



Making the connections between transport disadvantage and the social exclusion of low income populations in the Tshwane Region of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

To date, the majority of studies which consider transport from a social exclusion perspective have been conducted in the context of the developed world where both income poverty and lack of transport are relative rather absolute states. In a unique departure from these previous studies, this paper explores the relationship between transport and social disadvantage in the development context, the key difference being that income poverty is absolute and where there is much lower access to both private and public transportation generally. Thus, it seeks to explore whether the concept of social exclusion remains valid, when it is the *majority* of the population that is experiencing transport and income poverty compared with the *minority* who do so in advanced economies.

The paper is based on a scoping study for the Republic of South Africa Department of Transport (RSA DOT), which primarily involved focus group discussions with a range of socially deprived urban and peri-urban population groups living in the Tshwane region of South Africa. In a second departure from previous studies which consider transport and social disadvantage in the development context, the study takes a primarily urban focus. The rationale for this is that theoretically low income urban settlements do not suffer from the lack of transport infrastructure and motorised transport services in the way that more remote rural areas do. The policy issue is therefore less a question of addressing a deficit in supply and more one of addressing particular aspects of public transit service failure, which are more readily amenable to relatively low cost, manageable, small-scale national and local policy interventions.

A primary aim for the study was to reinvigorate cross-government debate of these issues in the hope of breaking South African government's long-standing and persistent policy inertia in the delivery of equitable and socially sustainable urban transport systems.

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1. Introduction

In 2007/2008, the Republic of South Africa Department of Transport (RSA DOT) became interested in the issue of transport and social exclusion following a detailed analysis of their 2003 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) (Republic of South Africa Department of Transport, 2005). The survey was the first ever of its kind to be undertaken with a representative sample of the whole of the South African population. It identified that the overwhelming majority of South African households do not have regular access to any form of motorised transport and that this seriously undermines their ability to participate in key economic and social activities. This was hardly a surprising discovery, as the lack of transport experienced by South Africa's low income populations has been a persistent and prominent problem in both its pre- and post-apartheid era (Khosa, 1995), as we shall see in the literature review section which follows.

Successive South African governments have been largely unresponsive to the problem of transport poverty and it is still not included as a consideration within South Africa's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Grieco et al., 2009). When government has responded to this agenda the focus has tended towards the development of new transport infrastructure projects and in particular major road-building programmes in rural areas (Potgieter et al., 2006). In general, there has been a very poor post-apartheid government response to the escalating mobility needs of low income travellers, who constitute the vast majority of South Africa's urban population. The NHTS demonstrates that the privately-run and still largely unregulated minibus or *kombi*-taxis, (which sprung up in the late 1970s to fill the gap between urban public transport supply and demand), remains the main form of motorised transport for two-thirds of all public transport users, compared to one in five who use buses and one in seven who use rail (Dibben, 2006). Later sections of this paper will demonstrate that this comes with its own set of particular problems for the people who are forced to rely on them as their only means of regular transportation.

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Publication of the 2003 NHTS and official recognition of transport-related social exclusion by the RSA DOT came at a time when the United Kingdom (UK) government had just published its now seminal *Making the Connections* report (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). The SEU report had served to significantly raise the profile of 'transport poverty' in transport and other social policy circles in the UK (Lucas, 2010). Policy makers within the RSA DOT had been following the progress of the UK agenda and felt that a similar 'social exclusion' approach to transport disadvantage in South Africa might lead to a similar result within South African social policy circles, in recognition that in the past:

"... 'development transport' advocacy, with its mixture of voices from the fields of engineering, economics, geography and urban and rural governance and planning, may not effectively or perhaps even coherently project themselves in agenda-setting development circles."

(Bryceson, 2009, p. 3 in Greico, et al. (Eds.), 2009).

