

Prioritising User-Friendly Urban Public Transport for the Zimbabwean Elderly

BOTHWELL GWESHE KUNAKA¹

Abstract

The population of the aged 60 and above is growing steadily and vigorously, faster than any other age group. There will be about two billion elderly adults by 2050, constituting quite a large part of the world society. This anticipated rapid growth in the elderly population poses a great challenge for transport planners. It is vital to maintain the mobility of elderly people to ensure that they continue to engage in civic and social life, take part in community activities, and pursue human interactions that enrich their health, well-being and quality of life from a social integration perspective. The article examines the challenges faced by planners in the provision of user-friendly urban public transport for the elderly. The study focuses on a case material of the Zimbabwe United Passenger Bus Company (ZUPCO). Study findings reveal that public transport for the elderly remains a critical issue in the Zimbabwean context due to a variety of challenges such as poor transport infrastructure, driver recklessness, lack of due regard for the travelling elderly people, lack of a public transport customer care policy, traffic congestion and lack of appropriate regulatory framework, among others.

Keywords: transportation, priority, adequate and accessible, the elderly and user-friendly urban public transport

INTRODUCTION

Despite growing transport challenges for the elderly in developing countries (TSCZ, 2020; Nantulya, 2011; THETICS, 2013; OECD, 2020), no study has sought to interrogate the transport challenges for the

¹PhD Student, Zimbabwe Open University, Harare

elderly in developing countries, while it remains trivialised and under-researched in the Zimbabwean context. The public transport system in Harare is suffering from several imbalances in urban development, transportation and liveability (Chirisa *et al.*, 2014). The city has developed unplanned, resulting in a mismatch between housing, employment, and services. Additionally, the shrinking of the economy inevitably led to the underdevelopment of the main public transport system. Of concern is that very little scholarship has been extended towards interrogating the effect of transport challenges faced by the elderly in Zimbabwean urban areas and, therefore, the article examines the challenges faced by planners in providing user-friendly urban public transport for the elderly.

The rapid increase in the senior population is a significant problem for transportation operators, managers, and urban planners entrusted with providing travel options that take into account the elderly's unique and complex travel needs. With deficits in their sensory function and musculoskeletal strength, the elderly are a disadvantaged group that requires special attention (Ipingbemi, 2010). Mobility refers to a person's ability to move from one place to another independently and safely and it typically declines gradually as people age (Rantakokko *et al.*, 2013). For the elderly, mobility is not only a crucial element of overall life satisfaction, but a prerequisite. It is essential for independence and for ensuring good health and quality of life (Banister & Bowling, 2004; Spinney *et al.*, 2009; Whelan *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, it is vital to maintain the mobility of elderly people to ensure that they can continue to engage in civic and social life, take part in community activities, and pursue human interactions that enrich their health, well-being, and quality of life from a social integration perspective (Dickerson *et al.*, 2007).

In Zimbabwe, road transport remains unsafe with statistics showing a growth trajectory of accidents projecting a 10% increase from 2016 (TSCZ, 2017). Although several studies that focus on transport have been done in Zimbabwe (TSCZ, 2020; Nantulya, 2011; THETICS, 2013; OECD, 2020), little has been done to interrogate elderly transport issues. Existing literature reveals that the deprivation of transport to certain groups results in numerous exclusions that combined could be referred to as transport-related exclusions (Lucas, 2010). These exclusions

reduce the ability of these certain groups to participate in socio-economic activities and to enjoy a reasonable standard of life (*ibid*). In most countries, the public transport network cannot cater for the fast-growing urban population explosions.

Despite a growing focus on transport issues (Osoteku, 2019; Mathias, 2019; Kasirye, 2017 Shilitsa, 2019), an analysis of extant literature highlights that transport for the elderly remains a growing challenge among developing countries. This study thus interrogates the state of urban public transport for the Zimbabwean elderly and isolates strategies that may be used to alleviate their transport challenges in the Zimbabwean urban context.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 2019, the number of elderly (aged 65 years and over) increased to 703 million worldwide, highlighting the global phenomenon of population ageing (UN, 2018). Southeast Asia has the world's largest number of elderly people estimated at 260 million people or 37% of the world's total. This number is expected to remain stable until 2050 (UN, 2019). The World Health Organization (2020) has predicted that in 2030, the number of elderly (60 years and over) around the world will reach 1.4 billion people, and increase to 2.1 billion by 2050. The pressure produced by the rapidly increasing elderly population is posing considerable transport challenges.

