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# Institutional Preparedness for Urban Public Transport Reforms in Zambia

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# Introduction: The Urgency of Public Transport Reforms

In 2017, the Minister of Transport and Communications, Honourable Brian Mushimba – MP, announced a forthright intention of the Government to reform public transport by introducing managed bus services and switch to higher occupancy vehicles in the urban public transport system. This announcement has helped to advance the debate on the future of Zambia’s public transport.

Public transport simply refers to a transport system that allows group travel for the general public. Public transport vehicles (buses, trains, etc.) operate on fixed schedules or timelines with already established routes, and passengers know the exact fare for each trip (Cross, 2016) (Zhang, Martens, & Long, 2017).

Zambia’s urban public transport, largely made up of intra-city minibuses, does not meet the international standards of convenience, reliability and affordability, which describes an effective public transport system. The 2013 ZIPAR paper “Trip Modelling and Cost Analysis for Urban Public Transport Systems for the City of Lusaka” describes Zambia’s urban public transport system as blighted by problems, namely poor service quality, unreasonable route configuration and unaffordable passenger fares, resulting in individuals shunning the system.

Such an ineffective public transport system holds back the development of urban areas. Investing in public transport can facilitate improvement of household incomes, economic growth, and social transformation by enabling efficient movement of people and goods around the city. This forms part of the process often called economic ‘agglomeration’ as concentrations of people can generate hubs of activities where businesses are able to benefit from access to a large pool of labour force and forge linkages with other companies. This reduces costs and increases productivity.

It is for this reason that the public transport reforms announced by the minister of transport are not only important but urgent. Zambia, like other countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, is urbanising rapidly at a rate of 4.3% per year. The country’s urban population is projected to reach 11 million by 2030, which is 4 million more than the current estimate (CSO, 2013) (UN-HABITAT, 2015). However, poor planning, weak institutional support and inadequate amenities are limiting the potential of urbanisation. A recent World Bank report shows that Sub-Saharan Africa cities, including Lusaka, are sprawling as they grow, isolating communities and fragmenting economic activity, rather than catalysing it through a network effect (Lall et al., 2017). As the cities grow, they should be furnished with efficient transport networks and regulated public transport system, accessible to all in order to remain functional.

# BENEFITS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT REFORMS

Public transport underpins the economic development of urban areas and provides tangible benefits, some of which come as a direct consequence of growth while others drive growth. These include the following:

**i. Improvement of household financial status;**

Increasing accessibility of public transport can enable people to access better jobs, increasing incomes, while switching to public transport from private motor vehicles can save households substantial costs.

**ii. Improved accessibility for the young, elderly and disabled;**

Public transport provides mobility for groups unable to operate or afford private vehicles, including Zambia's growing young population, the elderly and disabled. The young – below 18 years – account for 26% while the disabled account for more than 15% of the population (GRZ, 2016) (ILO, 2013).

**iii. Reduced congestion and travel time;**

Zambia's motor vehicle fleet has grown from 340,000 in 2010 to 700,000 in 2016, increasing congestion. Improving public transport reduces congestion by promoting a modal shift away from driving, thereby shortening travel time and increasing productivity.

**iv. Energy conservation; and**

Public transport consumes less fuel compared to private transportation due to economies of scale. Less fuel consumption reduces the import bill, reducing the current account deficit, and easing pressure on foreign reserves and the exchange rate.

**v. Protects the environment and promotes public health.**

Public transport produces less emissions such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and other volatile organic compounds per passenger mile compared to private motor vehicles (APTA, 2007) . Public transport also fosters a more active lifestyle by encouraging people to walk or cycle to public transport terminals.

## Proposed Reforms

ZIPAR (2013) suggested a few remedial measures for the faulty urban public transport systems which if well implemented, could reduce bus fares, increase ridership for the public and improve overall efficiency in delivery of services. The measures included enhancement of bus regulations, introduction of high occupancy vehicles, instituting a common ticketing system for passengers, and restructuring bus routes.

The reforms announced by the Government are on the back of ZIPAR and other institutions' suggestions. The reforms are about instituting scheduled, high capacity buses operating on main routes within and around urban areas. To ensure success in the implementation of the reforms, major changes in the regulatory framework are inevitable. First, there must be devolution of powers to empower councils to provide public transport services. The National Transport Policy directs public transport authorities (PTAs) to handle the regulation and management of public transport services at the local levels. Secondly, mandates of the rest of the players should be streamlined to avoid overlaps of responsibilities.

The Minister's announcement is a welcome first step for public transport reforms although it came at a time the country was faced with difficult fiscal challenges. The reforms must still go on because the complexity of the problems to address keeps increasing. To circumvent the fiscal challenges, the Government has the option of using purely private or public private partnerships to help minimise its outlays in the implementation of the reforms.

