

Transit media: ignore it at your peril

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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As all transit infrastructure is dramatically upgraded and improved, Out of Home (OOH) is set to become an integral part of the communication mix. This is especially so for transit media.

Media owners, brands and media agencies, will need to start engaging with transport infrastructure providers, says, Jacques du Preez, CEO of Provantage Media Group, if they are to develop new, meaningful media channels that effectively service the modern commuter.

Consider, he says, that the total Public Transport Commuter Base is 21.6 million (excluding the Gautrain and Air Travels). “As urbanisation and urban influx continues and Government continues to formalise and integrate transport in urban areas, this will grow. This integration will also ring higher LSM commuters into the system and make transit media even more important,” he adds.

Changes in the commuter landscape

By 2050 the world's urban population will be close to 6.3 billion. Of this urban population 90% will be in Africa and Asia, with 20% of the world's population in cities in Africa.

Africa's population is not only growing larger; it is also growing younger. This is in stark contrast to economies elsewhere in the world, including China's, where economies are closing because of an aging demographic.

In just under 15 years Africa will be the most rapidly urbanising region in the world. The rise of mega cities will continue and Johannesburg will follow Cairo, Kinshasa and Lagos, together with Dar es Salaam and Luanda to be the megacities on the continent.



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In South Africa 70% of the population are living in urban areas, with the people flowing into the country's big cities.

Urbanisation is placing these urban areas under huge pressure as the need for basic services, road infrastructure, hospital and social services, and a reliable public transport system grows, says du Preez.

"While Government has accomplished much, there is a constant lag. The continuous influx of people into cities means it is a constant battle. This is not unique to South Africa, but is a global issue."

Changes in commuter landscape globally

By 2035 the number of vehicles on the road worldwide is projected to triple by three billion. Just commuting will demand that Governments make intelligent choices about infrastructure and land use. There are massive economic implications in terms of how planning happens as vehicle congestion erodes a country's GDP by one to three percent.

To counter this road agencies, municipalities and governments are developing smart cities, with much better and longer term planning.

Key is the development of mass transport systems. "This requires political will, funding, better planning, and more private public partnerships (PPP). As mass transport and inter modal systems come about, more aggressive tolling for private vehicle users will take place," explains du Preez.

Smart cities

Smart cities are investigating how they can spread their commuter infrastructure by staggering commuting hours in peak periods, work days, school holidays and school days, and encouraging flexible work hours and shopping hours. This is in conjunction with managing traffic flow with the latest technologies, and utilising the real-time monitoring of driving conditions, intelligent traffic patterns and dynamic tolls that go up during peak periods.

This is already happening, says du Preez. "Earlier this year (April) Sydney, in Australia launched its Smart City 30 minute cities campaign. The concept is to plan for cities where residents can access employment, schools, shopping, services and recreational facilities within 30 minutes from home."

Sydney controls its traffic through a network of closed-circuit cameras and advanced sensors linked together amongst most of the city's highways, tunnels, and bridges and connected to a series of signs, signals, and lane control equipment.

This adaptive control system adjusts traffic signals in real time based on the current driving conditions, demand, and overall capacity. The system is also being used to provide signal priority to buses that are running late, improving mass transit reliability.

“The City has achieved a 37% decrease in travel time, a 21% decrease in congestion stops, and a six percent decrease in CO₂ emissions. In Sydney, the system is also being used to provide signal priority to buses that are running late, improving mass transit reliability,” he says.

Hong Kong is copying the Sydney system and Rio de Janeiro has implemented a smart city movement.

The value exchange between cities and media owners will offer brands unique opportunities and affinity points, he adds. “Such as wi-fi networks/rest and relaxation or third space opportunities/added value information and convenience.”

The integration of OOH and transit media with social media will become very important in new mega cities. “Commuters will want access to internet for emails, social networking and other information as a value add on transport systems.”

Apart from this, Smart Cities will also start standardising the OOH media industry. “As a result we will see more sophisticated and more digital transit media networks, making media more sophisticated and therefore more expensive,” he says.

Changes in the SA commuting landscape

In South Africa the commuting landscape is dominated by taxi, with 68% of commuters using this mode of transport weekly. Only 34% use private modes of transport, with 20% using bus transport and 11% using rail and 0.8% the Gautrain.

