



Some lessons from Lagos

IN JUNE 2009 THE City of Tshwane's BRT Project Office hosted a World Bank-led workshop on public transport restructuring. A highlight was the presentations made by colleagues from Nigeria on their experiences with implementing the "BRT Lite" system in Lagos. Listening to the enthusiastic endorsement of the system by the public transport union representatives – the people who turned from operating old, inefficient and poorly regulated minibuses and midbuses to being keen participants in introducing a new concept – it struck me that we in South Africa, busily driving our own BRT schemes, might sit up and take notice of a few things:

■ **The BRT scheme was fitted to local needs and conditions.** While retaining the essence of international BRT practice, planners in Lagos designed components to match local constraints (see Table 1 on page 24). Some elements, such as the lack of median lanes and open stations, have been criticised for deviating from what is generally considered "best practice", but this is exactly the point: system designers were not afraid to re-think the BRT concept to match local needs. The focus seems to have been more on deliverability and getting buy-in from all stakeholders than on perfect design. This implied, in some cases, "designing down" from leading examples, but resulted in a working system that can be incrementally improved. For example, the fare system is paper-based, requiring no advanced

electronics, but implemented in such a way as to control revenue flows strictly and to limit risk. Similarly, the decision not to remove parallel informal transport services, or simultaneously reorganise feeder services, helped considerably to secure community and political support without negatively affecting the inherent superiority of BRT operations.

■ **Planners spent a lot of time developing partnerships** with incumbent operators and other constituencies. Sure, history and conditions vary, and the BRT Lite scheme did not come with the acrimonious baggage of nationwide transformation of the informal public transport industry. But the city seemed to recognise that extra effort was needed to build trust through a long process of talking and listening. Deviating from the top-down processes followed in cities such as Bogota, where tendering concerns caused system planning to occur entirely without the input of future operators, Lagos authorities workshopped design and operational decisions with incumbent operators over a period of months. Union bosses agreed early on, with input from LAMATA, on the need to change their business model in order to become more efficient and sustainable. LAMATA talks about the principle of "developing engagement from receiving and not giving information". J O Spencer, a key union official of the 1st BRT Co-Operative Society Ltd, says the city "realised and appreciated the progressive contributions and input

[provided] by the Union leaders at meetings." The result is that the operators now display a strong sense of ownership of the BRT system, which augurs well for its sustainability and growth.

LAMATA also reports extensive community outreach, during which the BRT Lite was explained and adopted as "a means of solving their problems, not those identified by others, and without imposing alien solutions upon users". Significant effort went into publicity, including television and print media advertising, community meetings and mobilisation of key community supporters. By situating the BRT as a "community project created, owned and used by Lagosians," operators were probably pushed to overcome their short-term fears in the public interest.

■ **Strong public organisational capacity was established** through the creation of a public agency specifically tasked with implementing the BRT and also with delivering progressively improved public transport across the city. Most successful BRT systems have in common the presence of a strong, dedicated public agency that takes responsibility for specifying and maintaining service standards and sustainability. Its value has also been proved here in Africa. LAMATA is well staffed (interestingly, drawing on the expertise of returned Nigerians who had worked abroad), has dedicated funding, a clear mission and the necessary regulatory powers to implement what it plans. □