## Barriers to Delivery

The key barriers to successful implementation of public transport reforms include institutions with overlapping and uncoordinated institutional mandates, inadequate institutional capacities and complex institutional frameworks.

**Coordination of agencies:** responsibility for management of public transport in Zambia is diffused across a few institutions with overlapping mandates, which creates confusion and inertia for change. These include MTC, Road Transport and Safety Agency (RTSA), Road Development Agency (RDA), Local Authorities and Zambia Police. Improved coordination among the institutions will be instrumental in ensuring successful implementation of proposed reforms. So, setting up a central coordinating institution to spearhead the delivery of reforms, act as a secretariat for all institutions with a public transport mandate

and monitor performance at local levels is recommended.

Further the mandates of the key institutions including RTSA, Councils and proposed PTAs need harmonisation. This will help the nation to steer clear of bureaucratic inertia and rent-seeking behaviours in order to attract private investment. Amendments to necessary legislations can clearly delineate responsibility and create the necessary legal accountability for effective service provision.

**Institutional capacities:** Public transport institutions not only need to know their roles but must have the institutional capacity to fulfil them. Currently, most councils are inadequately funded or staffed to perform their duties. This is because besides the requirement to provide public transport services, councils have a host of other responsibilities including street lighting, water supply, firefighting services, and public health management to take care of (UNDP-HDR, 2017).

Therefore, successful implementation of reforms will require, among others, adequately resourcing and building capacities within key institutions such as councils in order for them to fulfil their mandates. Innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms will have to be explored. Meaning, apart from tapping into the regular funding that councils receive, the PTAs can be financed through operating license fees as well as other revenue raising methods such as fees on services provided by Local Authorities as stipulated in the 2002 National Decentralisation Policy.

**Complexity of institutional framework:** Zambia's public transport has highly dispersed ownership structures, with most bus owners owning one or two buses at most which in turn are leased to drivers (ZIPAR, 2013) (UNDP, 2012) (Kumar & Barrett, 2008). Further, several associations of drivers, operators and transport brokers have cropped up, further complicating the institutional framework for delivery of public transport services. This situation makes full consultation and consensus building on key issues that affect supply of the services difficult. This presents a major challenge to the reform process as stakeholders must be sufficiently engaged to garner their support for the reforms.

To overcome the challenge of institutional framework complexity, the Government should recognise most of the associations and invite them to the negotiation table as partners in the reforms. The associations should be given adequate information on the reforms and asked to propose the roles they play in ensuring that the reforms succeed.

The operator and bus driver association must also be offered some opportunity

to participate in the ownership and operation of the proposed larger capacity buses. This entails stipulating a minimum threshold of shares in the respective bus companies that should be offered to the local operators and providing financing mechanisms that enable current public transport operators organised into cooperatives to invest in required transport equipment and operations. Further, the Government should negotiate for retraining and redeployment of some of the drivers to be part of the bus crews in the bus companies that will be licensed to operate.

**Political commitment:** Political will is imperative because reforms to some degree involve social change. Some of the change may have adverse impact on the livelihoods of some stakeholders and result in resistance to reforms. Consequently, whether the proposed reforms will be successful or not largely depends on the commitment of the political players. Their endorsement and promotion of the reforms can generate the needed public support and can give a positive signal for the private sector to come on board to support the reform process. This is vital given the current fiscal constraint the country is currently facing (MoF, 2017).

It is recommended that Government appoints political champions of the reforms to help the public understand the importance – benefits and costs – of the reforms at all levels of the political stratification in each region.

## Conclusion: Delivering Reforms - Time to Get on Board

Now that Zambia has a new policy that proposes public transport development as a key factor for urban development, responsible institutions must begin to shake off the inertia of the previous policy period and act. World over, all thriving cities are serviced by efficient public transport systems that facilitate efficient movement of goods and people. The Government must recognise the importance of public transport as a crucial part of development. Existence of political will, effective oversight institutions and wider stakeholder engagements, will help to deliver the reforms.

To that effect, proposed reforms require:

1. A coordinating institution to guide the process;
2. A commitment to adequately resource the institution that will deliver the reforms and oversee the new system;
3. A consultative approach that manages the demands of disadvantaged players and looks to find them new opportunities within the new system;
4. Strengthening legal instruments that establish responsible institutions to ensure effective discharge of mandates and responsibilities;
5. Stating clear timelines for implementation of reforms; and
6. Prioritising public transport plans and strategies in future development plans.

Through such carefully considered implementation, Government can develop a public transport system that is well-regulated and attracts investment. These reforms are urgent and important: the resultant improvement in service will support the transfor



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