

Public transport policy and performance: The results of a South African public opinion poll

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Public opinion plays a vital role in a democracy, as democracies are, by nature responsive to the people. In South Africa, public participation is entrenched in the Constitution. Despite this, the spate of service delivery protests in South Africa in recent years would appear to indicate that the government is out of touch with the opinions of the South African citizens. Public transport policy in South Africa is described by a number of documents, mainly the White Paper on National Transport Policy, Moving South Africa and, more recently, the National Development Plan. An annual survey of 1000 South Africans is conducted to gauge opinion on transport related matters. The purpose of this article was to compare the current public transport policies (as stated above) and the public opinion on public transport (as gauged by the survey) in order to determine the extent to which these are aligned. The results show that current public transport policy is relatively strongly aligned with the public transport needs of the South African population, however, concerns regarding public transport such as mobility, accessibility, affordability and safety have not yet to be addressed satisfactorily.

Introduction

Democracies require public participation, as they are, by nature, dependent on a responsive population. It is thus critical that the state take cognisance of its citizens' needs and opinions. Despite public participation being entrenched in the Republic of South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996), service delivery protests appear to indicate that the citizens do not believe that their concerns are being taken into account. This article therefore attempts to compare public opinion to actual public transport policy by, firstly, providing an outline of current public transport policy and secondly, comparing this to the results of a public opinion survey, known as The State of Transport Opinion Poll South Africa (STOPSA), on transport conducted by the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (Africa) across South Africa in 2012. The article seeks to determine similarities and differences between policy and public opinion.

Literature review

Public opinion surveys are important tools in any government's planning processes. According to Hensher and Daniels (2011), opinion polls are indicators of consumer or business sentiment and are used over time to measure the impacts on aspects such as purchasing decisions, employment, capital investment and official interest rate adjustments. Opinion polls can inform the future direction of the economy.

Levasseur (2005) stated that public opinion plays a vital role in a democracy, as democracies are, by nature, responsive to the people. He asserts that an improved understanding of public opinion should lead to improved democratic governance. Chudowskya and Kuziob (2003) supported this by considering the views of historic thinkers who believed governments were created by societies and rulers and therefore needed to respond to society's needs and wants. Ignoring public opinion cannot only have an impact at the polls, but could indicate a government that is unresponsive to the opinions of its citizens.

In South Africa, public participation is entrenched in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996). It is described in a number of sections, notably sections 17, 59, 70, 72, 115 and 118. These set the tone for public participation, particularly in legislative processes. Together with related provisions, the purpose of these sections is to ensure that governments remain accountable, transparent and open. The spirit of the Constitution implies that the government needs to take public opinion into account at all levels of decision-making. Despite this, the spate of service delivery protests in South Africa in recent years would appear to indicate that the government is out of touch with the opinions of the South African citizens. Friedman (2012) contended that these protests arise from people's feeling that their opinions are not taken into account or valued.

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Opinion polls are important as they provide information about what people feel and want. Accurately gauging public opinion is critical in ensuring a better quality of decision making, maintaining credibility and developing civil society. Polls affect the public policy debate, but they also provide an important communication link between governments and citizens (Sophism 2003). '... [P]ublic opinion polls are oxygen to the corpus of a representative democratic society' (Baines *et al.* 2007).

Transport opinion polls can be used to gauge public views on any number of transport issues. There are numerous examples of important transport opinion polls. The New South Wales (NSW) Government, for example, conducted a Transport Customer Survey in 2011 to determine opinions on various service attributes (NSW Government Bureau of Transport Statistics 2012). The University of Sydney also conducts the quarterly Transport Opinion Survey (TOPS) (Hensher & Daniels 2011). In Europe, the European Commission conducts regular opinion surveys on a number of issues, including transport (European Commission 2013). Similarly, Transportation for America conducts surveys into various aspects such as the Future of Transportation National Survey (Transportation for America 2013). The University of Sydney's survey instrument was used as the base for the South African opinion poll and benchmarked against the other studies referred to above.

