# COMPREHENSIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING LEARNER MOBILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

The modal split in developing countries is substantially weighted toward non-motorised transport, owing to low vehicle ownership rates in both urban and rural areas of several of these countries. In South Africa, walking accounted for 41% of trips in 2020, while cycling accounted for less than 1.5%. These statistics are inflated when looking at the learner population in South Africa. More than 60% of learners walk the entire distance to their respective educational institutions. A disproportionate number of these learners are from low-income households who do not have access to alternative modes. Transport plays a crucial role in ensuring that students can exercise their right to a basic education; therefore, the provision of adequate transport facilities and infrastructure is essential. This study examines the current Learner Transport Policy as a regulatory framework that provides a holistic approach to planning and managing learner transport. It argues that by excluding non-motorized transport solutions, the framework lacks diversity and should be revised to improve learner mobility. This paper also offers recommendations for enhancing learner mobility by taking advantage of the significant proportions of students who commute via non-motorised transport to school. Analyses, of both the National Learner Transport Policy and the factors that influence the process of policy development were carried out to facilitate the formulation of a comprehensive policy recommendation.

**Keywords**: Learner Mobility, Non-motorised transport, Transport Justice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background and Context

Globally, there is a move to reduce the per capita environmental impact in cities. The sustainable development goals (SDG) aim to address a range of these social needs including the sustainable cities and communities' goal (SDG 11) which aims for the provision of safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems (Nations & Griggs, 2015). In 2018, less than half of urban residents had easy access to public transport, defined as living within 400 meters of open public transport, this statistic includes developing countries, where 95% of expansions are expected (United Nations, 2018). The top 20 most urbanised countries in Africa have at least 50% of their populations living in these urban areas. The modal split in these developing countries is heavily weighted toward non-motorised transport (NMT), which is a result of low vehicle ownership in both urban and rural areas of some of these countries (Whitelegg & Williams, 2000). According to the United Nations (UN), approximately 30-35% of trips in African cities consist of walking and even lower cycling trips that vary from 0,05% to 2% (Koinange, 2016). The inability to afford the purchase of private vehicles and in some cases public transport are the reasons for the comparatively high NMT trip rates. The low cycling rates are due to numerous factors, including the expense of buying and maintaining bicycles,

however, these modes are ignored or underestimated as they are viewed as being risky and unsafe (Global Site Plans - The Grid, 2024; Mwanza, 2018).

South Africa is no exception to the above-mentioned challenges. According to the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) walking made up 41% of trips in South Africa in 2020, whilst cycling trips made up less than 1,5% of the mode share (Stats SA, 2021). There are several reasons for these statistics, including inadequate NMT infrastructure in both urban and rural areas, as well as inability to afford to use alternative transport. The government's prioritization on public transport and private vehicles under the South African National Transport Policy has resulted in infrastructure issues, making NMT implementation a secondary problem. This is the case even though vehicle ownership is low in comparison to developed countries. This issue is reflected in scholar trips as well, with particular emphasis placed on motorised modes for school trips.

## 1.2 Research Problem Statement

Learners are one of the most vulnerable groups of road users in South Africa, according to the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) in 2024 approximately 20% of pedestrian fatalities occurred between the ages 0-19 years, a 1,1% decrease from 2023 (Road Traffic Management Corporation, 2024). Their limited autonomy with regards to their transport mode choices contribute to their vulnerability, amongst other reasons. Many reasons contribute to pedestrian fatality rates, including pedestrians avoiding violence by not using pedestrian amenities. According to a study conducted in Cape Town, people cross highways at grade far more frequently than available pedestrian bridges (Sinclair & Zuidgeest, 2016). This is, due, once again, to having to choose between the risk of being attacked and the risk of getting hit by a car while crossing the highway. This leaves pedestrians and cyclists, particularly young people, vulnerable to traffic fatalities.

