



**DEVELOPING CAPACITY IN THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT ARENA:**

# LINKING HIGHER EDUCATION AND PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

AUTHORS: *Herrie Schalekamp and Gail Jennings*

## THIS BRIEF TARGETS

- Transportation professionals, urban policymakers and officials interested in building capacity among public and paratransit operators.
- Academics, practitioners and students who are interested in exploring meaningful, engaged and activism-oriented scholarship, and finding a way to deliver university training to an audience that has little formal higher education.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Trusted relationships with paratransit operators, and partnerships with government, are key to engaged scholarship.
- A university, with little vested interest in transport reform outcomes, is well positioned to develop such relationships.
- Where adult students already have expert knowledge and experience, the primary mode of interaction should be critical discussion.
- The learning experience needs to be continuously co-designed with students, and students' practical needs re-assessed.

**Exploring rigorous activism-oriented scholarship can increase universities' contribution to society. This research brief discusses the University of Cape Town's work amongst adult learners who have extensive experience of public transport operations but little exposure to higher education.**

A goal of the VREF-funded African Centre of Excellence for Studies in Public and Non-Motorised Transport (ACET), in which the University of Cape Town's Centre for Transport Studies (CfTS) is a partner, was to become a hub of scholarship on public transport systems in African cities. A key aim was to inform debates around context-appropriate governance and reform initiatives.

In Cape Town, one of the ways in which CfTS has been able to achieve this has been through partnering with government and the private sector to offer a capacity-building programme for paratransit operators.

Paratransit describes a flexible, largely unscheduled mode of public passenger transportation: typically small to medium buses. Paratransit is sometimes referred to as 'informal' transport, yet in African cities it serves an important mass transport function.

The three-year capacity-building programme (2015-2017), which focuses on public transport planning and management, is funded by the City of Cape Town (the local authority) as part of the second phase of its public transport reform project.



## ► Background

In 2007 the local authority set out to develop a high-specification Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which was eventually to cover the entire city and replace existing paratransit and scheduled bus services. This phased project formed part of the national Integrated Public Transport Network programme. Dubbed the MyCiTi system, the first trunk and feeder services started in 2011, and the first phase was practically complete in 2014.

Existing bus and paratransit operators were given the opportunity to become the operators of MyCiti, but the first-phase transition process proved fraught with difficulties, including disgruntlement, violent opposition, and legal challenges from operators.

During negotiations around an interim pilot service spearheading the second phase of the MyCiTi project, the authority agreed to fund industry capacity building as part of the process of reforming the public transport system. The target audience included the leadership and members of the paratransit associations that were involved in running the pilot service as well as other paratransit associations that might be affected by MyCiTi in the future.

Corporate governance courses were run by the private sector, while courses focussing on public transport management were developed and run by CfTS. Collectively the courses aimed to develop operators' understanding of their own businesses, the context in which they operated, and to prepare them for potential incorporation into MyCiTi. Additional specialised training focussed on office management, trainee positions for technical managers, and technical apprenticeships.

## Key points

- The aspirations and needs of paratransit operators as collective and individual entities are difficult to investigate systematically. This makes reform initiatives particularly challenging.
- Through the ACET research programme, CfTS was able to develop trusting relationships with paratransit operators and with practitioners advising on the MyCiTi project. This enabled CfTS to engage directly with operators around their needs and views, which informed capacity-building programme design, while the relationship with practitioners formed the basis of CfTS being a partner in offering this programme.
- Because the target audience was comprised entirely of adult learners with extensive practical knowledge and experience but little exposure to higher education, the primary mode of interaction was critical discussion, with energetic debate encouraged.

- Students' learning experiences and needs were assessed along the entire learning path in individual and group sessions, and activities and resources were aligned accordingly.

- In the longer term, hardcopy resources are likely to expand the reach of the programme and reduce the gap between those who have and have not been able to participate.

- Programme effectiveness depended on having relationships of the kind that has evolved between CfTS, paratransit operators and practitioners in Cape Town over a number of years of engaged scholarship.

## Outcomes

- Through this work, CfTS has been able to expose a broader community to new knowledge and alternative ways of working, and to encourage this broader community to reflect critically on current practice. Many students in the CfTS master programme are government officials and practitioners. The new mode of scholarship has enriched this programme, prompting students to critically question their practices and roles in stimulating positive change.

- The programme has granted the University the opportunity to initiate research and pilot projects co-developed with operator students and their colleagues.

- Direct exchanges with operators have also enabled the University to reflect on how the higher education space might work with paratransit operators to help them to run their businesses more professionally.

- CfTS is developing partnerships with (i) officials in government and development agencies who encounter paratransit operators as part of their work, and who are able to become change agents in their own right; and (ii) other academics and practitioners, to expand the bridge between practice and degree-based studies in the field of urban transport planning and management.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ACET was established as a partnership between the Universities of Cape Town, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi with a multi-year grant from VREF in 2008-2013. The authors are part of the team behind ACET's capstone public transport publication, *Paratransit in African cities – operations, regulation and reform* (Behrens et al [eds.], 2016). Herrie Schalekamp convenes the Centre for Transport Studies' programme for paratransit operators.