

VALUES AND COMMUNAL INTROSPECTION – ANOTHER DIMENSION OF ROAD SAFETY

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ABSTRACT

In the City of Johannesburg, an average of fifty requests is received monthly for traffic calming. These come in the form of petitions from communities, requests from councillors and other elected representatives, frustrated phone calls from school principals and community leaders.

Often, the sentiment expressed by communities is one of helpless victims waiting for the local authority to provide solutions, magical speed humps which will remove all their problems.

On closer examination it becomes clear, that many road safety challenges are linked to a values vacuum in society. A sense that we're all so busy moving and doing, that we do not take time to introspect and understand what is the core cause of many road safety issues.

This paper outlines an approach taken by Johannesburg to address values in transport. The paper details the project from conception and focuses primarily on how the values symbols and project will augment other work being done by the department.

1 BACKGROUND

Increasing car ownership, growing congestion and rapid in-migration to the City of Johannesburg have all had an impact on quality of life in the city. Amongst these have been: poorer air quality, more time spent commuting leaving less time for family and self, greater levels of frustration and road rage and an increasing number of requests for traffic calming.

The highest number of petitions received by the public participation and petition's committee in Johannesburg are requests from various areas in Johannesburg requesting the municipality to introduce traffic calming measures. The requests are often in relation to an incident that has already occurred. Sometimes communities proactively identify driver behaviour that indicates possible problems in the future and make pro-active requests.

The challenge for the City of Johannesburg transportation department and the Johannesburg Roads Agency is that the bulk of these requests take the form of interventions for speed humps and other engineering solutions. It has become evident that instituting engineering solutions on their own will simply not change behaviour or the number of road crashes on Johannesburg roads.

2 AIM OF PAPER

This paper traces the conception of the values in transport project, how the symbols were developed and how values have been factored into other safety initiatives of the department. The paper aims to inform other policy-makers and institutions on an approach adopted by the City of Johannesburg that in the spirit of our values project, we would like to share with others.

3 TRANSPORT VALUES

Post the 1 March 2006, local government elections, the City of Johannesburg, under the leadership of His Worship, Executive Mayor, Councillor Amos Masondo, created the transportation department as a stand alone department. The department also has an oversight role on the Johannesburg Roads Agency and Metrobus.

In setting the 5 year agenda for the department, the goals had to be aligned to the priorities as articulated in the Growth and Development Strategy of the city. Having looked at a number of transport challenges and unpacked them to the lowest common denominator, it was evident that many were linked to a growing values vacuum in society. A decision was thus made to include the values programme as a key deliverable for the department.

4 WHY VALUES?

Our current transport system is indeed a test of character. This is evident if we reflect on some of the following:

- How do you react when caught in traffic congestion?
- How do you react when a driver cuts in front of you without indicating?
- How do you react to a young child trying to cross a busy street?
- How do you react when pedestrians should have the right of way?
- Have you noticed the number of Johannesburg residents who spray graffiti or stick adverts on signs meant to guide or warn road users?
- Have you noticed the number of Johannesburg residents who think that stormwater channels are places to dump refuse and building rubble?
- Have you noticed the number of Johannesburg residents who think it is cool to not pay bus fares?

The values project is premised on the belief that as proudly Johannesburg residents we can accept road rage, constant violation of laws, vandalism of infrastructure, poor customer service, rising number of road crashes as the norm ...

OR

We can start a movement that is based on timeless VALUES that provide us all with a common vision of the type of city we want to belong to!

The values project aims to introduce spirituality into the domain of transport. A useful definition of spiritual is: “That which gives life or vitality to a system. The spiritual in human beings makes us ask WHY we are doing what we are doing and makes us seek some fundamentally better way of doing it. It makes us want our lives and enterprise to make a difference.”

Danah Zohar & Ian Marshall: Spiritual Capital: Wealth we can live by.

The process followed in developing the values included the following:

- The assembly of the transportation family, held in June 2006 where all employees of the transportation department, the Johannesburg Roads Agency and Metrobus were afforded an opportunity to input into the values they felt the department should be espousing.
- A session with councillors, the elected representatives in the City of Johannesburg, where they too were afforded an opportunity to make input.

After analysing all ideas and suggestions – 5 values were identified.

In October 2006, during transport month, the 5 values as proposed by the city stakeholders were presented to external stakeholders, including public transport operators, commuter organisation representatives, the Automobile Association and youth representatives amongst others.

The 5 values as proposed were ratified by external stakeholders. They were:

- Accountability.
- Co-operation.
- Honesty.
- Respect.
- Ubuntu.

A series of consultative workshops were subsequently held where a variety of stakeholders assisted with the development of a symbol to represent each value. The choice of symbols was motivated by the fact that: “from early cave paintings to modern corporate logos, symbols have been used to convey meaning graphically. They have the power to unite different human feelings, thoughts and experiences into coherent meaning. Symbols emerge within communities that share a common world-view, experiences and common goals.

Symbols convey a deep and almost instinctive meaning to people – they make up the very fabric of identity and are one of the most basic systems of human expression. They provoke strong emotions for those who identify with them and those who oppose them.

A symbol has layers of meaning – both literal and experiential. Traditional value statements are often conveyed as literal statements that are unemotional and have little or no impact on aligning behaviour. By converting these values into a symbolic representation, the right-brain of the organisation – the powerful motivating centre – is activated. “ Richard Tasker. www.symbology.co.za

The workshop sessions were highly creative and lots of fun. The symbols were also tested on a variety of target audiences and appropriate messaging developed by involving stakeholders.

A wide range of stakeholders were party to the development of the symbols that were unveiled on 5 December 2007.



LINKING VALUES TO OTHER PROJECTS

Now that the symbols have been publicly unveiled, work has started on aligning them to various workstreams that the department is undertaking.

In road safety this includes, the launch of a mascot, pedestrian angel which will be undertaking road safety education coupled with values messaging to schools in Johannesburg.



Launch of Transport Mascot: Pedestrian Angel pictured here with Councillors in the City of Johannesburg.

The values symbols are also being linked to the development of ward based community road safety plans. The intention behind this project, is to allow the communities in each of the 109 wards in Johannesburg to become active role – players in enhancing safety in Johannesburg. The meetings are conducted in a fashion that empowers community members in understanding the complexity of road safety and the extent to which community members are complicit or actively engaged in behaviour that undermines safety.

The City of Johannesburg is currently actively seeking to build partnerships with a view to creating deeper awareness of values both internally and externally.

CONCLUSIONS

We have only but taken the first step on a journey that indeed will be a long one. The process of getting communities to introspect and then begin to change their behaviour based on timeless values will not be a short term solution.

We are of the opinion that engineering solutions without taking power back to the people, will not bring road safety. It is when we start a mass movement based on values that we will indeed better not just our safety record, but our transport system and our city!