These are challenges that are also reflected in educational trips among learners. More than 63% of learners in South Africa walk the entire distance to their respective educational institutions (Stats SA, 2021). A disproportionate number of these learners are from low-income households who do not have access to alternative modes. To fulfil learners' right to a basic education, transport plays a critical role, therefore, both the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Department of Transport (DOT) at national and provincial levels must adopt more comprehensive and proactive measures.

In 2015 the South Africa cabinet approved the National Learner Transport Policy which was developed to try deal with management and operational issues involved with learner transport (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2018). The policy encourages the use of all modes of transport, including walking and cycling; however, the framework does not outline how learners' mobility can be enhanced through a comprehensive approach to address the challenges that learners face. One of the key challenges identified is a lack of suitable NMT facilities, resulting in substandard service levels. A review of the literature reveals that providing acceptable service levels for NMT users is a critical component for most countries. The lack of suitable NMT facilities may be viewed as a barrier to the acceptance and support of NMT trips (City of Cape Town, 2012). By neglecting some of these challenges in the policy, it has consequentially led to their neglect at the planning and implementing stage. The present priority for NMT facilities appears to be far lower than what is required to make significant progress in terms of implementing suitable facilities to enable safe, convenient, and comfortable NMT trips in South Africa.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

This paper examines the current National Learner Transport Policy as a regulatory framework that provides a holistic approach to planning and managing learner transport. It argues that by excluding NMT solutions, the framework lacks diversity and should be revised to improve learner mobility. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the potential areas of interventions in the policy process, with the aim of enhancing both policy creation and implementation processes, as well as the implications on livelihoods. Therefore, the objective of this research is to:

- Analyse whether the policy framework is either perpetuating or reducing disparities in transport access and mobility for learners in South Africa.
- Identify gaps in the policy regarding the inclusion of non-motorized transport (NMT).

Therefore, recommendations for enhancing learner mobility, by taking advantage of the significant proportions of students who commute via non-motorised transport to school, will be explored as part of this research. These recommendations will be based on a thorough review of the literature and the policy.

## 2. BENEFITS OF NMT FOR LEARNERS: ENHANCING MOBILITY, HEALTH, AND ACCESSIBILITY

### 2.1 Social Benefits

On an individual level, shifting towards non-motorised modes of transport, such as walking and cycling, offers numerous benefits, particularly for health. These benefits include increased cardiovascular fitness, reduced stress levels, and a lower risk of obesity. Macmillan et al. (2014) highlight that a significant component of these benefits is the reduction in mortality associated with physical inactivity, contributing up to half of the total beneficial value in European case studies (Cooke, 2017). Moreover, there is a notable correlation between higher NMT usage and improved road traffic safety, because environments that support walking and cycling tend to prioritise safer road design and traffic calming measures (Marshall & Ferenchak, 2019; Short, 2019). Additionally, as the number of NMT users increases, drivers become accustomed to sharing the road. This improvement may be attributed to heightened awareness and sensitivity among motorists toward NMT users, as well as the greater visibility and acceptance of NMT as a viable transport (Cooke, 2017; Sælensminde, 2004).

Beyond safety, NMT positively impacts community cohesion, equity, and liveability. Appleyard et al. demonstrated these effects by studying residential streets in San Francisco, showing how reduced traffic volumes improved liveability (Appleyard et al., 2007). Similarly, Cervero (2002) and others found that compact, mixed-use, and walking-friendly environments encourage NMT and public transport use, enhancing mobility choices and quality of life (Cervero, 2002; Cooke, 2017). Importantly, NMT also addresses social exclusion by providing access to opportunities and services for vulnerable populations. For those unable to afford motor vehicles or public transport, NMT becomes a vital, affordable option, reducing income inequality and supporting social inclusion (Cooke, 2017). This is particularly critical in developing countries, where urban households may spend up to 25% of their income on transport, placing significant strain on household budgets.