In South Africa, transport opinion polls are not as common, with very few available examples. The National Household Travel Survey conducted in 2003 contained some customer perception related questions, but was mainly focused on travel patterns (Department of Transport 2003). Aside from this, very little else could be found in the literature to inform government on the public's opinion on transport matters, other than the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (World Bank 2012), which provides some opinions on transport matters, albeit logistics related.

It is evident from the above that public opinion plays a critical role on public policy making and that various governments and institutions conduct transport opinion polls to gauge public opinion on various transport issues. In South Africa, it is postulated that the government is 'out of touch' with public opinion (Friedman 2012; Raghavan 2012). As a result, it is not always possible that the policies are aligned to public requirements or that policies are successful in their execution. The purpose of this study is therefore to determine public opinions on transport issues and to compare these with government's stated transport policy objectives. This will allow for the determination of the success or disconnect in the alignment between stated policy objectives and public opinion on policy issues.

South African public transport policy White Paper on National Transport Policy (1996)

The White Paper on National Transport Policy (Department of Transport 1996) is the key transport policy document

in South Africa and guides all transport legislation and planning. The broad goal for transport is 'the smooth and efficient interaction that allows society and the economy to assume their preferred form' (Department of Transport 1996). To this end, the policy is divided into two key areas – infrastructure and operations and control. Public transport is nested within the broad area of operations and control under the heading 'land passenger transport'. The department of transport's mission regarding land transport is:

The promotion of a safe, reliable, effective, efficient, co-ordinated, integrated, and environmentally friendly land passenger transport system in South African urban and rural areas, and the southern African region, managed in an accountable manner to ensure that people experience improving levels of mobility and accessibility. (Department of Transport 1996).

To support this, the policy objectives are broadly outlined as:

- Spatial development principles must support passenger transport policy.
- The principle of devolution of public passenger transport functions to the lowest appropriate level of government.
- Public passenger transport must be provided efficiently so that public resources are used in an optimal manner.
- The application of funds to transport improvements should be self-sustaining and replicable. To encourage this, the users of urban transport facilities should pay for all or most of the costs incurred within the limits of affordability.

It is evident from the above that the White Paper considers the provision of public transport as critical to improving mobility and accessibility and that it should be provided efficiently, affordably and effectively.

In terms of infrastructure for public transport, the policy provides that there should be efficiency in the provision, maintenance and operation of the primary economic road infrastructure network and that increased attention will be given to the provision and maintenance of the lowest order roads, both in rural and in urban areas. Rail infrastructure for commuter transport will be determined by a combination of market needs and social considerations

Moving South Africa (1998)

The Moving South Africa project (MSA) was designed to produce a data-driven program for strategic action that extends the short to medium-term policy formulation documented in the Transport White Paper into a long-term strategic formulation embodying the sets of trade-offs and choices necessary to realise the vision as set out in the White Paper (Department of Transport 1998).

The document creates a vision for urban transport to support the overall vision in the White Paper (Department of Transport) as follows:

Provide an effective and sustainable urban transport system, planned and regulated through the lowest possible level of government, based on competition and largely private sector

operation, which reduces system costs and improves customer service in order to meet customer and national objectives for user cost, travel times, choice, and safety (1998).

Moving South Africa (MSA) is less clear on rural transport, however, it suggests that, due to a lack of data, the general strategic principles developed in other parts of the strategy are to be applied to the rural situation until the data are developed. MSA thus largely focuses its objectives for public transport as per Figure 1.

National Development Plan (2012)

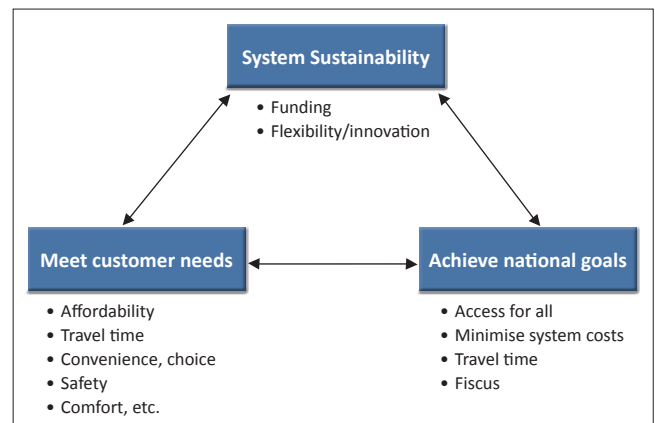
In August 2012, the National Planning Commission (NPC) presented the National Development Plan (NDP), which was aimed at addressing and eradicating poverty and reducing the inequality in South Africa (SA). The NDP presented a long-term strategy, which considered a variety of factors that influence the SA economy and society, including transport.

