

A NEW APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF TAXI-RELATED FACILITIES:

Description of a joint agreement between the taxi industry and the local authority – *The Lethabong experience*

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ABSTRACT

The minibus-taxi industry is part of the public transport system in the Republic of South Africa. The service is conducted on a shared basis where each passenger is responsible for his or her own fare. It usually works on an origin-destination basis, which is quick and relatively faster than conventional buses. The minibus-taxis operate from taxi ranks where passengers embark for various destinations. The ranks consist of loading, ablution and shopping facilities. The loading facilities include shelters, pavement and seating. The ablution facilities are the most important element of the rank as regards maintenance, because they could easily get out of control if not managed well. Shopping facilities can be divided into three main categories, namely: places for informal traders, kiosks and shopping units. These are all business opportunities arising from the activities at taxi ranks. Had it not been for the taxi associations that provide transport, there would have been no work for informal traders. Trading is conducted along the access roads to the taxi rank and also inside the rank. The maintenance and management system implemented in the Lethabong MLC area consists of a co-operation agreement between the authority, as owner of the taxi rank, and the taxi association in the area. The basis of the co-operation agreement is that the taxi operators undertake to manage the day-to-day maintenance and control of all activities at the rank whereas the authority is responsible for the structural maintenance of the rank. To ensure that the taxi industry remains committed to the agreement, the association deposits an amount with the council to be used to call private cleaners or craftsmen to fix faults at the ranks, in case the taxi association does not fulfil its responsibilities. The paper gives more details of the contents of the co-operation agreement between the council and the controlling taxi association, and the operational agreement concluded by all the taxi associations providing services at the rank. The paper also discusses the role of respectively the taxi subcommittee and the Section 59 Transport Committee, as liaison structures between the different associations and between the council, other role players and the taxi industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

The minibus-taxi industry is part of the public transport system in the Republic of South Africa. The service is conducted on a shared basis where each passenger is responsible for his or her own fare. It usually works on an origin-destination basis, and this service is quicker, has more flexible routes and is relatively faster than conventional buses. The minibus-taxis operate from taxi ranks where passengers embark for various destinations.

The ranks generally have loading, ablution and shopping facilities. The loading facilities include shelters, pavement and seating. The ablution facilities are the most important element of the rank as regards maintenance, because they easily get out of control if not managed well. Shopping facilities can be divided into three main categories: sites for informal traders, kiosks and shopping units. These are all business opportunities arising from the activities at taxi ranks. Had it not been for the taxi associations that provide transport, there would have been no work for informal traders. Trading is conducted along the access roads to the taxi rank and also inside the rank. The maintenance and management system implemented in the Lethabong MLC area comprises a co-operation agreement between the local authority, as owner of the taxi rank, and the taxi association in the area. The basis of the co-operation agreement is that the taxi operators undertake the day-to-day maintenance and control of all activities at the rank, whereas the authority is responsible for the structural maintenance of the rank. To ensure that the taxi industry remains committed to the agreement, the association deposits a sum of money with the council to be used for calling in private cleaners or artisans to repair faults at the ranks, in case the taxi association does not fulfil its responsibilities.

The paper gives more details of the contents of the co-operation agreement between the council and the controlling taxi association, and the operational agreement concluded by all the taxi associations providing services at the rank. The paper also discusses the respective roles of the taxi subcommittee and the Section 59 Transport Committee, as liaison structures between the different associations and between the council, other role players and the taxi industry.

2. ELEMENTS OF TAXI FACILITIES

The facilities at taxi ranks can be divided into the facilities used by the taxis and passengers, and the facilities used by the informal sector.