Evidence from extant literature highlights that the bulk of existing research on the elderly has been based on medical treatment guidelines (Prendki, 2020; Veronese, 2020; Hbr, 2021; Richardson, 2020; Orikiriza, 2020). Research related to public transport of the elderly is a relatively new concept in developing countries (Methawadee *et al.*, 2020). Hu and Wang (2020) conducted a comparative study of the difference between the elderly's travel behaviour in developed and developing countries. The results indicated that 30% of the elderly in developed countries choose to travel by private car. Similarly, in Taiwan, elderly passengers tend to use public transport less than cars due to safety (Hu *et al.*, 2013; Wong *et al.*, 2018). In Thailand, research was conducted on factors affecting the elderly's mobility with an emphasis on the

development of city plans and transportation planning. The research objective was to enhance ageing mobility when travelling (Schrichu *ae et al.*, 2016). Public transportation provided for the elderly is challenging, especially in the countryside or in remote areas where there is a shortage of public transport. This creates elderly's travel limits that affect their mental state (UN, 2018).

Maintaining the quality of elderly people's daily lives by improving their mobility should be a top priority for transport policymakers. The key reasons contributing to the infrequent use of public transport by older Americans include unreliable public transport services, difficulties in accessing bus stops/stations and transfers, unavailability of some destinations, and fear of crime (Burkhardt *et al.*, 2002). From the statistics on bus crime in Los Angeles, it is found that the elderly are more likely to be victimised than other subpopulations and their fear for personal security significantly affects their frequency of bus use (Levine & Wachs, 1986). Thus, it can be said that prioritising transport for the elderly should be a priority as they are the most vulnerable. Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted on the driving behaviour and safety of elderly drivers (Yannis *et al.*, 2010; Broberg & Willstrand, 2014; Nakagawa *et al.*, 2013; Gelau *et al.*, 2011). Some other studies have been conducted on the travel patterns of the elderly (Buehler & Nobis, 2010; Broome *et al.*, 2012; Siren & Haustein, 2013) to improve their mobility.

The safety and comfort of the elderly when travelling by bus are often not guaranteed (Lee *et al.*, 2021; Chang *et al.*, 2010; Broome *et al.*, 2013). The elderly may fall and get injured due to improper driving, and the discomfort of the elderly will increase in crowded carriages. It is, therefore, difficult for the elderly to get on and off the bus because of the inconvenience to their legs and feet. These problems will make the elderly question the service provided by the bus when they travel, reducing the travel and eventually affecting their mental health. Therefore, in-depth research on urban transport travel service quality of the elderly will provide useful insights for providing better public transport services, improving the travel well-being of the elderly and contributing to the improvement of the social security system (Li *et al.*, 2021).

Improving elderly mobility should be an important part of promoting overall societal development, especially in the transport sector (Olawole & Aloba, 2014). Maintaining the quality of elderly people's daily lives by improving their mobility should be a top priority for transport policymakers. Evidence from existing studies shows that transport-related challenges for the elderly have become pervasive in Zimbabwe. The following section below presents transport challenges in the Zimbabwean context.

The administrative history of public transport in Harare dates back to the 1930s when urban local authorities had been providing public transport. By 1935, operators were enjoying a monopoly and subsidies from central government. Further, new franchise agreements were contracted in 1976. The year 1978 witnessed the introduction of the Zimbabwe Express Motorways (ZEM) plying the Salisbury-Chitungwiza route. Throughout the period from the 1930s to 1983, the stated objective of the Council was to "Provide continuous and reliable services for all sections of the community" (Jordan, 1983: 138). With the attainment of independence in 1980, a major milestone was the creation of the Zimbabwe United Passengers (ZUPCO) whose mandate was to service all urban centres. The company had several competitive advantages over other public transport providers. ZUPCO enjoyed all benefits that accompany economies of scale. Its mission statement was "ZUPCO is a provider of an efficient, safe and reliable passenger road transport that guarantees a satisfactory return on investment" (*ibid*).

