programme or not, and, secondly, the information that is available may not be in a vocabulary that operators can easily understand. Frank and frequent communication between government and paratransit entities might begin to forge the trust that is a necessary foundation for the complex negotiations that are required to corporatise existing operations, and to allay uncertainty and fears on the part of paratransit operators who are being asked to abandon their familiar and decades-old business format, however flawed it might be.

Did the interview method highlight concerns and expectations that paratransit operators have with regard to their businesses? A number of concerns were indeed elicited, but due to the qualitative approach it is not possible to establish how representative these concerns might be. Also, because of the group setting of the interview individual attitudes could not be discerned (except where there was only one respondent present), and contrary views may have been suppressed due to peer pressure within the group. The interviews did, nevertheless, illustrate numerous relevant concerns as well as noteworthy efforts by associations and operators to improve their businesses – without outside intervention. This offers a glimpse into the self-determination present within the paratransit sector, which policy-makers and planners alike would do well to heed.

Lastly, responses during the interviews and the application of the semi-structured interview method, as reported on in this paper, as well as the IRT's first phase engagement process, provide some pointers for the reform policy engagement process going forward. Engagement with paratransit operators is an intensive and at times volatile procedure with unpredictable results. Penetrating operators' views will require sustained effort especially in view of the significant potential for a hostile reception. The paratransit sector has created a niche for itself in the passenger transport arena despite receiving little public sector support, particularly prior to the TRP. Approaches by the public sector around paratransit restructuring may therefore well be viewed as unwanted outside interference. Focused and transparent efforts will have to be made to overcome the 'us/them' boundary and for a mutually acceptable reform agenda to be established. Government may ultimately have to accept that this agenda does not revolve primarily around the introduction of a new public transport mode, but rather around unlocking the human capital – including the operational experience and local knowledge – that is embodied in the multitude of paratransit businesses around the country. Conversely, paratransit operators and associations may have to move away from seeing themselves as the owners and operators of a particular vehicle and mode of operations, and towards being small, medium and micro businesses in a segment of the economy – that of passenger transport – that is receiving significant public sector attention and funding. The outcomes to date of the government-led engagement process and of the interviews reported on in this paper would suggest that both government and paratransit have the capacity to achieve such shifts in focus.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research presented in this paper was funded by the Volvo Research and Educational Foundations, and forms part of a broader research programme conducted by the African Centre of Excellence for Studies in Public and Non-motorised Transport (ACET, www.acet.uct.ac.za).

REFERENCES

Arce, C. (2003). Multi-cultural and multi-lingual conditions. In P. Stopher, and P. Jones (eds.). Transport survey quality and innovation. Pergamon, London. (pp. 209-213).

Barrett, J. (2003). Organizing in the informal economy: A case study of the minibus taxi industry in South Africa. SEED Working Paper No 39. International Labour Office. Geneva.

Business Report. 4 May 2010. "Inside Transport: Feuding taxi associations leave industry without a single voice".

Cape Argus. 30 March 2010. "Taxi report is available – Rasool".

Cape Times. 30 October 2012. "City vows to include taxis in grand plan".

CCT (City of Cape Town). (2007a). City of Cape Town Public Transport Implementation Framework.

CCT (City of Cape Town). (2007b). City of Cape Town Operating Licences Strategy.

Clifton, K. and S. Handy. (2003). Qualitative methods in travel behaviour research. In P. Stopher, and P. Jones (eds.). Transport survey quality and innovation. Pergamon, London. (pp. 283-302)

Dugard, J. (2001). From low intensity war to mafia war: taxi violence in South Africa (1987-2000). Violence and Transition Series. 4, May. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. Johannesburg.

Engineering News. 6 July 2012. "Toyota starts taxi assembly, DTI seeks others to follow".

Iafrica News. 15 March 2009. "A history of violence".

Mail and Guardian. 7 December 2008. "Taxi industry shoots down public transport plans".

McCracken, G. (1991). The long interview. Sage Publications. Newbury Park, California.

Merriam, S. 1998. Qualitative Research and Case Study applications in education. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

NDoT (South African National Department of Transport). (2003). National Household Travel Survey. Pretoria.

O'Leary, Z. (2005). Researching real world problems – A guide to methods of inquiry. Sage Publications. London.

Walters, J. (2008). Overview of public transport policy developments in South Africa. In Research in Transportation Economics, 22, 98–108.