

TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: CURRENT INITIATIVES, DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

International experience has shown that Transport Authorities play a key role towards improving public transport service delivery by grouping and integrating all transport functions in one institutional structure at local sphere. South Africa is in the process of establishing Transport Authorities in terms of the National Land Transport Transition Act of 2000. These transport authorities have a potential role to play in the planning, management and public transport funding functions.

The first Transport Authority in South Africa has been launched in Ethekewini Metropolitan Municipality and other pilot Transport Authority projects are presently under investigation in Tshwane, City of Johannesburg, City of Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, and Mangaung Local Municipality.

The paper reviews the recent Transport Authority initiatives in South Africa. Drawing from International experiences, the paper also looks at the potential role of Transport Authorities in South Africa. The paper then discusses the challenges that are inhibiting factors to the processes of establishing Transport Authority in South Africa. Finally, the paper makes recommendations on means that are likely to enable the process of establishing of Transport Authorities to move forward.

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Land Transport Transition Act No. 22 of 2000 has significant implications for local government. Local authorities in South Africa have been considerably affected by changes in legislation, demarcation and the responsibility over the past ten (10) years of democracy.

The review of transport policy leading to the White Paper on Transport policy (1996) identified fragmentation of transport functions and responsibilities for transport at local government and also between the three spheres of government as one of the major problem inhibiting effective and efficient transport service delivery. In order to address the fragmentation and transform and improve public transport in South Africa, the National Land Transport Transition Act (Act 22 of 2000) (NLTTA) was enacted. The NLTTA provides for the establishment of transport authorities at the municipal sphere of government. The rationale for the establishment of transport authorities is to improve transport service delivery at the local sphere of government by grouping transport functions into a single well-managed institutional structure.

South Africa is in the process of establishing Transport Authorities (TAs). Recently, there has been a substantial interest in TAs and a number of municipalities at metropolitan,

district and even some local municipalities are engaged and at advanced investigations to establish transport authorities. Ethekewini Metropolitan Municipality has established the first transport authority in South Africa with effect from March 2004.

There is overwhelming evidence from the United Kingdom and many other developed countries that Transport Authorities can play a catalyst role to address fragmentation in transport service delivery and improve service quality (An Introduction to Transport Authority, 2001). It is against this background that a number of cities are opting to establish Transport Authorities in line with the NLTTA. The TA initiatives began in the late 1980s and formal work began in the 1990s but to date very little progress has been made. This paper looks at the potential role that TAs can play in transforming transport service delivery at local sphere. The paper also looks at the challenges that are inhibiting progress in the establishment of Transport Authorities.

2. POTENTIAL ROLE OF TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES

TAs are the key decision bodies responsible for all issues related to public transport, and thus mobility for the following reasons:

Large cities are not viable without public transport. The high density of inhabitants and jobs makes space a very scarce resource. As a result, public transport, which is the most efficient mode of transportation in terms of space consumption per traveler, is the best answer to mobility in densely populated areas. The major disruptions, which occur in large cities when public transport fails to deliver its services, are the best illustrations of this strong dependence.

Furthermore, large cities all over the world suffer heavily from congestion and externalities caused by excessive use of private car. Pollution, noise, and accidents are particularly acute in large urban environments and affects lives of thousands of people. This needs to be controlled through planning and regulation.

Metropolitan areas often have very complex institutional frameworks, involving different levels of authorities in charge of urban planning and transportation policies (Metropolitan areas, municipalities). It is also frequent to have different companies operating parts of the public network of a metropolitan area. Integration of modes and operators (physical integration, integration of fares, etc) is therefore a fundamental task of TAs so as to be able to offer travellers a seamless trip. This is still a challenge for South African cities. This requires major institutional reform.

2.1 Institutional reform

Fragmented planning and service delivery characterize the present situation in South African urban transport. Planning and provision of services is done by a number of different organizations in an uncoordinated and fragmented manner. Different tiers of government and agencies responsible for certain elements. Funding streams are also fragmented. These factors inhibit the provision of integrated and coordinated service delivery at local government sphere. The grouping of functions that will result from the establishment of TAs will play a key role to consolidate a number of planning and coordinating functions of public transport. As a result, the accountability of one institution on service delivery will be realized.

2.2 Modal integration

Modal integration is one of the critical challenges that need to be addressed in our public transport system. Currently, modes operate in silos and in a manner that is fragmented and results to wasteful competition between modes. The lack of modal integration is also a result of fragmented service delivery that is managed and planned by different institutions. The establishment of TAs presents an opportunity to achieve modal integration since TAs will be responsible for planning, management and regulation of all modes of public transport. It is for this reason that the devolution of passenger rail function must be done.