The decimation of the state-owned Harare urban formal public transport, ZUPCO, in the 1990s created a huge transport services vacuum. The Informal Public Transport (IPT) sector swiftly moved in to fill the resultant vacuum (Mbara, 2006; Mtizi, 2017). The *modus operandi* of the new service providers was characterised by an influx of youthful drivers, traffic chaos, and inefficient, unprofessional public transport personnel (conductors, rank marshals, touts and others). The operations were unpredictable and unreliable. Bandaiko (2017, p127) posits that the public transport system in Harare is "mainly associated with urban evils such as congestion and chaotic urban transport system that impacts on the

quality of the urban environment". This chaotic environment presented urban mobility challenges for the elderly.

AREA OF STUDY: HARARE

Harare's growth has mainly been rapid over the years. Since 1980, a combination of rural 'push' and urban 'pull' factors have witnessed increased rates of urbanisation in the country (Chirisa *et al.*, 2014). Such urbanisation, with its conspicuousness, was experienced mostly in major cities. Pull factors for migration into urban areas included economic opportunities, better standards of living and education. Push factors that led some to migrate are countermands of the pull factors such as the lack of educational facilities and poor standards of living in the rural areas. The effect of this trend has been a severe strain on the physical, economic, and social fabric of the urban centres such that in virtually all of the cities and towns in the country, the rate of service delivery has been outstripped by demand, much to the detriment of the urban population (*ibid*).

Prevailing economic conditions have led to more dependence on public transportation. Many people cannot afford to buy a vehicle for their personal use and hence rely on the public transport system. This over-reliance on public transport has strangled this sector's ability to provide sufficient transport services to the people. The public transport system in Harare is suffering from several imbalances in urban development, transportation, and liveability (*ibid*). The city has developed unplanned, resulting in a mismatch between housing, employment and services. Additionally, the shrinking of the economy inevitably led to the underdevelopment of the main public transport system administered by the government, thereby allowing private actors to operate. The IPT sector has grown beyond control and is causing safety and congestion issues due to the number of vehicles and their way of operation (*ibid*). Transportation networks for the different modes have not been able to develop properly and the narrow streets of the city are unable to meet the increasing demand for transport, resulting in severe congestion with many negative impacts (*ibid*).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conduct of this study was largely influenced by both the 'mobility' (Giuliano *et al.*, 2003) and 'capability' (Akhavan *et al.*, 2018) conceptual frameworks in the gathering and analysis of data on public transport provision challenges for the elderly in Zimbabwe. Mobility is defined as the ability to move independently or using assistance or transportation within one's residence to the local neighbourhood or beyond. On the other hand, the latter framework focuses on how individual well-being is differently shaped and experienced by each person. In this study, user-friendly urban public transport was regarded as one that is accessible, affordable, and available when and where one desires the service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lack of mobility deters older people from participating in social activities, resulting in low morale, depression and loneliness (Atkins, 2001; Whelan, 2006). In most Western countries, driving is the primary means of transportation and only a small portion of elderly people use public transport. Various studies with differing degrees of depth and sophistication have focused on the travel patterns of the elderly to improve their mobility (Schmöcker *et al.*, 2008; Buehler & Nobis, 2010; Currie & Delbosc, 2010; Aceves-González, 2015; Voss *et al.*, 2016). However, a close analysis of these studies indicates that they are centred mostly on developed countries, with very little research having been done in developing countries like Zimbabwe. According to the results of the 'Understanding Senior Transportation' Survey (Ritter *et al.*, 2002), the key reasons for the infrequent use of public transport by older Americans include unreliable public transport services, difficulties in accessing bus stops/stations and transfers, unavailability of some destinations and fear of crime. However, the majority of pertinent studies have been focused on car-dominant cities in developed countries. Limited research has been conducted focusing on the urban mobility of the elderly in Zimbabwe or other transit-oriented metropolitan cities that provide similar public transport services in developing countries. The absence of research to inform policy on the challenges of the elderly and their particular needs is cause for concern.