In Cape Town, historical inequities exacerbate access challenges, particularly for those in low-cost housing or informal settlements located far from employment opportunities and

public amenities. These spatial disparities increase travel demand, especially for public transport, and leave many reliant on NMT. However, NMT users face barriers such as unsafe crossings over railway lines, freeways, and major arterials, leading to high-risk travel conditions (Mathoma, 2011). Addressing these challenges requires prioritising NMT in transport network planning to create safer and more accessible environments. Accessibility metrics, such as those outlined by Conway (2015), emphasise the importance of practical, lawful, and safe routes for NMT users (Conway, 2015). Cycling access, for instance, is heavily influenced by infrastructure quality, as unsafe or poorly planned routes can severely limit usability. Strategic investments in NMT infrastructure can therefore play a pivotal role in ensuring equitable access and improving the overall quality of urban mobility.

## 2.2 Economic Benefits

For low-income individuals, NMT is often the only viable alternative to motorised modes. Therefore, NMT presents tangible economic benefits for learners, particularly in low- to middle-income contexts where access to safe and affordable mobility options remains limited. By reducing or eliminating daily transport costs, NMT alleviates the financial burden on households (GIZ, 2011), allowing families to allocate resources toward other basic needs. This is particularly critical for learners in underserved communities, where unreliable or costly transport often results in absenteeism. Improved access through NMT supports better school attendance and retention, which in turn enhances long-term educational and economic outcomes (World Bank, 2025). Additionally, the physical activity associated with walking and cycling contributes to better health outcomes, ultimately reducing medical expenses for both families and public health systems (World Health Organisation, 2025). In this way, NMT not only provides immediate economic relief to learners and their families but also serves as a long-term investment in human capital and inclusive development. When supported by safe infrastructure, its impact extends well beyond mobility, reinforcing broader social and economic equity.

However, the benefits of NMT cannot be fully realised without the government doing proper planning and budgeting (Conchon, 2008). A significant barrier to funding NMT is the lack of clear methods or guidelines for allocating budgets specifically for its development (Okoro & Lawani, 2022). Transport funds are typically directed towards motorised infrastructure, with NMT often treated as an afterthought. As a result, pavements and other pedestrian-focused infrastructure are installed without adequate planning or adherence to regulations, while cycling infrastructure remains severely underdeveloped in most countries (Koinange, 2016). To optimise the advantages of walking and cycling, governments must establish dedicated funding frameworks and clear investment guidelines for NMT. For example, African ministers have recommended allocating at least 10% of transport infrastructure budgets to NMT, emphasising safety as a priority (UNEP, 2009).

The importance of prioritising NMT becomes evident in road safety statistics. In South Africa, pedestrian deaths accounted for 41.4% of all road fatalities in the first half of 2020, with the Western Cape recording the highest pedestrian death rates, where 52% of crashes resulted in pedestrian fatalities (Road Traffic Management Corporation, 2023). Cyclist fatalities remain comparatively low but increased from 1.2% in 2019 to 1.8% in 2020, highlighting the vulnerability of cyclists even amid restricted mobility due to COVID-19 lockdowns. The economic implications of these fatalities are significant, with the estimated unit cost of a single road death in 2019 valued at R4.7 million, encompassing future lost earnings, emotional suffering, and rising economic costs (Rice et al., 1985; Road Traffic Management Corporation, 2023). These figures underscore the urgent need

for strategic investments in NMT to enhance safety and mitigate the human and economic toll of road traffic incidents.

### 2.3 Environmental Benefits

Reducing the number and length of motorised trips offers significant environmental benefits on both local and global scales. Globally, it promotes the sustainable use of resources by decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, as non-motorised transport (NMT) relies on human energy rather than non-renewable fuels. Cycling, the most energy-efficient mode of transport, plays a key role in this transition (Cooke, 2017). With road transport accounting for 25% of global energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions from the sector growing at 2.5% annually (United Nations Environment Programme, 2019), NMT offers a practical solution for lowering emissions. Cities prioritising NMT and public transport emit 2.4 fewer tonnes of $CO_2$ per capita compared to those reliant on private motorisation (International Association of Public Transport, 2014). Beyond reducing emissions, NMT addresses other urban challenges such as air pollution and traffic congestion. Active transport options, such as cycling and walking, not only minimise pollution but also alleviate traffic by converting short vehicle trips into active modes. Enhancing cycling infrastructure, particularly in commercial and recreational areas, reduces congestion costs, including travel delays, vehicle expenses, and stress (Koska & Rudolph, 2016; Litman, 2016). Investing in NMT is thus a critical strategy for combating climate change and improving urban liveability.

