

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Rethinking urban mobility to provide real choices and resources for all

Effective planning in South Africa's metros must incorporate the everyday and often-changing needs, desires and decisions of ordinary people, according to the latest research report from the IRR, *Rethinking Mobility – Spatial Planning that enables transportation and technology in South African Metros*.

The report makes the case for a conception of urban mobility that goes well beyond the established conventions, and limitations, of transport planning to liberate and exploit the "talent, enterprise and capital" of human agency in an enabling environment.

It argues that South Africa relies on outdated planning models whose assumptions better served apartheid ideology, and that a new approach is needed to overcome the inherited spatial patterns that continue to disadvantage the poor in the country's growing cities.

"Using mobility as our starting point for transit and planning policy," says author of the report, IRR consultant Garreth Bloor, "we can leverage immense government holdings, the ingenuity of South Africa's entrepreneurs and multiple sources of private sector investment – all by driving spatial transformation through the empowerment of the poor specifically and directly, providing real choices and resources that until now have only been reserved for the privileged among us."

Rethinking mobility, he argues, "means going beyond transport planning and putting individual choice at the core: we must increase decision-making for residents and private transport providers".

Effective planning "must be responsive to the everyday and often-changing needs and desires of people" so that choices available to people are not limited to the ballot box every five years.

The report suggests that metros should create an enabling environment for different modes of transport, without owning a monopoly on one or two modes. Authorities can set standards and allow licensed operators to use public infrastructure that offer more modes of transport and competing prices daily.

Bloor notes that the current transport planning framework relies on land-use models that have "proved incapable of delivering real spatial transformation" in cities. Locating development closer to existing opportunities is "vital for mobility, ensuring government spending is maximized for the socio-economic good, by using the available land (national, provincial and city) governments hold".

Mobility solutions in the report include proposals for the poor to be directly empowered to secure spatial transformation, as opposed to only having housing projects outsourced to private developers. The report argues that the private sector operates best when it responds directly to empowered consumers every day, rather than accounting to governments elected every five years. It suggests one way of doing so is through allocating housing vouchers directly to residents, offering additional options in the face of the current waiting lists backlog.

Says Bloor: "Mobility cannot just be about bringing the poor closer to existing opportunity either. It must also create new nodes of opportunity that go beyond the spatial patterns we have inherited.

"At present, development does not happen in poor areas far from existing urban cores because of the absence of tradable property rights and collateral against which to raise capital either through bonds or the sale of property. All apartheid-era land-use planning ordinances, which assume underdevelopment through measures such as limited commercial zonings and restrictive or absent title deeds, must be eliminated."

He adds that "brave politicians are beginning to match good intentions with sound economics, but more needs to be done".

The report concludes: "Where government spends on infrastructure and mobility that supports it, such spending must enable greater choice, not just mobility defined as a five-year plan that is either achieved or is not. Mobility as a concept must include the preferred choices of individuals, and changes in those choices over time.

"More powerful than Master Planning is the power of human agency in an enabling environment. Out of it comes innovation, personal choice, and consistently better options for goods and services."

South Africa's metros contain "talent, enterprise and capital" which "can be unlocked to build the mobility that brings us together and moves us forward in more ways than one".

Ends.