

PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPAL AREA: UNPACKING THE OPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that 4.5% of the approximately 3.29 million residents of eThekweni are people with disabilities (PWD). In this regard, one of the key developmental pillars of the metro is to promote the concept of an accessible city by ensuring universal access to facilities and public transport. However, planning for transport for people with disabilities has not received adequate attention as evidenced by the fact that there are only three accessible buses (adapted) servicing eThekweni. The following constitute contributory factors as to why a fully accessible public transport system is still but a pipedream:

- Social (cultural attitudes that tend to wish away and/or render PWD together with the concerns invisible)
- Financial (limited resources dedicated to improving transport for PWD)
- Economic (the relatively high costs of retrofitting the built environment and the vehicles to be accessible)
- Institutional (stakeholders have tended to function in silos and therefore there is no integration in planning for accessible transport), and
- Political (universal access to facilities and public transport has not been prioritized nor championed and therefore there is no coherent and integrated policy).

This paper, which is based on a study that was conducted in 2007 by the eThekweni Transport Authority (ETA), will profile the travel patterns of PWD in the eThekweni Municipal Area, unpack their travel constraints, speculate on the *raison d'être* for the relative inaction from across the stakeholder community in terms of addressing these challenges, provide a bouquet of intervention options across the entire travel chain undergirded by an implementation framework as well as reflect on what interventions have since been implemented.

Key Words: eThekweni Transport Authority, persons with disabilities, universal design, accessible public transport, travel chain, interventions, built environment.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ethekwini Municipal Area (EMA) is a Metropolitan Municipality situated along the KwaZulu Natal coast, East of South Africa. The (EMA) has the first and only Transport Authority in South Africa whose Mission Statement is as follows:

To provide and manage a world class transport system with a public transport focus, providing high levels of mobility and accessibility for the movement of people and goods in safe, sustainable and affordable manner.

2 BACKGROUND

The EMA has a population of approx.3, 28 million (projected figure) and amongst those 4.5% are considered to have some degree of disability.

Planning for people with disabilities has been lagging behind, hence only 3 specially adapted buses service an area of about 2.297 km². This service is known as the Sukuma Service.

3 THE DETAILED APPROACH UNDERTAKEN FOR THE ETA: CASE STUDY

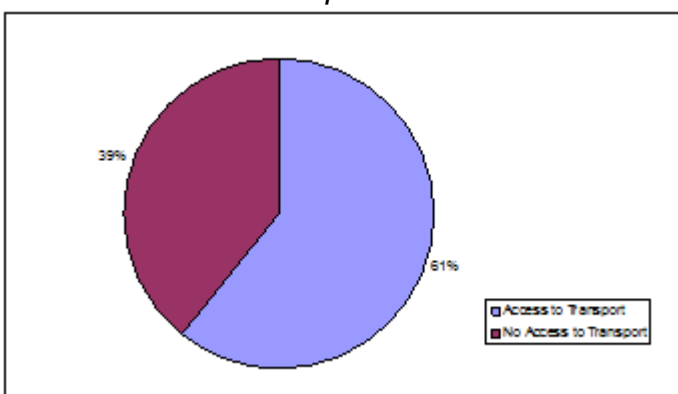
An overall approach undertaken to look into the EMA situation is explained below.

In 2004 a “Transport Needs Survey” was conducted by KwaZulu Natal Quadriplegic Association and responses were received from 2445 people – all with some form of disability. In total 31 948 trips per month were requested. The next step that was embarked on was to take the process forward by engaging a team of consultants that worked closely with an ETA Project Manager in order to unpack the results of the survey. The following approach was followed:

- Analyse the data from the “Transport Needs Survey”
- Analyse the existing systems in place (Sukuma)
- Understand the various components making up the ‘Accessible Journey Chain’
- Discuss introduction of new/improved systems.
- Make recommendations on the way forward