## 3. NMT IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES FOR LEARNER MOBILITY

South Africa's transport challenges today are largely the product of colonialism and the legacy of apartheid. Because of urban planning, the low-income population lives on the outskirts of towns, requiring them to commute long distances to access employment, health, and educational institutions. The South African Constitution guarantees citizens' rights to equal service provision regardless of race, age, gender, or income (Vanderschuren & Zuidgeest, 2017). Even so, there are still South Africans, especially those from low-income households, who are unable to take advantage of these opportunities, due to a lack of transport. This highlights the urgent need for inclusive mobility solutions that address the everyday realities of the transport-disadvantaged.

NMT and public transport are starting to form part of policy options in pursuit of sustainable transport in South Africa (Vanderschuren and Zuidgeest, 2017). The 2018 Green Transport Strategy (GTS) described a transition from private car usage to public transport and NMT as critical to reducing energy consumption and GHG emissions (Department of Transport, 2018). Included in the GTS outcomes is the provision of NMT infrastructure. While this signals a policy-level commitment to sustainable mobility, the practical implementation of NMT initiatives reveals significant gaps.

South Africa faces a host of challenges when it comes to NMT as a mode of transport, including a restricted budget, policies and interventions, and insufficient education and training of NMT and other road users (Baufeldt, 2017). The most significant external problem affecting NMT trips in South Africa, however, is safety and security. After Nigeria, South Africa has the second highest number of road traffic fatalities, with 32 deaths per 100,000 people. The fact that Africa accounts for 20% of global traffic deaths despite having fewer than 2% of all registered vehicles adds to the problem. Inadequate infrastructure adds to the safety and security threats that NMT users face. According to a 2017 Baufeldt report, better NMT infrastructure will enhance the safety of pedestrians and cyclists in South African settlements.

Since most of the population in South Africa cannot afford to buy a private car, NMT and public transport play an important role in population transport. According to *Stats SA* (2020), this is particularly true for learners who need to get to school. As a mode of transport, 64% of learners walk to and from school. A single trip takes more than two hours for 3% of these learners, resulting in learners spending more than four hours commuting every day. A large number of these learners come from low-income families who cannot afford to buy bicycles to use as an alternative form of transport.

## 4. METHODS

The National Learner Transport Policy, in its role as a regulatory framework, is intended to provide a holistic approach for the planning and management of learner transport. However, the policy in question does not comprehensively outline how learner mobility can be enhanced through addressing NMT challenges that learners face, despite the fact that these options are appropriate to be made accessible. While there are numerous types of NMT users in South Africa, this study focuses on learners.

### 4.1 Methodological Framework

#### *4.1.1 Critical Document Analysis and Design*

Document analysis is a systematic process for assessing and evaluating documents, both printed and electronic. Document analysis, like other analytical procedures in qualitative research, necessitates the examination and interpretation of data in order to extract meaning, acquire insight, and build empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The use of document analysis in this study will employ a variety of data sources and methodologies to look for convergence and corroboration (Bowen, 2009), making it possible to identify how the framework lacks diverse transport modes and should be revised to improve learner cycling mobility. In the absence of interviews or other sources, documents will supply supplementary data and information, and the knowledge gathered from them can be beneficial additions to the body of knowledge. All things considered, documents provide background information and context, additional data, questions to ask, a means of tracking development and change, and validation of findings from other data sources (Bowen, 2009).