2.1 Ranks

Ranks consist of pavements, shelters and ablution facilities.

a) Pavements

Paving is very important as it protects passengers and vehicles against dust and mud. Pavements include the travel lanes and parking areas for minibus-taxis, which are designed to bear the heavy mass of vehicles, and the pedestrian areas designed for lighter pedestrian traffic. Either bitumen-based or cement-based pavement blocks are the materials generally used for the pavements. The main problem with bitumen pavements is that the chemical products used for washing the vehicles will dissolve the bitumen. It should also be noted that if a vehicle travels on the pedestrian areas, it permanently damages the pavement layers and makes them sag. When puddles collect on these pavements, the water saturates the sublayers, further weakening the pavements.

These are the reasons that vehicles should not be permitted to drive on pedestrian areas or to be washed on bitumen surfaces, and also for insisting that vehicles be washed in proper washing bays. For these reasons too it is recommended that cement pavement blocks should be used for taxi rank pavements, especially for the vehicle lanes.

b) Shelters

Shelter is one of the most important elements of the facilities at a rank. Shelters protect passengers against the elements, such as heat, wind and rain.

Shelters should meet a number of requirements to be effective.

- i) Shelters should be high enough to accommodate minibus-taxi vehicles safely, especially the new 18 and 35 seater vehicles.
- ii) Shelters should not be too high that they do not protect people against the glare of the sun or against the rain, especially when rain is blown in by strong wind.
- iii) The type of material used overhead on the shelters should be selected with care. Although shade nets provide protection against the sun, they are disastrous in wet weather because rain begins to filter through the nets, later releasing a deluge onto the waiting passengers. Hail can cut through the nets and damage them. It is recommended that money should rather be saved up and spent on weatherproof roofing than on ineffective covering.
- iv) Gutters and downpipes are also essential, because they prevent rivulets of water from running off the roof and splashing on the people waiting in the shelters.
- v) The maintenance of the shelters is classified as structural, and the shelters should be repainted after about three to five years. The roofs or pillars need to be fixed when damaged by vehicles which enter the ranks unlawfully or when taxi drivers bump their vehicles against the pillars. The latter could be classified as day-to-day maintenance.

2.2 Ablution facilities

Perhaps the most controversial element of a rank is the ablution facilities, since these usually require constant care and supervision. The most common problems include blockages in the sewerage system due to the use of the wrong paper or of flushing objects down the toilets, and damage to the toilet bowls, hand-basins and taps. If the sanitary equipment is not maintained and repaired soon after it has been damaged, further damage may result since people lose respect for damaged facilities. Unfortunately, some people have a tendency to vandalise facilities, but effective supervision usually discourages such behaviour. In most cases it is also necessary to use specific chemicals in the toilets as they have advantages for the recycling and purification of water-borne sewage.

The cleanliness and effectiveness of taxi rank facilities are usually measured by the condition of the ablution facilities.

2.3 Informal sector

Informal traders and taxi ranks go hand in hand. It is important to place the traders in positions where the passengers or pedestrians may buy if they wish, but equally as important to ensure that such traders do realise that the primary function of the taxi rank is to provide minibus-taxi transport to passengers. With this in mind, traders ought not to be allowed to hinder the proper functioning of the taxi rank by selling their wares on the passenger islands or vehicle runways or by obstructing the free passage along the pedestrian areas. Trading sites should be properly marked and numbered before being allocated to traders. It is important to control informal trading activities so as to prevent overcrowding and ensure hygienic conditions.

The facilities needed for the informal trading include shelters and pavements.

a) Pavement

The first step in providing for informal traders is to construct pavements to eliminate dust and mud. Informal trading areas are usually paved with 60 mm pavement blocks.

b) Shelters/kiosks

There are three ways in which to accommodate informal traders.

i) No facilities, only a designated site

In this case, no facilities are provided except for paving, but it is important to mark and number the site for each trader. Traders are then allocated and registered for a specific site. This improves control over the informal traders and their activities.

ii) Shelter with table

The next level of trading facilities includes a shelter plus some sort of table or counter, but without lock-up facilities. The principle of marking, allocating and registering sites should still be followed.

iii) Kiosk

The highest level of facilities for informal traders is the provision of a kiosk type of facility where lock-up facilities are available. Such facilities are obviously more expensive to hire, but give the informal traders an opportunity to prepare for and progress to the formal business market.