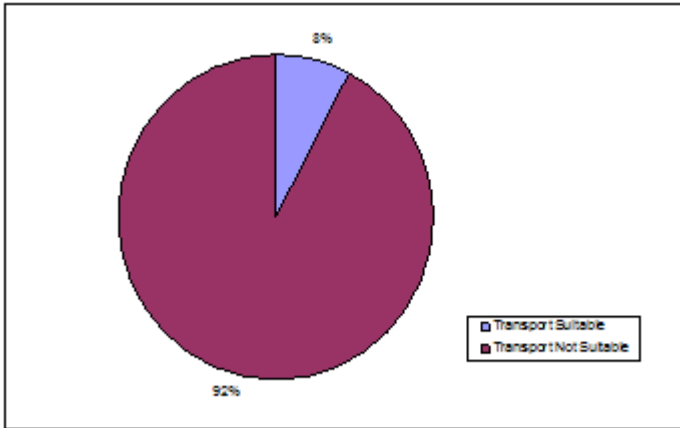
3.1 Detailed explanation of each of the above stages and findings. “Transport Needs Survey” analysis produced the following results.

3.1.1 Access to Transport



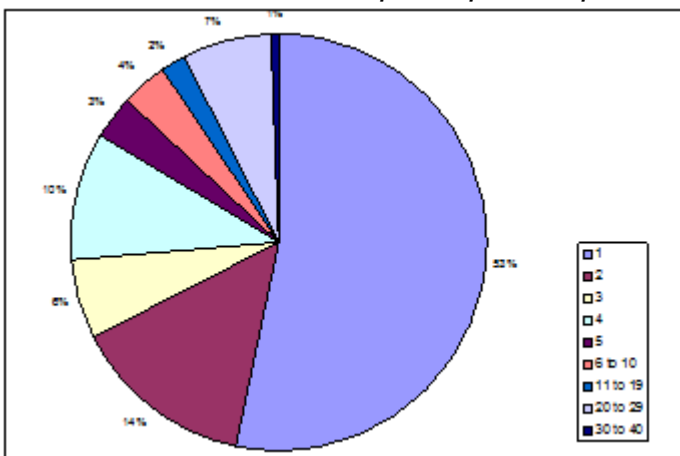
Approximately 60% of the respondents indicated that they had no access to transport. The results of the survey were not clear as to whether this referred to public and/or private transport.

3.1.2 Suitability of Transport



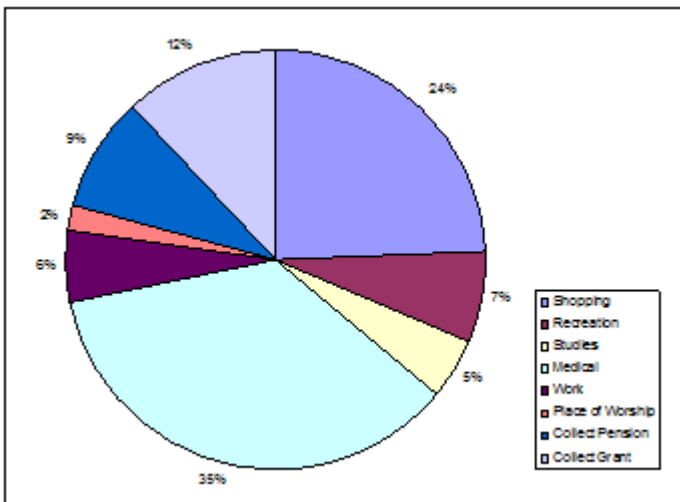
The results clearly indicate that the vast majority (> 90%) of the persons surveyed who had access to transport, were of the opinion that the existing public transport system was not suited to their needs. Unfortunately, the reasons given were not recorded and it would have been extremely useful.