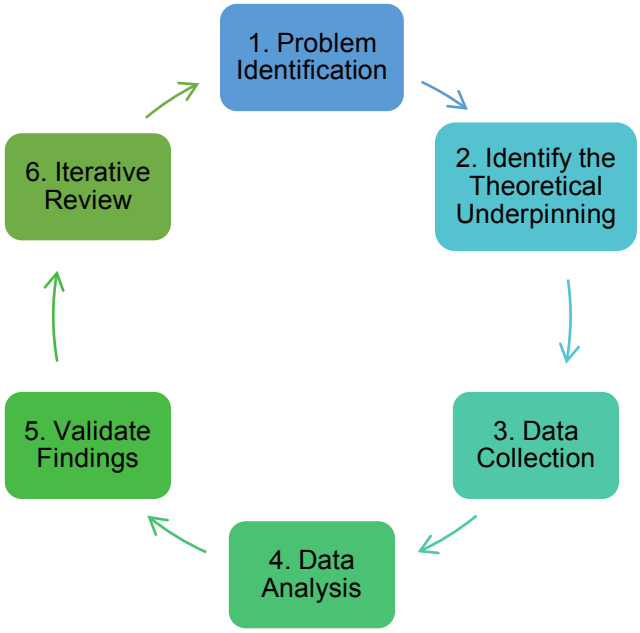


**Figure 1: Six step critical document analysis and review cycle**

Figure 1 is the six step critical document analysis and review cycle that outlines the iterative process that will be used in this study. The first step is problem identification, where a gap in existing research or real-world practice is identified for investigation. In this case, the identified gap is the lack of a holistic framework that comprehensively addresses the mobility needs of learners in South Africa. Addressing this deficiency will provide critical insights to inform and enhance the National Learner Transport Policy. The subsequent steps are outlined and discussed in detail below.

### *4.1.2 Theoretical Framework: Social Justice Theory*

The theoretical framework that will be used in this research is the social justice theory to answer the research questions. The social justice theory will be applied to understand how the policy framework is either perpetuating or reducing disparities in transport access and mobility for learners in South Africa. John Rawls' theory of social justice advocates for an equitable compromise of equality and liberty that is intended to be applied to the fundamental framework of a well-ordered society (Mertens, 2005). The theory is founded on two fundamental principles: the assumption that all individuals should possess the same fundamental rights and liberties, and the maximization of the scope of these rights (Mandle, 2009). Nevertheless, these rights must also guarantee that all individuals have the same opportunity to exercise their rights and freedoms. Secondly, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged in a manner that is both (a) consistent with the just savings principle and (b) attached to offices and positions that are open to all under conditions of equitable equality of opportunity, with the goal of maximizing the benefit to the least privileged (Mandle, 2009). The assessment of whether the national learner transport policy in its current form addresses the fundamental rights of all stakeholders, particularly those who are disempowered and belong to the low-income bracket, will be facilitated by the application of the social justice theory as a theoretical framework.

### *4.1.3 Data Collection*

Data for this study will be collected from a diverse range of sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and to meet the research objectives. These sources include but are not limited to relevant policies, guidelines, legislation, newspaper articles, official websites, and case studies. The selection of these sources is informed by their relevance to the study's objectives and timeframe. The timeframe for data collection spans materials published between 2014 and 2024, ensuring that the study captures a decade of developments, trends, and context pertinent to the research focus. This period has been chosen to provide a balance of recent and longitudinal insights, allowing for an analysis of both current and evolving practices.

The process of data collection will occur between December 2024 and January 2025. This timeline has been carefully planned to ensure the inclusion of the most recent data available up to 2024 while also allowing sufficient time to systematically review and analyze the gathered materials. Data or information falling outside the defined timeframe will be excluded to maintain consistency and ensure the research remains focused on its specified objectives. Additionally, the data collection process will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring that all sources are cited appropriately, and any sensitive or proprietary information is managed with the utmost confidentiality. This approach will provide a robust foundation for the study, enabling an in-depth exploration of the research topic.

### *4.1.4 Data Analysis and Validation*

The thematic data analysis method will be used to analyse the data collected for this study. This method is useful for this study because it is a qualitative approach used to analyse patterns and meaning in the data, which will help determine the potential areas of

interventions in the learner transport policy. Thematic analysis is a technique for identifying, assessing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Boyatzis, 1998). The method is used to succinctly organise and describe data in comprehensive detail.