Investments in transport infrastructure and improving public transport are viewed as key development areas that are imperative in achieving the 2030 objectives. The NDP recognises specific strategy objectives, which are related to public transport and are intended to attack poverty. These are listed below:

- Investments in public transport, which will benefit low-income households by facilitating mobility (National Planning Commission 2012:18).
- The establishment of effective, safe and affordable public transport that will enable various strategy objectives (National Planning Commission 2012:24).
- Investments in the transport sector must 'bridge geographical distances affordably, foster reliably and safely so that all South Africans can access previously inaccessible economic opportunities, social spaces and services' (National Planning Commission 2012:183).
- Improving mobility and economic accessibility will increase social and economic access and alleviate poverty. The provision of safe and efficient public transport is critical to this end (National Planning Commission 2012:184).

The NDP (primarily from Chapter 4 – Economic Infrastructure and Chapter 8 – Transforming Human Settlements) identifies a number of public transport policy and planning priorities, including:

- Increasing public transport investment: including attracting private-sector investments that are focused on extending bus services, refurbishing commuter trains and linking high-volume corridors to develop an integrated and effective service (National Planning Commission 2012:185; National Planning Commission 2012:283–284).
- Resolving the problems with bus rapid transport (BRT) systems: this is imperative given the substantial financial and spatial investments made and the envisaged improvements to public transport the systems represent.
- Devolving transport management to local governments: transferring transport responsibilities over to municipal authorities will only be successful if institutions are



Source: Department of Transport, 1998, *Moving South Africa*. Pretoria, Republic of South Africa

FIGURE 1: Public transport objectives.

strengthened and legislation, policy and practice are aligned.

- Providing incentives for public transport use: subsidies for low-income commuters will increase the affordability of public transport. Increasing private car costs might motivate motorists to use public transport, provided the public transport system has the necessary capacity, frequency services and provides the required accessibility and safety.
- Improving road infrastructure: although public transport is expanding, urban populations will continue to use cars and transport authorities must plan and invest in road and transport infrastructure construction and maintenance.
- Renewing commuter train fleet: given the demand density, trains can provide the lowest-cost transport service in metropolitan areas. Old rolling stock, which is often unreliable and uncomfortable, must be replaced with new technology to improve service levels.

The maintenance of SA's national, provincial and local road networks, with an approximate replacement value of R1.7 trillion, is a top priority and needs immediate attention to avoid further deterioration. Given the high cost of rail transport, old rolling stock and low patronage on long-distance rail passenger services, investment into commuter rail and bus services with a wide reach for poor people is more defensible (National Planning Commission 2012:187).

In many rural areas, where insufficient productive economic activity is available, the provision of scheduled public transport services can ensure accessibility and mobility. Given the limited resources and urban migration, subsidised transport services would be limited to higher density areas along transport corridors (National Planning Commission 2012:188). Scheduled public transport services must be provided to give access to basic requirements and state support services (National Planning Commission 2012:232).

Policy conclusions

It is evident from the above policy initiatives that the key thrusts are safe and reliable transport; devolution to the

lowest level of government; private sector involvement, where possible; high levels of mobility, accessibility and affordability; and efficiency and effectiveness.

Research methodology

The purpose of the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (Africa) (ITLS Africa) State of Transport Opinion Poll South Africa (STOPSA) is to gauge community confidence regarding transport on a regular basis across South Africa. STOPSA is an annual telephone survey of 1000 South Africans, aged 18 years and over and is representative of all South African provinces.

A two-phase approach was followed:

In Phase 1, respondents were randomly selected from a database of valid subscriber phone numbers and sent a recruitment short message service (SMS) to (1) enquire if they were willing to participate in a survey and (2) to identify the region in which they resided.