Little policy progress has been made despite significant and robust evidence of a strong relationship between lack of transport and economic and social disadvantage in the South African context. This has been particularly noted in relation to women's pre- and post-natal health outcomes and high infant mortality rates (McCray, 2004), the changing geography of schools and access to a basic education (Lemon and Battersby-Lennard, 2009), unemployment and economic insecurity (Potgieter et al., 2006) and the low living standards and unsustainable livelihoods of most transport poor households and population sectors (Bryceson et al., 2003). The contribution of the study should therefore be considered in the context of this past governmental inertia (Cameron, 2000) and the related objective to raise the profile of the important transport-related social exclusion with transport and social policy makers in the wider context of:

- (a) Existing research of the interaction between transport and social development which has already been undertaken within developing nations and in South Africa in particular. The main aim here is to critically evaluate whether application of the 'social exclusion' approach adopted by this study can offer any new insights into this relationship and/or on how to practically address the persistent problem of transport disadvantage.
- (b) The past studies of transport and social exclusion which have hitherto been undertaken in advanced industrial societies, where both the problems of poverty and lack of transport are issues for a *minority* rather than *majority* of the population. The main aim here is to draw out any similarities and key differences in the reported experiences of transport poverty and its social consequences in these diverse policy delivery contexts, and to determine whether there are any policy solutions which might be transferred from the UK to the South African context - or if this is wholly inappropriate.

2. A long tradition of transport and social development research in South Africa

As Potgieter et al. (2006, p. 2) attest, transport has been identified as a key factor in the economic and social development process because it facilitates the movement of people and goods, thereby (theoretically at least) promotes trade and better standards of living through improved access to markets, employment, health, education and social services. Largely from a belief in this relationship, the World Bank's lending in the 1950s and 1960s tended to be heavily biased towards investment in transport infrastructure

and in particular road-building (Bryceson et al., 2008). In 2002, however, van de Walle found little evidence to convincingly suggest that rural road-building in development contexts had affected social outcomes beyond what they would have been without the new road.

An overview of the relevant literature identifies a wealth of studies which explore the interaction between transport provision and access to basic activities and amenities on the one hand, and the social consequences of this for low income populations. A number of these studies are of particular relevance because of their specific focus on the South African context (e.g. Bryceson and Howe, 1993; Mahapa and Mashiri, 2001; McCray, 2004; Potgieter et al., 2006; Grieco et al., 2009). In common with Van de Walle, many of these authors also criticise the over emphasis of past policy on major transport infrastructure projects as a social development tool and seriously challenge their appropriateness and effectiveness in lifting low income population out of poverty (Bryceson et al., 2008). For example, Mahapa and Mishiri (2001) note the pre-occupation of transport policymakers with higher technology fixes and efficiency savings rather than the travel needs of local 'beneficiary' communities, which they claim could have resulted in different, less expensive and more context-specific and gender-sensitive solutions.

The majority of these studies have tended towards a focus on the transport provision of low-income *rural* South Africans, where there is almost a complete absence of public transport services. They identify an over-reliance on walking to access all out of home activities, and how the inequalities which arise from this particularly affects women's participation in the paid employment and the formal economy and can result in their low uptake of health-care and educational opportunities. In a rare (but not unique) departure from these previous studies, (e.g. see also Venter et al., 2007), this paper is concerned with the relationship between transport disadvantage and social exclusion in the *urban* context.

Salon and Guylani (2010, p. 642) identify that existing research on transport for the *urban poor in developing cities* has tended towards four key themes: (i) financial poverty as the main cause of transport disadvantage; (ii) the spatial mismatches between housing location and labour market opportunities; (iii) road safety for pedestrians and other non-motorised road users; and (iv) gender differences in transport provision and the related disproportionate negative social consequences of this for women and children. Fouracre et al. (2006) have also argued that a more participatory approach to urban transport planning in developing countries would also lead to a better understanding of the effects and implications of travel on the livelihoods of the *urban* poor. This paper identifies similar recurring themes.

Salon and Gulyani (2010) statistically demonstrate poverty to be strongly negatively correlated with the use of motorised transport and identify that affordability is a key issue in the transport poverty of urban slum dwellers in Nairobi, with the situation being particularly bad for slum women and their children. They find that most slum dwellers need to use motorised transport to access education and employment opportunities that could lift them out of poverty, both because of the distance of their housing locations from these key destinations and because of their inability to move physically closer to them due to the absence of affordable housing in the areas where such opportunities are located within the city. As the authors observe, the main problem of transport and access in the urban context is not the absence of transport infrastructure or motorised public transport *per se*, because of the almost ubiquitous presence of the privately owned and operated minibuss-taxi industry (*matatus* as they are referred to in Kenya, *kombis* in South Africa). Rather it is because the taxis are reported to be unaffordable, unsafe, unreliable and unsuitable for the long journeys that must often be undertaken to access work and other key

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