There is limited literature on the constitution of user-friendly urban public transport from the eyes of the elderly. Among the limited scholarship is the work of Mussewhite and Haddad (2010). The two scholars emphasise the role of mobility and accessibility in older adults' self-reported quality of life. They identified three needs, namely accessibility, independence and travel. According to MacKnight (1992), it is important to examine critically older people's travel needs and abilities from their perspective to provide innovative, tailored and individualised transport solutions. Elderly drivers can give up driving and yet maintain their mobility, independence self-esteem and quality of life successfully. The same sentiments are shared by Sleaf (2017) who posits that older women with disabilities regularly face a rude attitude in hospitals, clinics, and on transport as society shows indifference to them. They often become victims of manipulation and discrimination. Sleaf's (*ibid*) study findings on urban transport challenges for the elderly have become a global challenge and a topical issue. The same sentiments are shared by Simonsson *et al.*, (2017) who posits that urban public transport must be sensitive to the mobility needs of the elderly. Their walk to and from the bus terminus, and their entire board to their destination is risky hence, a user-friendly urban public transport must have properly trained personnel or professionals as a matter of policy (Gorman *et al.*, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a phenomenological research paradigm since the investigation focused on people's lived experiences. In all 20 key informants were selected for interviews using purposive sampling, then five members of the community were picked randomly for interviews. The respondents included officials from driver training institutions, driving inspectors, VID inspectors, road traffic police, and members of the community as these were deemed to possess knowledge of the phenomenon under study. In-depth interviews, document review, observation and photography were some of the data collection methods used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Study findings reveal that a good transport system depends on reliable transport infrastructure. Transport infrastructure requires large investments and regular maintenance to prevent it from becoming unsuitable for motorists to use. However, evidence from the study has observed that the high cost of paved road construction tends to limit most major road interventions to the public sector. Evidence from the study has also observed that in Zimbabwe, the road infrastructure has deteriorated at an alarming rate with narrow roads and potholes damaging vehicles and increasing maintenance costs to road users.

For transport modes such as trains, the tracks are already in place and the challenge is the maintenance of tracks and managing the trains that are running daily. The results of this study re-affirmed the averment that the quality of road infrastructure indicated that there was no prioritisation by both local and central government for user-friendly urban public transport for the elderly. The article exposed the urgent need for prioritising and raising the level of public transport infrastructure and customer care with special attention to the elderly's commuting needs and expectations. The safety and security of the commuting elderly begin with sound public transport infrastructure.

Old age diminishes the capacity to cope with the road environment, the quality or the state of the road cannot be ignored by both central and local government. The study argues that to meet the needs and expectations of the elderly, policy-makers and other public transport stakeholders must be required and expected to formulate and implement an array of mobility services such as subsidised taxi services, demand services and older person door to door community services.

LOSS OF EXPERIENCED DRIVERS TO GREENER PASTURES

According to research findings, most public transport companies lost their most experienced personnel, especially good drivers and conductors, as they moved on to greener pastures that offered fairly reasonable remuneration and other non-monetary benefits. The reckless driving that

characterised most public transport service providers were perpetrated mostly by inexperienced and young drivers. Hence this kind of driving did not bode well for the elderly passengers using public transport.

In one organisation, an informant testified that their driver's major duties and responsibilities were the customer and vehicle care or sympathy driving ability, safety and security. It was their company philosophy that without customers they would be out of business. Older person's user-friendly public transport requires drivers who are mentally and physically fit. No driver can afford to be fatigued behind the steering wheel.

DISCRIMINATION

Evidence from the study highlights that the elderly suffer from discrimination when they try to board public transport. The elderly are discriminated against within families and services such as public transport. The same study findings are shared by Ilango *et al.*, (2013) who highlight that discrimination is predicated upon the various countries' legal systems and government policies. Older people's rights are set out in a range of international agreements but are often ignored (Ilango *et al.* 2013 p.6). Society has negative attitudes towards the elderly. Regrettably, the elderly rarely report abuse because of fear and ignorance of their rights.

Public transport in urban areas has gained greater attention due to the increasing world population. The domino effect of this population growth has been felt from two angles. There is rapid and unprecedented population migration from rural to urban areas in search of socio-economic opportunities. This has the effect of plummeting into suburbanisation and urbanisation, creating bottlenecks in social services such as public transport. This is where the elderly needs a user-friendly public transport system. The system should offer the urban elderly commuter comfort, convenience and accessibility (Saif *et al.*, 2018).