In Phase 2, a computer-aided telephonic interview was conducted with the willing respondents identified in Phase 1. Consulta Research, a market research company, using trained interviewers, conducted the telephonic survey. During Phase 1, more than 47 500 SMSs were sent to subscriber phone numbers across four SMS campaigns; approximately 2250 positive returns from the sent SMSs were received. The target sample of 1000 South Africans was randomly selected from these willing participants. Of the sample respondents who gave positive returns on the various SMS campaigns, the average response rate for completing the survey was 41%, varying from 27% to 51% per campaign. Although a larger sample would reduce the sampling error, the sampling size indicated a trade-off with the costs of the survey.

The research instrument provided for demographic information such as location, age, gender and employment to ensure representative geographical and social-demographic sampling. Of the sample population, 55.2% were males and 45.8% were females. The profiles of the respondents are depicted in Figure 2 to Figure 4. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 18 years and 35 years.

The majority of the respondents, 58.4%, were employed in some capacity, compared to the 37.0% who were unemployed as reflected in Figure 3.

The results from Gauteng (24%), Kwazulu Natal (14%) and the Eastern Cape (14%) influence the national results due to them making up approximately 50% of South Africa's population and respondents. The results from smaller provinces such as the Northern Cape, Free State and North West, with approximately 14% of South Africa's population, could be more variable due to the small sample size.

The demographic profile from the survey approximated a relatively accurate reflection of the South African demographic profile (Statistics South Africa 2012). Although

it might be seen as a limitation to the study, the convergence of the data led the authors to believe that the sample size is sufficiently large to reflect public opinion on transport matters in South Africa. This is supported by the British Polling Council, which asserts that 'in a random poll of 1000 people, with a 100% response rate, then 19 times out of 20, a poll will be accurate to within 3%' (British Polling Council n.d.).

Research results

The key public transport areas that were tested included whether transport is a national priority, the highest priority issues in transport and changes in transport conditions locally as well as nationally. Other issues that were tested pertained to funding, ownership and public transport usage.

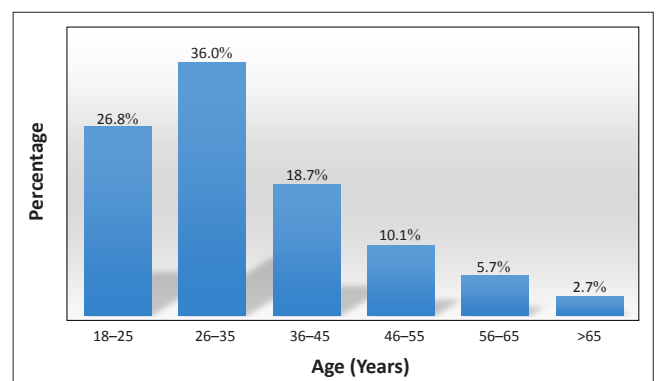


FIGURE 2: Respondents' age profile.

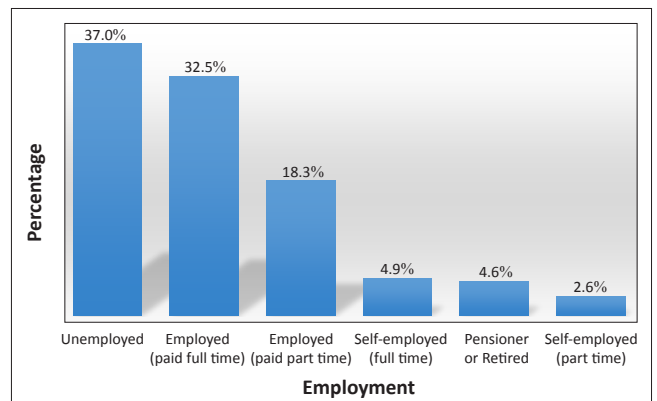


FIGURE 3: Respondents' employment profile.