2.4 Operations

2.4.1 Taxi movements

Taxis usually enter the rank, offload passengers and may then either queue for the next load, or the taxi may be washed before being loaded and leaving the rank. For these purposes the rank needs an entrance, washing bays, a holding area, loading area and an exit. The passengers' demands usually determine the need for taxis. As taxis also have to be able to load passengers going to different destinations independently, a bay is needed for each destination, except in cases where the bays are designed to accommodate sharing.

2.4.2 Needs

2.4.2.1 Passengers

Obviously, the passengers' need for transport is the fundamental reason for providing transport. The passengers' need for transport led to taxi owners identifying the business opportunity of providing transport to satisfy this need. In many cases the passenger can choose to use a taxi, bus, train, private car or

bicycle, or simply walk to a destination. In most cases the choice is rather limited but the passenger still has the power to choose.

Apart from the primary need for transport, the passenger also has secondary needs such as shelter against the elements, toilet facilities, food, information and communication with management.

2.4.2.2 Owners

The needs of the owners centre on the method used for satisfying the passengers' primary need for transport. As a businessman, the owner wants to provide transport and make a profit by doing so.

2.4.2.3 Drivers

Drivers are paid to provide transport to the passengers and for driving the minibus-taxis. To this end, drivers in the first instance need facilities for loading passengers. Such facilities should be accessible, have adequate turning space and safe entrances and exits. In the second instance, drivers need a place to wash the vehicle as well as toilet facilities and somewhere to buy or prepare food.

2.4.3 Control

It is important to exercise effective control at the taxi facilities so as to protect the interest of not only the passengers but also the drivers, taxi owners and the local authority. Responsibility for such control rests on different organisations, institutions and people.

2.4.3.1 Health

The busy, congested nature of the environment at taxi facilities, where many people buy food, use ablution facilities and interact, make it vital to ensure compliance with the health regulations. Regular inspections by the responsible Health Department, if possible accompanied by the rank manager, are of cardinal importance. This again emphasises that informal traders ought to be registered with the local authority. When traders register, certain rules and conditions for using the facilities could be explained to them and be made compulsory for the use of the facilities.

2.4.3.2 Traffic

Traffic should be controlled in two ways. The first consideration is the roadworthiness of vehicles; the second is the vehicular and pedestrian movements at the rank. The second consideration should really be addressed during the planning stages of the minibus-taxi rank facilities. The vehicles must have ample space to drive in and out of loading bays. The traffic department of the local authority should be able to enter the rank at any time for routine investigations or in case of emergencies.

2.4.3.3 Queue and rank marshals

The day-to-day control of the activities at the rank is in the hands of the queue marshals who see to it that drivers load at the right places and that passengers queue at the allocated places. The rank marshal is in turn responsible for co-ordinating the queue marshals and the operations of the rank in general, including control over the activities of the hawkers.

3. MOST COMMON WAYS TO MANAGE TAXI-RELATED FACILITIES

The following are examples of the most common ways to manage taxi-related facilities:

- a) **The local authority takes responsibility for everything at the facilities.** In this case, municipal cleaners clean the ranks and ablution facilities and even provide the chemicals and toilet paper.
- b) **The facility is on private property** and the private organisation is responsible for the management and maintenance of the facility.
- c) **A management body is formed** or registered, for example a Section 21 Company consisting of all the parties involved at the rank. Such a body appoints or creates a management structure and is wholly responsible for the management and maintenance of the facilities.
- d) **The establishment of a joint venture** between the local authority and the taxi industry, where responsibilities are shared.

Each of these examples has advantages and disadvantages. Before deciding on a management structure, the question to be answered is whether the facilities will be managed properly. Such management should preferably be achieved without additional cost to the local authority that is the custodian of the facilities, and without creating tension and power struggles between the parties traditionally present at a taxi-related facility.