The study reveals that the elderly's commuting needs are not a priority for key public transport service providers. This is evidenced by the absence of user-friendly public transport infrastructure. Public transport service providers lack both sympathy and empathy for the commuting elderly as manifested through poor customer care. The results of this study point to

a hardening of attitude by key public transport providers. They argue that the numbers of the elderly who patronise urban public transport in urban Harare are not backed by statistical evidence of their existence in large numbers to warrant special attention. One cannot talk of user-friendly urban public transport without addressing the issue of emissions. By providing the elderly with user-friendly public transport conversely, they should be protected from inhaling vehicle emissions that are dangerous to their already deteriorating health. To achieve these, stakeholders must ensure transport availed meets emission reduction standards. This entails making transport more environmentally sustainable.

ANCILLARY CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN ZIMBABWE

Evidence from the study highlighted that transport for the elders remains a challenge in urban areas in Zimbabwe. Respondents observed that in recent years, the economic conditions in Zimbabwe have proven to be the principal challenge to the public transport system. Evidence point to the fact that transport challenges worsened after the deregulation of the transport industry. The same sentiments were noted in the literature as Mbara (2006) pointed out that the state-owned bus service provider fleet was depleted by 45%, and routes decreased from 450 to 270. Thus, such findings align with the literature. Respondents observed that currently, the only buses operational in the country are for long distances between cities and towns, and not within. Further, the metro train services have stopped. This has seen rapid growth in minibus taxis as the primary mode of transportation. The commuter omnibus operators are known for their rowdy and rude behaviour that challenges the elderly. Further, evidence from the study findings has observed that their fares are not set and fluctuate according to economic conditions, weather and “feelings” of the driver. This, indeed, does not augur well for the elderly generally with meagre disposable income.

Overcrowding in the minibus taxis is another problem as operators maximise profit through overloading their vehicles which results in faster degradation of road infrastructure and accidents. Such a state of affairs presents challenges for the elderly in Zimbabwe. Figure 1 presents pictures showing the unregulated taxi ranks mushrooming in Harare.



Figure 1. (left) Street blocked by minibus taxis; (right) Minibus loading and unloading in the middle of the road (Mbara, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Generally, it can be construed from the study findings that public transport should be user-friendly with ease to access, including accessibility to the physically challenged and the elderly. Fatima and Noridpour (2006) observe that for “people such as senior citizens, public transport needs to be accessible and affordable to provide them with the opportunity to fulfil their medical, shopping and recreational needs”. These include people on wheelchairs, leg crutches, artificial limbs or any other assistive gadgets. The service provided should be as close to journey origins and destinations. The effects of ageism or gerontology on the elderly physical, mental and emotional states have been, and are well documented in the literature. Ageism is associated with poor vision, loss of balance, dementia and cognitive skills loss to name a few chronic challenges faced by geriatrics. At the same time, service must be manned by well-trained and well-groomed helpful personnel. Such personnel assist the elderly to board and alight without being pressured. Special public transport personnel with qualifications in caregiving, first aid, or even nurses, must be engaged as public transport personnel specifically for the commuting old people.

When public transport is not readily available, conventional taxis should be the best alternative mode for the elderly. However, the state should subsidise such an option to the normal bus fare for the same trip. The task of providing user-friendly urban public transport is not a monopoly of the

service provider. The intervention requires all key stakeholders to agree. Key stakeholders are the central government, local authorities, quasi-government transport regulators, operators and entrepreneurs' civic organisations. The mandate of the key stakeholders is to identify the current gaps, constraints and challenges characterising the current public transport system. Are the problems currently creating problems of financial, operational or human resources, among others? The elderly must be given the opportunity through their representatives to articulate their perceptions, expectations and needs without fear or favour. According to DESA (2009), to achieve social integration and social inclusion, the voices of people and their needs and concerns need to be heard.