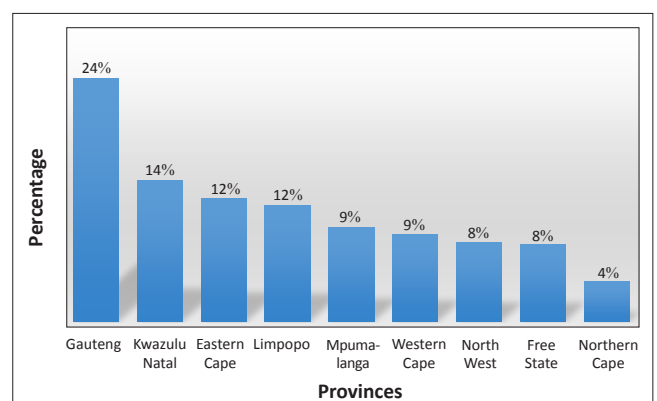


FIGURE 4: Respondents geographical location.

In the survey, education is identified as the highest priority issue in South Africa today; it is nominated by 46% of the respondents as one of the three highest priority issues. Health and transport are the other two main areas of importance. The rating in Figure 5 reflects the average rating for all respondents (respondents were asked to rate issues on a scale where 0 = very low priority and 100 = very high priority).

The survey indicates that transport is the third highest overall priority in South African society today. This ranking indicates that transport is still regarded as critical despite the attention it has received in numerous policy initiatives, including the 2012 National Development Plan.

The survey results indicate that public transport is by far the highest priority issue in transport in South Africa today. Almost 25% of the respondents highlighted public transport as an issue. If public transport were inclusive of all taxi

related issues, public transport would have been highlighted as a priority issue by 35% of respondents. These results are depicted in Figure 6.

The question regarding the highest transport issues was an open-ended question. Each time a term such as 'public transport' was mentioned by respondents, these were grouped together and tallied. There were however more specific responses related to public transport modes such as trains or buses quality, frequency and amount of services, travel times, issues that relate to customer service and mobility and accessibility. Other aspects that were mentioned were affordability, quality of public transport infrastructure, safety, transport in rural areas and government attitude to public transport. Therefore 'Public transport' includes any mentions of the generic term 'Public transport' as well as other more specific terms. 'Quality of roads' includes any mentions of the generic term 'Quality of roads' as well as