**Figure 2: Six phase thematic analysis model (Braun et al., 2019)**

Thematic analysis can be approached in six steps as outlined in Figure 2. Phase 1 will involve understanding the data by thoroughly reading each data item to grasp its depth and breadth. Phase 2 will focus on creating initial codes by organizing the data into meaningful groups based on the research questions. In Phase 3, themes will be identified by sorting and correlating codes into overarching themes, often through mind mapping. Phase 4 will entail refining the themes to ensure coherence and distinctiveness. This will involve two levels of analysis: checking the coherence of themes and reworking or discarding themes if necessary. In Phase 5, the essence of each theme will be captured by naming and analyzing the aspects of the data they represent. Finally, Phase 6 will involve writing the report, providing a detailed, coherent, and engaging analysis of each theme, ensuring enough data is extracted to demonstrate their prevalence.

## 5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Walking and cycling as modes of transport are not given adequate consideration in developing countries, which may be, due to a variety of factors, including safety perceptions and a sense of it being a poor person's mode of transport. This view is profoundly ingrained in society, including those responsible for transport infrastructure planning and construction, and it contributes to an emphasis on improving infrastructure for vehicles rather than people. This has led to a major neglect of the NMT, particularly walking and cycling, yet they are the most basic and accessible modes.

### 5.1 Thematic Analysis

Based on the study's objectives, themes were identified using the social justice theory framework as a tool to investigate whether learners are afforded the same opportunity to exercise their right to basic education through the provision of relevant transport, whether the potential impacts of social and economic factors are addressed, and whether the policy benefits the least privileged. Therefore, two main themes were identified, these are equitable and sustainable transport systems and adequacy of transport systems. The subthemes that were identified are summarized in Table 1. The findings from each subtheme are discussed in detail below.

**Table 1: Summary of the Thematic Analysis**

| Theme | Key Focus Areas (Subtheme) |
|---|---|
| Equitable and Sustainable Transport Systems | Safety and Security |
| | Economic and Environmental Sustainability |
| | Cost and Affordability |
| | Equitable Access |
| | |
| Adequacy in Transport System | Infrastructure Development |
| | Coordinated Planning |
| | Comprehensive Guidelines |
| | Intermodal Transport Network |

### *5.1.1 Safety and Security*

Learners are one of the most vulnerable groups of road users in RSA. According to the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) in 2024 approximately 20% of pedestrian fatalities occurred between the ages 0-19 years, a 1,1% decrease from 2023 (Road Traffic Management Corporation, 2024). These are challenges that are also reflected in educational trips among learners. More than 63% of learners in South Africa walk the entire distance to their respective educational institutions. A disproportionate number of these learners are from low-income households who do not have access to alternative modes. The National Learner Transport Policy identifies safety and security as one of the focus areas of the policy.

"*Therefore, exposure to external factors such as hijackings, rape, violence and other potential life-threatening incidents that may pose a threat to the safety of learners must be minimised. There is, however, a need for a more inclusive and holistic approach regarding learner transport to comprehensively address the matter of learners' safety and security*." National Learner Transport Policy, 2015.

The primary area of focus of the policy on safety and security is centred around the safety of learners in motor vehicles, and no mention of the safety of learners who use alternative methods, including walking and cycling. The policy lacks comprehensive inclusivity and neglects the safety and security of vulnerable learners who depend on NMT. This oversight doesn't consider the unique challenges faced by this group, leaving them exposed to risks.

### *5.1.2 Economic and Environmental Sustainability*

To achieve sustainable growth in the transport industry investment in clean transport has become imperative. As a result, the world is now focused on achieving sustainability in all spheres of development. With the global population expected to increase by one-quarter by 2030 and urbanisation on the rise, sustainable transport is critical to achieving the SDGs. Unfortunately, the current investment patterns have proven to be unsustainable evidenced by the high traffic congestion experienced especially in cities and the growing carbon emissions from transport activities.