4. PROPOSED APPROACH TO MANAGING TAXI-RELATED FACILITIES

The approach followed in the Lethabong Metropolitan Local Council's area was to establish a joint venture between the taxi industry and the local authority. The joint venture is based on a co-operation agreement between the controlling taxi association and the authority. Following the success of the management of ranks in the Lethabong area, the Khayalami Metropolitan Council (KMC) adopted this approach and is currently engaged in implementing it in the metropolitan area as a whole.

The main principles taken into account in developing a management system for the taxi-related facilities in the Lethabong area are as follows:

- a) Avoid creating a new structure to take responsibility for the management and maintenance of the taxi-related facilities, because such structures need financial support.
- b) Let the taxi industry play an important role in the management of the rank because they create the business for the informal traders and other shop owners and they already manage the taxi operations through the queue marshals and rank marshals.
- c) In keeping with the principles of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the taxi association's members are empowered by being given the opportunity to develop as managers of the business opportunity they help to create.

- d) Keep the taxi association interested and committed by allowing its members to share in the income generated at the rank.
- e) Keep the taxi association effective by having it deposit a sum of money with the local authority, to be used if the association does not fulfil its responsibilities stipulated agreed in the co-operation agreement.
- f) All taxi associations operating at the rank or ranks should sign an operational agreement with the controlling association, stipulating that they and their members and drivers will adhere to the rules of the rank and contribute towards the cleaning of the rank.

The system in the KMC area is based on a co-operation agreement between the local authority and the controlling taxi association. The controlling association in an area is usually the association that operates the majority of the routes in such an area and that the other taxi associations regard as the association in control of operations in the area.

In some cases there is no association controlling the area, in which case the associations form a management committee to co-ordinate operations and appoint an association to take responsibility for the management and maintenance of the rank and facilities.

The co-operation agreement is in fact an opportunity for the taxi association which, through its transport activities, has opened up trading opportunities for the informal sector, to start new businesses. It could therefore be regarded as fair for the taxi association to benefit from renting out business sites such as hawkers' stalls and kiosks. Part of these funds could again be utilised for the upkeep of the rank and facilities and the rest could be retained in the coffers of the association. The advantage is that the more effective the association maintaining the rank, the greater the profit for the association.

4.1 Management committees

The management committees need to be established with a strong leadership. The success of the memorandum of the co-operation agreement depends greatly on the management committee's commitment to making the agreement work. In most cases, the regional ranks have such big operations that one association cannot be regarded as the controlling association. In the KMC area it is mainly at the Thiteng and Oakmoore ranks where the operations are so big that no single association could control the management of the facility.

In the KMC area there are two management committees, namely at the Thiteng and Oakmoore taxi ranks.

4.1.1 Thiteng

The Thiteng rank serves the function of a regional rank where routes begin from all over the KMC and Johannesburg and Germiston. Eight minibus-taxi associations operate these routes. None of these associations dominates the operations at the rank. The associations decided to form a management committee which will co-ordinate operations at the rank and will monitor and support the agent appointed to clean and maintain the rank. For example, the management committee recommended the Lethabong Taxi Association as the agent to manage and maintain the Thiteng Taxi Rank.

4.1.2 Oakmoor

In the case of Oakmoor, there are three associations operating from the western side of the station and one operating from the eastern side of the station. The management committee is composed of two representatives from each of the four associations.

4.2 Co-operation agreements

As mentioned above, the rank maintenance and management policy in the Khayalami area centres on the co-operation agreement between the authority / owner and the taxi industry. The basis for the co-operation agreement is that the authority, which happens to be the owner of the land and property, allows the taxi industry to use the taxi rank and facilities to provide transport. The authority will do the structural maintenance and the taxi industry will do the day-to-day maintenance and management of the rank and facilities in return for part of the income derived from renting out the hawkers' sites and business sites on the property.

4.3 Monitoring

For the sake of effectiveness, it is important to monitor the performance of the functions assigned to different parties in terms of the agreement. It is proposed that a monitoring site visit should be arranged on a monthly basis to determine whether the functions are being performed in accordance with the agreement. The monitoring report would be presented to the Section 59 committee for consideration and information.