The country has seen an increase in the percentage of households who use taxis, buses and trains, with the total number of public transport trips per weekday increasing from five million the total to just under 5.5 million.

Fewer commuters now have to make at least one modal transfer per trip. One in every three commuters now leave their area of residence later than in 2003 (between 6am and 8am). Walking distance to and waiting time for the first public transport (train, bus and taxi) has decreased.

Government has created a lot of infrastructure and done a lot of work on the different systems. Fifteen years ago Johannesburg did not have the inter model systems it has today.

Taxis

The taxi industry is still the biggest public transport system in the country and provides an important service and is important to the country's economy and it will continue for some time, says du Preez.

“The industry is the first to service any developing squatter camp and in the past few years we have seen a formalisation of ranks. Formalising or putting a rank in place, requires consultation with the industry,” he says.

Without it the taxi industry will ignore you and your rank, he explains, as in Cosmo City, where the state of the art rank developed by the local authority sits unused, while taxis gather across the road on a field because they were not consulted in its development.

Developing around taxi ranks are retailers and hawker stands. These have continued to mushroom and the trend is to form this retail activity with the rank. In many cases this is followed by the construction and opening of a mall, either as part of the rank or very close by. A lot of ranks are moving through these stages swiftly and we predict a lot of the same with more nodes and retailers developing around these nodes.

“The taxi industry will continue to capitalise on the urbanisation trend and ensure that communities are very mobile and will remain dominant commuter mode for the foreseeable future,” he says, adding that it is important to understand the transition from informal rank environment to formalisation, and this has made brand communication at the large formalised taxi nodes a necessity.

Buses

There is lots of action in the bus sector, with changing demographics and consumers as well as media consumption.

The bus industry has been through many changes. This has included the roll out of Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) systems throughout the country, and this roll out is continuing with a further 10 cities in the country earmarked.

While BRT systems are being rolled out, the old municipal buses are limping along. These will either disappear or be absorbed into the BRT systems.

While the BRT systems first launched in Johannesburg, it is in Cape Town that it has been the most successful and rolled out the quickest. The MyCiti is part of the Cape Town City government’s plan to allow its residents to access public transport no more than 500m from their residence. “My prediction is that this will lead to more of the higher LSM groups leaving their car at home.”

He also believes that the new local government in Johannesburg will take some of the learnings from the MyCiti in Cape Town and apply it to the Rea Vaya system in Johannesburg.

Other systems being rolled out or planned for roll out include Areyeng in Tshwane and Ekurhuleni’s BRT System, Harambee.

He further predicts that more and more of these systems will include value-added services such as free wi-fi. “BRT projects and systems are here to stay and will radically change urban commuting patterns, profiles and shopping behaviour,” he says.

Rail

Future plans include the upgrading of rolling stock, investment in the infrastructure in major train stations and the development of integrated hubs.

“Rail is still the most efficient way to transport people, despite an expensive initial outlay, and most cities have rail as part of its inter model system,” he says.

“In South Africa there exists an urgent need to get new rolling stock as the last rolling stock was purchased in 1956 and has not been maintained. However, given the recent developments around PRASA, it will take another four to five years for this new stock to come into use,” he adds.

Despite this rail has had significant investment, especially into its stations. Currently a further 28 of 135 stations are at various stages of development. With stations modernising trade has formalised. Retailers are entering this space, for example there is a Spar in Park Station in Johannesburg.

This is a space where there is a lot of opportunity for brands and retailers, he says. “While there has been a decrease in the use of rail, I have no doubt that this trend will reverse when the new rolling stock comes online.”

The Gautrain has been a massive success and its expansion will no doubt continue. It is viewed as a bit elitist, but its expansion will ease traffic congestion.

“Rail commuting will grow and soon have very large intermodal transit nodes that will be very important both from a retailing and media perspective”, he says.

In conclusion, he simply says: “Transit media is an effective way to reach consumers across the entire LSM spectrum.”

**This article is from a presentation given by Jacques du Preez recently on changes in the commuter space and attended by Bizcommunity.com.*

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Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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