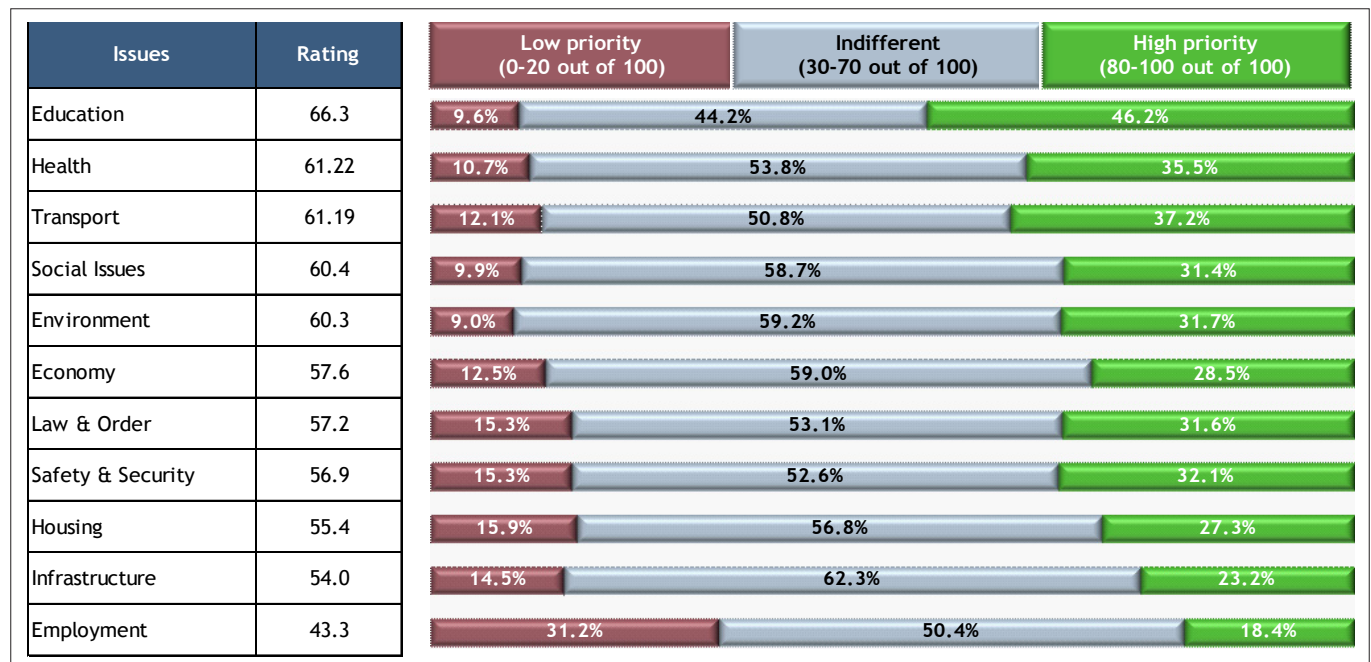


FIGURE 5: Rating of national issues.

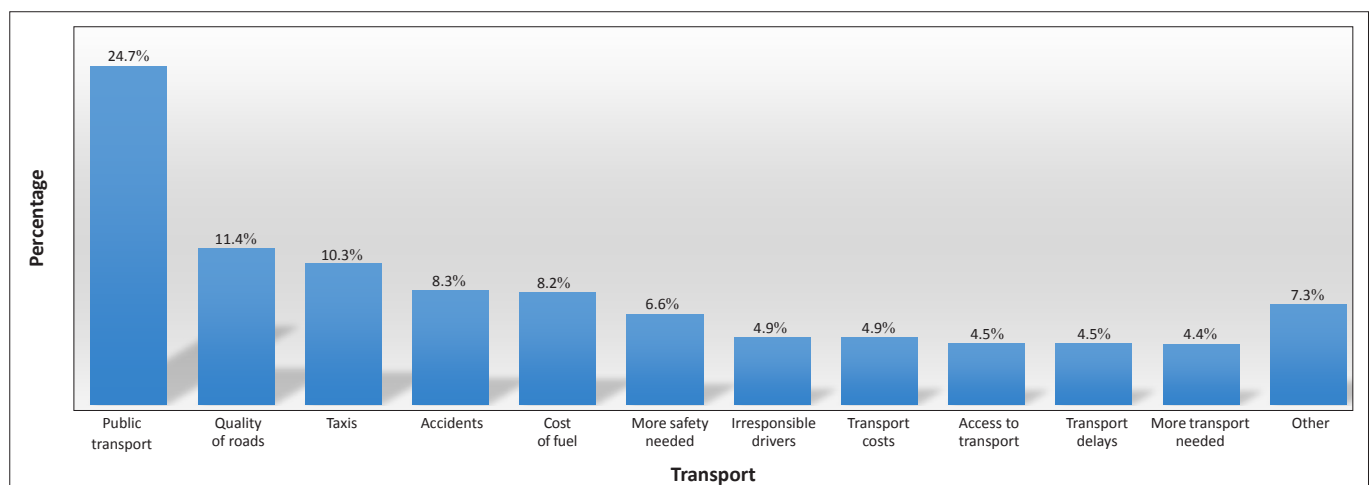


FIGURE 6: Highest transport issues.