3.1.3 Number of 'return trips' requested per month



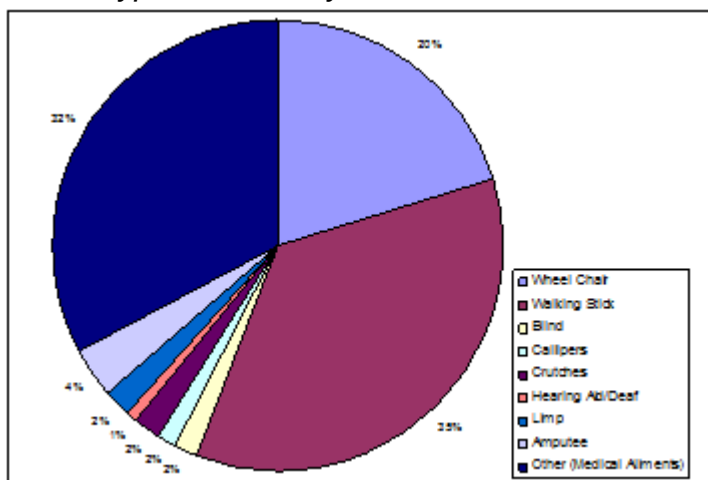
The 2445 respondents requested approximately 32 000 trips per month. 53% of the trips requested were single, return trips between the respondents' home and a particular destination.

3.1.4 Reasons given for wanting to travel



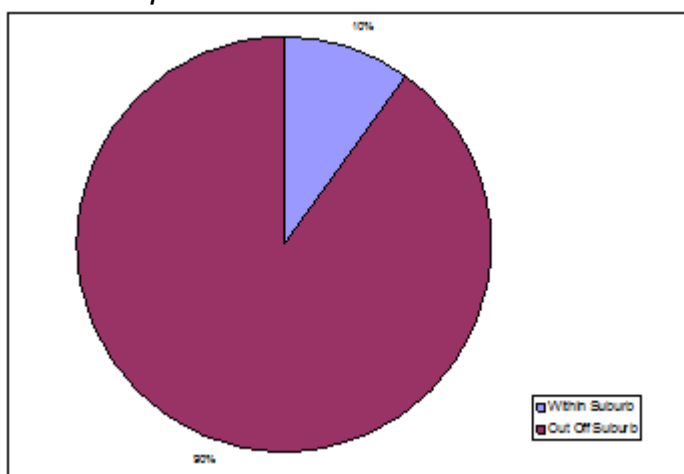
The percentage of single, return trips requested per month can be related to the main reasons given for wanting to travel – 35% of the respondents requested for medical reasons (most likely the monthly visit to a clinic or hospital) and 24% for shopping.

3.1.5 Type of Disability



In terms of assistive devices being used - 20% of the respondents used wheel chairs and 35% used walking sticks.

3.1.6 Requests for travel 'within'/'out-off' ones' suburb



Further analysis of the data collected also indicated that 90% of the trips requested were for trips 'out-off' ones' suburb. This information proved useful as it directed us to investigate transport solutions on a macro level rather than a micro level.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE SUKUMA SERVICE

4.1 Introduction and overview

The 'Sukuma' bus service was created as a pilot project at the initiative of the Department of Transport and the Ethekwini Municipality. Durban Transport (owned and operated by the Remant Alton) maintain three, specially adapted buses to service persons with disabilities. The areas serviced are (northern route) and (southern route). Users of the service are transported from these areas to the Ethekwini Metro and immediate surrounds in the morning peak with a return journey in the afternoon peak.

There being little or no available recorded data related to these services, the information gathered for the purposes of this report was obtained by the following means:

- Site visits to inspect the pick-up (origin) and drop-off (destination) points
- Interviews with the bus drivers and assistants
- Interviews with the users
- Following the bus with a tracking device in order to accurately establish the bus route and bus stops
- Riding as passengers on the bus in order to observe first-hand the practices in place