When cases of harassment of the elderly or other passengers are reported, a user-friendly urban transport operator investigates promptly. Another intervention to ensure that user-friendly urban public transport is achieved involves blacklisting of both driver and conductor in cases of proven acts of commission and omission while on duty. There is a correlation between the prioritisation of older persons and public transport needs and expectations and the values and belief systems of a society or community. A society that celebrates and respects its senior citizens prioritises user-friendly public transport for its elderly commuters. Increased incidence of impaired physical mobility and mental challenges affecting the elderly should motivate both central and local authorities to enforce a user-friendly public transport system. Both the African Union (AU) and the United Nations respect the independence of the elderly. In the absence of user-friendly public transport, the elderly people suffer marginalisation and vulnerability, leading to self-quarantine. Elderliness is not about social exclusion, but can become a reality in the absence of pro-elderly urban public transport. However, the article concedes that the mobility and visibility of the elderly within their local cities and towns may not be attributed to the exclusion or lack of transport only. By their own choice, the individual older person may opt to retreat from public life or social life due to incapacity or changing interests and priorities in older age (Tornstam, 2011).

Bowering (2019) opines that it is imperative to ensure that city facilities and social infrastructure suitable for the elderly be guaranteed. The elderly require frequent or occasional rest on their journey. City authorities must ensure that some public benches are reserved for the elderly to avoid conflict and contestations between the elderly and city visitors, especially those drinking and eating in public places. The absence of inadequate or inaccessible toilets in the city, may demotivate the elderly visiting the city. The levels of motility, mobility and spatial participation of the elderly in the city have a direct correlation with town planning policy formulation and agendas on the conception and development of the city (*ibid*)

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE ELDERLY TRANSPORT CHALLENGES IN ZIMBABWE

The study isolated several strategies that may be used to improve the transport for the elderly in Zimbabwe.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The study findings highlighted that the government should take an active role in regularising the transport system in Zimbabwe. Evidence from the findings highlighted grand corruption as one of the drawbacks in improving the transport infrastructure in the country.

In Africa, corruption and politics play an immense role in public transport decisions, as a result, inadequate construction quality (i.e. corrupt road contractors) and failure to maintain roads soon led to severe deterioration has been the order of the day. Politics influences who is awarded road contracts, resulting in the exclusion of certain areas that do not benefit the contractor, and maintenance for a particular area while neglecting others. The decision to improve roads is based on politics rather than merit, making efficient public transport a bigger problem (respondent 3).

The regulation and policies of transport are politically determined. Thus, it can be concluded from the study findings that no set transport policy is not affected by political parties or influential people's opinions. Further, respondents observed that in the commuter minibs taxi industry, there are no strict laws or rules to guide their activity, and with government officials owning taxis, regulation is not prioritised. There are high rates of sexual harassment reported from taxi drivers, reckless driving and traffic crimes committed. Law enforcement needs to be held more accountable

during roadblocks so that they can enforce the law. Police officers set up illegal roadblocks to collect money from road-users. The increase in the number of traffic offenders getting off using bribes is another challenge facing government. Weak enforcement of traffic regulations, vehicle inspection and driver behaviour and traffic management is a common practice in many southern African cities (Kumar, Barrett, 2008). Financial resource allocation is another government-related challenge of public transport. When taxes are collected and government spending increases, other sectors are of importance other than transport.

ACCESS TO FUEL AND PRICES

Study findings highlighted that fuel costs and availability is a critical challenge for public transport in Zimbabwe. Access to fuel at an affordable price is a crucial factor in transportation and is politically very sensitive. Fuel is a determinant of the fare paid for the transport service – when adjusted it affects the passengers mostly. Fuel levies and taxes that affect fuel price are used for road maintenance and improvement, connoting their existence as a necessity.

SAFETY AND POLLUTION

Most forms of transport are ill-maintained and old, making them a danger to people and the environment. Buses have a speed limit and operate at low speeds for long hours. Minibus operators usually cause noise pollution by calling and hooting for passengers. Environmental consciousness is ignored by public transport operators. Transport has emerged as the highest single energy-consuming human activity in most countries. The transport industry needs to pay attention to climatic events and take appropriate measures to reduce pollution by investing in cleaner and alternative options.

VIABLE SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES

To be beneficial to a wide sector of the continent's population, transport planning requires a detailed understanding of the economic, social and political environments where transport takes place and interventions are made (Porter, 2007).

INTERMEDIATE MEANS OF TRANSPORT

There needs to be extensive planning that increases accessibility and provides an integrated transport system for people of all age groups, including the elderly.