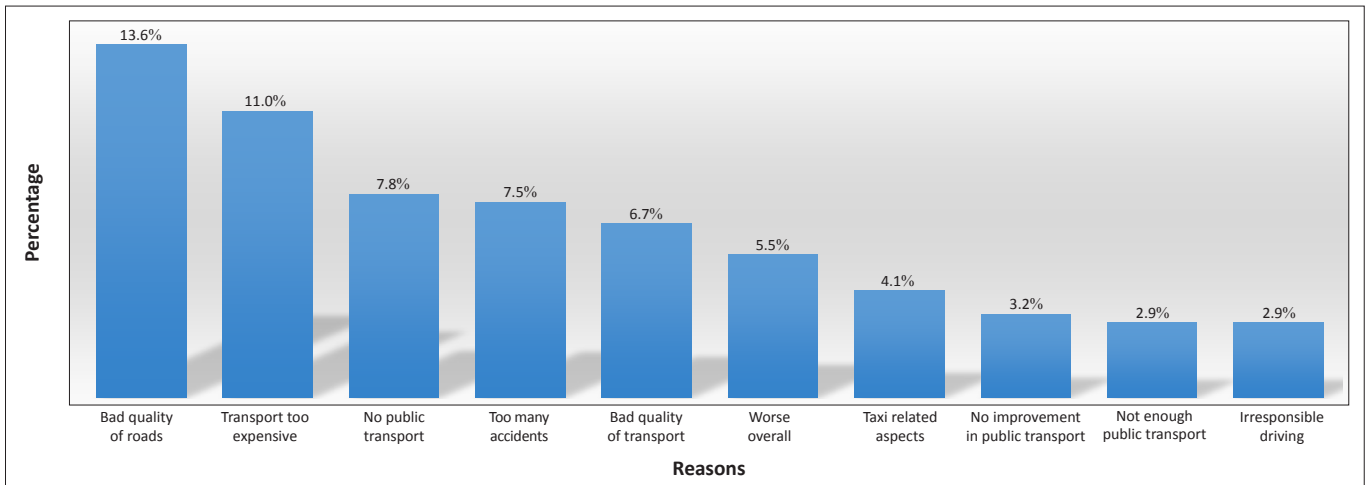


FIGURE 7: Reasons for worsening of local transport.

specific mentions of potholes. 'Taxi's' includes any mentions of the generic term 'Taxi's' or 'Taxi services' as well as other more specific terms such as quality of taxi equipment and complaints about taxi associations.

Respondents highlighted the principal concerns pertaining to public transport as the provision of services, the safety and reliability of public transport, mobility and accessibility, affordability and quality of infrastructure.

When tested on the current state of local transport, only 32% of the respondents felt that transport in their local area was better now than a year ago, whilst almost 68% either felt that there was very little change or that it was much worse than a year ago.

Respondents who indicated that transport in their local area was worse than a year ago attributed this primarily to the quality of roads and transport, high transport costs and the lack of sufficient levels of public transport (see Figure 7).

Respondents believed that local and national government are most responsible for the provision of transport, with provincial governments only playing a small role (see Figure 8).

Government policy is to devolve the responsibilities for public transport to the lowest possible level of government. It is evident from the above findings that although many respondents indicated that local area governments (lowest level) are responsible for transport provision, the majority still feel that national government plays a leading role.

The majority of the respondents indicated that the private sector should be far more involved in the provision of public transport (see Figure 9). This clearly reflects the need to implement the MSA's requirement for largely private sector operations and the NDP's objective of attracting private sector funding to transport infrastructure investments.

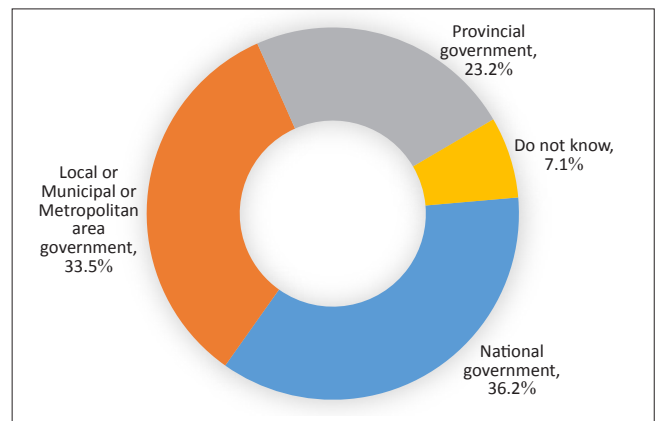


FIGURE 8: Government level responsible for transport.

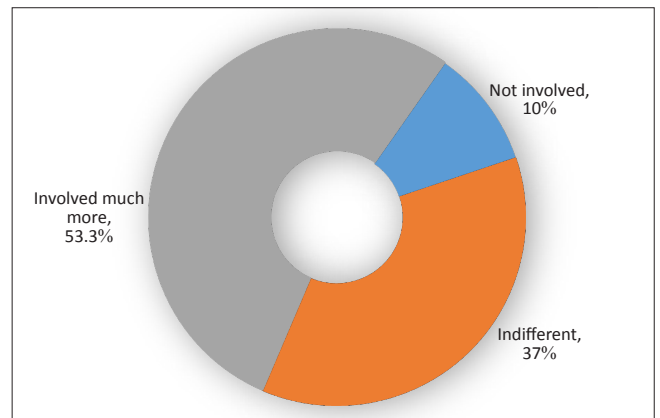


FIGURE 9: Private sector involvement.