2.3 Giving recognition to the role of transport

Government is confronted by competing demands and priorities at all spheres. As a result it is difficult to elevate transport above other priorities at the agenda especially at local sphere where delivery has to occur. The establishment of TAs creates an opportunity to give transport an “undivided attention” by placing it in an institution that will plan, manage and regulate it. This presents a good opportunity to give transport the recognition it deserves, given the catalyst role transport plays in the social and economic development of the country as a whole.

2.4 Promotion of public transport

One of the overarching objectives of the NLTTA is the promotion of public transport over private transport. The promotion of public transport can only take place at local sphere through improvement of service quality is achieved. Transport Authority functions as outlined in Section 10(13) of the NLTTA clearly indicated that TAs would be at the center in all endeavors to promote public transport – by integrating services and also enhancing public transport in a manner that meets customer needs. For example, using public participation, the transport authority will be able to design services in a manner that meets the user’s needs. There is no doubt that TAs have a potential role to play in turning around our public transport service at local sphere. However, the potential role of TAs depend on a number of challenges being addressed. These challenges have been observed in the local current TA initiatives. These can be outlined as follows:

2.5 Funding

Research conducted on the progress made in the implementation of the NLTTA indicates that lack of funding is one of the barriers to the effective implementation of the NLTTA and hence the establishment of TAs (Palmer Development Group, 2004). The lack of sustainable and guaranteed funding also inhibits the establishment of Transport Authorities. A number of Metropolitan municipalities intend to establish Transport Authorities as promoted by the Act but the uncertainty regarding funding for Transport Authorities prevent progress. The Ethekwini Transport Authority which is a pilot project is also facing funding challenge as funding for the TA is discretionary and needs to be negotiated on an annual basis (Ethekwini Transport Authority Founding Agreement, 2003). Given the potential role that TAs can play in transforming our public transport system – there is a need to provide funding to make the TAs work. Furthermore TAs should be empowered to impose levies and taxes where appropriate.

2.6 Political Commitment

Ogden (1977) argues that “good engineering plans and good economic analysis can decide whether or not development is possible but politics decides whether it will be done or not”.

International experiences in London as well as well as in Lagos clearly indicate that strong political commitment play a key role towards the success of TA initiatives. The strong political leadership by Mayor Ken Livingstone indicates that strong political will is a prerequisite for the success of TA projects. Closer to home, during the establishment of the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) in Nigeria also confirms this view (The Lagos Metropolitan Area TA, UATP Conference, 2004). The establishment of the Ethekwini Transport Authority (ETA) can also be attributed to strong political will by the political principals in the 3 spheres of government. The lack of political will and power struggles has hindered progress in the establishment of TAs in many cities. Observations show that the majority of the current TA initiatives are driven by officials without the strong involvement of politicians. The gap between political and technocrats inhibit progress in the TA initiatives. Therefore, there is a need for strong political leadership in order to take the TA initiatives to advanced levels of delivery, especially in the context of current funding challenges.

3. TA S FOR DISTRICT AND LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES

Recently, the interest into the establishment of TAs has even observed even at district and local municipalities. Even though the establishment of a TA is a voluntary act by a municipality or a group of municipalities, it is important to emphasize that a TA must be established “only if” it will improve transport service delivery at local sphere by grouping transport functions into a single, well managed and focused institutional structure (NLTTA Section 10(3)). Therefore, ideally, only the metropolitan municipalities (with large population, high economic and social activities and large traffic volumes) must establish TAs. There is a need to guard against being seen as merely building empire y establishing TAs in areas where it will not result to better transport service delivery. Therefore, for small and medium sized municipalities, it may be better to regroup transport functions in an integrated manner without necessarily establishing a TA.

4. CONCLUSION

International experiences indicate a number of advantages of establishing TAs for metropolitan municipalities. One of the most important benefits is to have a single, focused point of delivery and contact that is accountable for transport service delivery, thus overcoming present fragmentations. As lessons from abroad indicate, the establishment of TAs has a potential role to play in transforming our transport service delivery in South Africa. However, strong political will and guaranteed and sustainable financial framework is crucial to make it work. There is also a need to clearly and convincingly demonstrate a need to establish a Transport Authority. Caution should be taken against the establishment of TAs as a “nice to have” or empire building, which will not improve transport service delivery. Finally, further research is necessary to determine the transferability of success of TAs abroad into the South African context.

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