The National Learner Transport Policy doesn't specifically address environmental and economic sustainability of learner transport, however, given that South Africa has a Green Transport Strategy (GTS), this omission is surprising and warrants attention. Addressing this gap is crucial for assessing the long-term sustainability of the current framework, especially given that most learners rely on walking as their primary mode of transport to school. The GTS criticises the historical focus on the provision and maintenance of infrastructure to support motorised transport, specifically private vehicles.

### *5.1.3 Cost and Affordability*

Cost is a barrier to accessing education, especially in cases where learners do not live within a comfortable walking distance from school. Transport costs are highest among middle- and low-income households. Leaving families, in some cases, unable to afford to pay to get their children to school. This may result in absenteeism and learners unable to utilise their basic right to education.

The National Learner Transport Policy addresses this by making provision to subsidies to reduce or eliminate the cost burden from families. The policy also identifies the need to collaborate with the private sector and other stakeholders to contribute to the transport programme through cost-sharing or cost-effective solutions.

### *5.1.4 Equitable Access*

Equitable access to transport prioritises learners' mobility by addressing their specific needs, considering existing and potential infrastructure interventions in both rural and urban areas. The regional context plays a crucial role in determining how transport can be effectively provided for learners. By ensuring the availability of appropriate transport infrastructure, learners are not left in transport deserts, where their right to basic education cannot be fulfilled.

The prioritisation of motorised transport has led to increased cost of the provision of transport for the government, at national and provincial levels. These costs result in departments stretching their resources to meet the needs of all learners, and despite this the demand for learner transport far outweighs the supply due to limited time and funding. To create equitable access, investment in cost effective, sustainable transport options is important.

### *5.1.5 Infrastructure Development*

Road pavements have traditionally been the primary focus in road development, with any remaining space typically allocated to retrofitted NMT infrastructure. In many cases, the construction of NMT can easily be sacrificed due to budget restrictions. As a result, NMT infrastructure is frequently an afterthought, resulting in certain pavements; mostly for walking; being installed on the road's side, often without regard for the regulations.

The National Learner Transport Policy fails to address the provision of infrastructure specifically designed for NMT users, despite its detailed focus on the infrastructure and mechanisms supporting public transport and other motorised learner transport systems. While the policy thoroughly discusses aspects such as vehicle safety, designated routes, and operational requirements for learner transport, it neglects to consider the critical infrastructure needs of learners who rely on walking and cycling to reach their destinations.

### *5.1.6 Coordinated Planning*

To fulfil learners' right to basic education, transport plays a crucial role, requiring coordinated efforts from national and provincial departments of education and transport. Effective NMT planning involves collaboration among government entities, NGOs, public transport providers, professionals, researchers, and the private sector. Strengthened coordination between the state and civil society, supported by awareness programmes, is vital. Local and District Municipalities play a key role in identifying and integrating NMT projects into planning and funding systems, ensuring alignment with community policies and access to essential resources.

The development of the National Learner Transport Policy highlights the importance of collaboration between the DBE and various stakeholders to ensure adequate infrastructure for learner transport.

*"…the recognition that learner transport planning and implementation require a multi-sectoral coordination approach where various government departments play significant roles."* National Learner Transport Policy, 2015.

### *5.1.7 Comprehensive Guidelines*

South Africa has made considerable progress in terms of the standing of NMT and the recognition it receives. Political interest in NMT has grown since the White Paper on National Transport Policy was published in 1996, after changes in the South African landscape forced the country to adapt its transport plans. Since then, NMT has been included in guidelines, policy frameworks, and acts as part of a land transport strategy. The

formulation of plans and proposals reveals a great deal about NMT policy considerations and intentions. The National Transport Policy aims to play a role in social development and economic growth. The policy in its current form prioritises public transport and private vehicles as it focuses on achieving an 80/20 public transport to private car use ratio. This suggests that NMT is not a priority and one of the consequences of this is that projects are planned and implemented in isolation, which results in transport infrastructure that is not well integrated.