4.4 Report back

It is crucial to report back to the subcommittees and to the taxi councils on the progress and status of the rank and facilities. At meetings of the subcommittees on which all the associations are represented, a decision could be made about the steps to be taken against those associations that do not respect the conditions of the agreement.

4.5 Needs identification procedure

There is a need to monitor the balance between demand and supply at the different ranks. Such comparisons ought to be done at regular intervals. Some kinds of information would have to be collected more often than other kinds of information. It would be a great advantage if local people who work at the ranks, e.g. the queue or rank marshals, could do the counts and monitoring. Such people could be trained to do the surveys. The collected information would then have to be entered into the database of the KMC to form part of the current public transport record. The type of information to be collected, could include the following:

- The queue lengths of vehicles and passengers for each destination
- Waiting times for taxis and passengers
- Perceptions of passengers

4.1 Responsible structures

The structures that represent the taxi industry ought to be informed of the purpose of the surveys. All parties involved at ranks would have to trust the outcome of the surveys, as the information would concern conditions at the rank.

4.2 Monitoring procedures

Monitoring is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it provides an understanding of the current balance between the demand for and supply of transport at a specific rank and secondly, it ensures compliance with the essence and specific maintenance clauses of the management agreements. Collecting specific data to determine the capacity utilisation of the services at a rank and comparing the data with previous data and trends, help to monitor the balance between supply and demand. Visiting the ranks on a regular basis monitors the execution of the maintenance agreements.

4.3 Data collection surveys

As mentioned above, the collection of data should become an integral part of operations at a rank. Data collection is in the interest of the taxi industry as a business as well as of the authority responsible for the provision of effective passenger transport services. If the association has appropriate information it could realise in good time that there is a need for more taxis or that a certain route has reached capacity and that no more new taxis should be allowed to enter the market on that route. It could even happen that demand may decline for certain reasons, and that the number of taxis should be reduced. In such a case some taxis could be deployed on a route where there is a growing demand in the passenger market. All this is only possible if the correct information is available. Such surveys could be done in a systematic way according to a programme. The data collected would be forwarded to the KMC to add to the public transport record.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions may be drawn about managing taxi-related facilities:

- a) That the taxi industry is instrumental in generating the business opportunities at taxi ranks and it is generally good business practice to allow the people who generate the opportunities to share in the benefits flowing from such businesses;
- b) That the property should be owned by the local authority or that a servitude be registered over the rank to allow law enforcement agencies to have access to the rank and its facilities;
- c) That the operational agreement should be based on a joint venture agreement between the taxi industry and the local authority;
- d) That the taxi rank should be managed by the association that operates the majority of the routes from the rank;
- e) That the different associations that operate from the rank should liaise through the taxi subcommittee;
- f) That the Section 59 Committee should act as the communication structure where the taxi industry and the authority would meet to consider issues concerning the management of the rank;
- g) That regular monitoring of the condition of the rank and facilities should be undertaken together with the controlling taxi association;
- h) That it takes time to build a good relationship between the different parties and to build an effective management structure based on co-operation agreements.

A NEW APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF TAXI-RELATED FACILITIES: CO-OPERATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TAXI INDUSTRY AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY – *THE LETHABONG EXPERIENCE*

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Sias is a **public transport specialist** with a M Eng (Transportation) and is especially well-known for his success in the development of liaison structures between the authorities and the taxi and bus industries. He has an effective way of working with the industry at all levels, particularly at grassroots level. Other fields of his experience include the development of passenger transport plans and strategies, the determining of the need for infrastructure, conceptual planning and design of public transport facilities. The East Rand and several other parts of South Africa have many examples of his expertise and input. Of late he has become involved in projects to stimulate and create jobs at grassroots level through the establishment of trading co-operatives. He was part of the team who developed, design and implemented the colour coding system in the GPMC area and North West Province.