APOLITICAL TRANSPORT POLICIES AND REGULATION POLICY

Evidence from the study has observed that the government has the challenge to create an enabling environment and providing a clear policy framework for the provision and operation of public transport. The main problems are a lack of effective policy implementation due mainly to the lack of sustainable funding to achieve the ambitious policy objectives, huge financial demands to replace ageing bus rail and taxi fleets, and lack of skills to effectively implement and monitor policy initiatives and complex political and policy relationship between the three levels of government dealing with public transport. Government needs to produce transport policies that benefit the people, irrespective of income, race or political affiliations. Insinuating a policy that remains constant, irrespective of the ruling political party and party member sentiments. Policies ought to have specific goals and guidelines that transcend various social affiliations.

In the minibus taxi industry, stricter guidelines need to be put in place for taxi drivers. There needs to be a taxi driver registry indicating the licenses (i.e., the validity of licensing), and roadworthiness of vehicles; and drivers should acquire training in terms of defensive driving and first aid training. With the increase in accidents and floods in southern Africa, drivers need to be aware of how to save passengers' lives and be accountable to their passengers. The policy should include GPS devices placed on taxis, to monitor speed and driving behaviour.

ADEQUATE URBAN PLANNING

Local authorities have the responsibility to provide infrastructure and services to residents in urban areas. The location of physical infrastructures such as houses, industries and commercial centres have implications on transport costs. The appropriate land use planning policies that integrate residential and employment places will significantly solve some of the public transport challenges (Mbara, 2006). Transport

infrastructure usually follows after the development of an area has taken place. Instead, developments need to be along already existing transport infrastructure to reduce the need for huge capital investments required to build transport infrastructure.

INTEGRATED PAYMENT OPTION

The government needs to provide a universal form of payment for all modes of transport and allow passengers to pay cash only for emergencies. This reduces the time people spend paying instead of a 'tap and go' mechanism. For a country like Zimbabwe, this would be an appropriate solution considering the cash crisis, passengers using a prepaid card that allows them access to public transport.

One innovative solution that might tackle most of the public transport challenges is a travel application. The introduction of a travel application that uses GPS devices on minibus taxis and maps out routes, times and distances of a taxi. This development can facilitate cashless payments, and use a scan or card mechanism to completely remove conductors in minibus taxis. Another benefit would be, the ability to record passengers in a taxi and prevent overloading. Such an application can notify passengers of the nearest taxi or passengers can take themselves to the nearest route. It can show traffic conditions, provide routes and allow the driver to be aware of potential traffic jams or any interference on the road.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study followed the demise of the government provided urban transport the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) and its impact on the elderly in terms of user-friendly urban mobility provision. Study findings highlight that transport for the elderly remains a critical issue in the Zimbabwean context. There are no tangible efforts or plans by key urban public transport supply stakeholders to prioritise or allocate resources for the introduction of a user-friendly urban public transport system in Zimbabwe urban areas like Harare. Thus, such findings indicate the need to conduct further studies focusing on the development of tailor-made solutions to the existing urban mobility challenges for the elderly in Zimbabwe.

There is need for better integration of social outcomes within public transport policy at the strategic tactical and operational levels. With access to emerging transport infrastructure and technologies, Zimbabwe can become the test-bed and breeding ground for better urban transport systems. New mass transit systems can be introduced to replace or work alongside existing services.

- More focus needs to be put into developing mobile public transport applications that will assist commuters and law enforcers and regulators, together with transport operators, in achieving a sustainable public transport service.
- The study recommends that legislation be enacted to prioritise the elderly urban public transport service. To achieve this, the national budget should set aside funds for that purpose.
- Urban public transport personnel, especially the driver and conductor, must be customer care trained and vetted before engagement.
- All fatal accidents involving the vulnerable elderly should be treated as premeditated murder, especially where elements of negligence, recklessness and drunken driving are proven.
- An age-friendly built environment including safe, affordable and convenient transportation is a critical factor in enhancing the quality of life in old age.
- On matters of age discrimination and age-discriminatory policies, the Government of Zimbabwe must create an awareness of human rights for the elderly.
- Operators must have an operations safety policy and a comprehensive accident or insurance cover.

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