*5.1.8 Intermodal Transport Network*

The integration of learner transport infrastructure plans into the Integrated Transport Plans (ITPs) is necessary, and learner transport services are not necessary in areas where public transport is available. It is imperative for provincial DOTs to ensure the integration of learner transport services to establish a system that is both functional and efficient. It is imperative for provinces, in collaboration with Local Government, to guarantee the provision of learner transport services that are readily available to all learners, including those with special needs, in both urban and rural regions.

## 5.2 Social Justice and the South African Learner Transport Policy

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the rights of learners to basic education have not been fully realised. This implies that a demographic of learners is excluded from the policy and, as a result, from the right to a basic education, as the learner transport policy has not addressed the complete scope of the provision of transport. This discrepancy implies that additional efforts are required to gain a comprehensive understanding of the requirements of learners who lack access to public transport and, in certain instances, are unable to utilise the transport services provided by the Department of Transport.

The just savings principles emphasise the obligation of the current generation to guarantee that the subsequent generation possesses an adequate amount of capital to sustain its institutions. And the learner transport policy in its present state does not consider NMT as a transport alternative for learners. This implies that NMT investment in any form is not presently being pursued, leaving it to future generations to cover the capital cost of introducing adequate infrastructure for vulnerable and disempowered individuals. The efficient use of public funds will be maximised by investing in NMT infrastructure, as most learners in South Africa walk all the way to their educational institutions. This is due to the comparatively high cost of maintaining and expanding motorised transport systems.

The learner transport policy does not address the issue of maximising benefits for the least privileged. The provision of motorised transport does not always meet or serve the needs of the least privileged in South Africa, as they do not always have access to motorised transport infrastructure, such as paved roads. NMT infrastructure is accessible to all demographics, with a particular emphasis on low-income groups, and it is significantly less expensive than motorised transportation. Additionally, the provision of NMT infrastructure diminishes the learners' dependence on motorised transportation.

# 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As demonstrated by the results of the thematic analysis, two issues were examined: adequacy in transport systems and equitable and sustainable transport systems. Due to a lack of appropriate transport, the results demonstrate that the learner transport policy as it stands now does not sufficiently address the needs of learners who walk or cycle to school. While the National Department of Transport tries to circumvent the issues of transport cost and affordability by providing learner transport, this solution only reaches a

small fraction of learners. Leaving the marginalised population with limited resources to fulfil their transport needs. This exclusion is further compounded by the insufficient attention given to the broader needs of learners who walk or cycle to school, particularly in terms of safety, security, and accessibility. Neglecting NMT as a viable transport option undermines learners' fundamental right to equal opportunities, particularly for those in low-income communities. By prioritising motorised transport in policy, institutions like the DOT and DBE fail to address the mobility needs of vulnerable learners. This paper advocates for a comprehensive inclusion of NMT modes in learner transport policies, not only to promote equitable access to education but also to uphold the broader principle that every individual deserves equal rights and opportunities. A stronger focus on NMT would help bridge the gap between existing policies and the urgent need for sustainable and inclusive transport solutions.

Based on the findings of this research, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance scholar mobility and promote the safe and equitable use of NMT. First, there is a need for deliberate infrastructure provision of tailored to NMT users, such as dedicated pedestrian and cycling lanes, especially along school routes. Integrating NMT infrastructure into school routes and traffic safety plans, with clearly defined objectives and realistic budgets, is crucial for creating safe and accessible travel options for learners. Measures such as traffic calming zones and designated low-traffic routes can enhance safety; however, infrastructure alone is insufficient to address the systemic barriers to NMT faced by learners. Secondly, traffic safety education must be prioritized within school curricula and community programs to equip both scholars and motorists with the knowledge to safely share road spaces. Additionally, the concept of the school zone must be redefined to extend beyond the immediate school perimeter, considering the broader routes commonly used by learners. Effective and sustained change also requires coordinated planning between the DOT, DBE and other relevant stakeholders such as local municipalities and law enforcement agencies. Lastly, an integrated transport network that supports multimodal access should be prioritized to ensure scholar mobility is not dependent on any single mode or system, thereby fostering a more flexible and inclusive approach to school transport planning.

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