TABLE 1: Public transport usage.

Public transport usage	Taxi (%)	Gautrain (%)	Train (%)	Bus (%)
4–7 times a week	73.1	1.0	8.4	17.5
2–3 times a week	57.9	4.8	14.4	22.9
Once a week	39.2	5.4	17.5	38.0
Once every 2 weeks	27.1	7.0	27.1	38.8
Once a month	16.7	13.0	24.3	46.1
Less than once a month	10.1	19.4	32.1	38.4
Never use	13.8	85.4	64.8	40.2

When testing the frequency of public transport usage, of the regular public transport users (four to seven times a week), taxis are clearly the dominant mode of transport followed by buses. The same is also true for commuters who use public transport two to three times a week. For public transport users that commute less frequently, buses become the dominant mode (see Table 1).

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents have never used trains, which is inevitable given the current commuter rail coverage. However, 86% of the respondents indicated that they have used taxis as a form of transport at some time. Very few respondents indicated that they have never used any form of public transport at all. The findings reveal the need to highlight public transport in general and taxis issues specifically as priorities in the formulation of public transport policy. The above also clearly indicates that public transport is unquestionably the prevailing means of achieving mobility in South Africa, hence the importance of the South African public's opinion on transport policy matters.

Conclusion

The White Paper on National Transport Policy (1996) highlighted in its mission for land passenger transport, the need for safety, reliability, efficiency, effectiveness, co-ordination, integration, accountability, mobility and accessibility. Moving South Africa (1998) supported this in its vision for urban passenger transport, seeking effectiveness, sustainability, competitiveness, devolution of responsibilities to lowest levels of government, private sector involvement and increased customer satisfaction, particularly regarding costs, travel times, choice and safety.

Most of these issues were reiterated in the 2012 National Development Plan. This document specifically highlighted the need to invest in transport infrastructure and improve public transport. Issues with public transport that were highlighted included effectiveness, efficiency, safety, affordability, mobility, accessibility, integration, private sector involvement, devolution to lowest levels of government, increasing public transport capacity, frequency and overall quality. Maintaining and improving the road network is clearly a high priority issue.

The State of Transport Opinion Poll SA (STOPSA) clearly highlights that transport is a major issue amongst South African citizens. By rating it as the third highest priority in the country, South Africans are indicating that the current transport system does not meet their present requirements. When considering the highest priority issues in transport in South Africa, public transport is clearly highlighted by a very high percentage of respondents. This includes aspects related to quality, frequency and amount of services, travel times, et cetera, which are issues that relate to customer service, mobility and accessibility. Other aspects that are highlighted

are affordability, quality of infrastructure and safety. Further investigation also reveals the need to highlight taxis as a priority issue, the full devolution of powers to the lowest levels of government and the need for higher levels of private sector involvement in the provision of public transport.

It is evident from the comparison between the survey results and the overview of the salient points of the current public transport policy that policy is, in fact, relatively strongly aligned with the public transport needs of the South African population and has been since 1996. In essence, the findings seem to indicate that whilst aspects that concern South Africans regarding public transport such as mobility, accessibility, affordability and safety have been prioritised in policies since 1996, these concerns have not been addressed. This is evidenced by the repetition of similar priority issues in the White Paper on National Transport Policy and Moving South Africa and again in the National Development Plan. The issues highlighted by South Africans in the survey further evidence this. The ranking of transport as the third highest priority issue in the country suggests that public transport is a critically unaddressed issue. It is thus apparent that, whilst the White Paper of 1996 has clearly highlighted specific public transport issues, little progress has been made since and the issues therefore remain unchanged. As such, public transport requires more than appropriate policies, but also a resolute political commitment to policy implementation.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author contributions

R.L. (University of Johannesburg) and G.H. (University of Johannesburg) were equally responsible for the writing of this article.

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