- Perusal of existing, recorded data

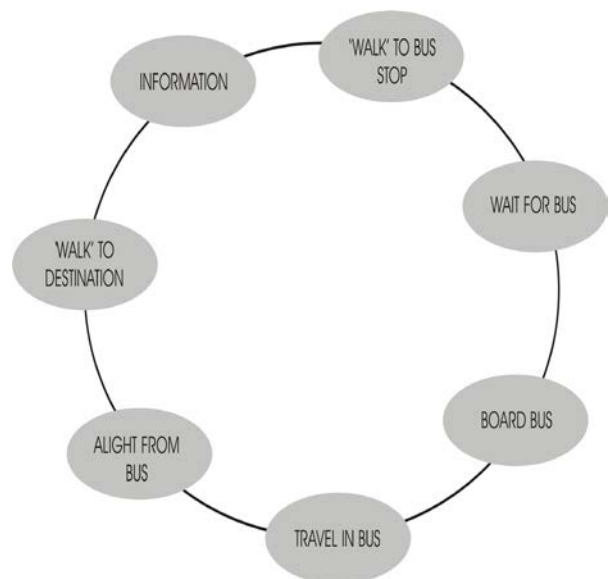
The data from 'Origin-Destination' survey commissioned by the Ethekewini Transport Authority was analysed in conjunction with the tracked bus route in order to determine the extent to which the current route selection meets the needs of the disabled bus user.

The 'Sukuma' bus service appears to operate on a 'needs' basis. A potential user makes application to the bus operator (usually via the depot manager) to be picked up and dropped off at particular locations.

The following method was applied in order to interrogate the present Sukuma Service.

5 THE ACCESSIBLE JOURNEY CYCLE

- Each link must be accessible for the whole journey to be achieved
- Passengers need to be certain that the entire journey is accessible – some people require more certainty than others as they are more sensitive to barriers.
- Spontaneous Journeys are not possible without prior information.



6 INTRODUCTION OF NEW/IMPROVED SYSTEMS

6.2 Immediate Intervention : Improved Sukuma service and Introduction of Dial A Ride

6.2.1 *Establish Database of Existing Users.* New improved Sukuma buses were introduced with a bigger capacity and a lot of consideration was taken into account of PWD. A data base of all passengers has been captured with the following details:

Full Name and Surname, Identity Number, Telephone Contact Numbers, Home Address, Work/School Address, Next of Kin Details (including emergency contact details).

6.2.2 *Information Pamphlet.* An information pamphlet detailing the Dial A Ride service with the following information is available:

- Operator contact details (preferably toll-free number)
- Specific Information on the service available
- Operating times and fares

6.2.3 *Sensitise Personnel.* Drivers of the Dial A ride service has gone through an appropriate training to equip them with knowledge on how to deal with PWD.

6.2.4 *Upgrade Vehicles.* Vehicles have been upgraded to meet all required criterion and have been through SABS approval.

6.3 Short to medium term Interventions

6.3.1 *Introduce Additional Routes to the 'SUKUMA' Service.* Initially there were 2 services and an additional route serving part of the Western Areas has been introduced.

6.3.2 *Improve Infrastructure: Bus Stops and Sidewalks.* Improved infrastructure at bus stops will reduce the bus 'stopping time' especially when loading/off-loading wheelchairs. The construction of bus shelters to accommodate both able bodied persons and persons with disabilities (in particular wheel chair bound passengers) will ensure the comfort of passengers whilst waiting for a bus.

6.4 Medium to long term Interventions

6.4.1 *Introduce a Dial Ride Service.* As part of a medium to long term plan the Municipality has introduced a Dial A Ride service that operates in the entire Municipal Area. There a 10 such vehicles that are specially adapted to accommodate wheelchair users as well. Even though the service is fairly new, there is a lot of enthusiasm amongst its registered users who have long waited for a service of this nature. This project is being piloted for a period of 3 years.

6.4.2 *Merging of the Sukuma and Dial Ride Services.* It's is in our plans to have the 2 services complementing each other, once the Dial Ride is fully established.

7 **CONCLUSION**

A number of challenges that were observed in terms of the journey cycle are now being addressed and there is still room for further improvement.

The ETA made a good start in the provision of Transport for people with disabilities, but much more is needed to meet the demand.

REFERENCES

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Tyler, N, 2002. Accessibility and the Bus System: Concepts to Practice.