

The Challenges Facing the Metered Taxi Industry in South Africa: A Case Study of Durban Metropolitan City

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Abstract— Metered taxis have become an integral part in transportation system around the world. An effective metered taxi industry will bring about investment and tourist confidence as they normally rely on this mode of transport when they arrive in a country. As a tourist and investment destination country, more attention should be given to the metered taxi industry if the country wants to bring tourist and investors into the country to enhance its economic growth. However, the metered taxi industry is facing a lot of challenges that seem to be neglected by the authorities concerned hence drivers have lost faith in the concerned authorities. Operational costs of the metered taxi are surging thereby preventing drivers from getting profit at the end of the day and therefore threatening the sustainability of the industry as more people are forced out of the metered taxi industry to look for other lucrative jobs elsewhere.

Keywords —: Metered Taxi, Public Transport, Taxi Associations and Taxi Operators

I. INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH in South Africa metered taxis are not a commonly used form of public transport by the local population for a variety of reasons, the industry in Durban is nonetheless well established and performs an essential role in the public transportation of both residents within, and visitors to Durban. The function of metered taxis within the municipal public transport system is not clearly defined and the institutional structure of the industry on all levels is fragmented. This study looks at the current status of the metered taxi industry. In addition, the framework for

developing policy and strategy is considered, which will assist in positioning the industry to perform effectively in serving future demand. Durban is the largest city in KwaZulu-Natal and the third largest city in South Africa. It forms part of the eThekweni Municipality (Integrated Development Plan 2012-2017) [4]. In 2011 the city was reported to have a population density of approximately 3.5 million residences (South Africa National Census, 2011) [9].

This implies the high demands for alternative public transportation systems such as metered taxi services. Both the National Road Traffic Act and National Land Transport Act of 2009 define a metered taxi as a public transport service operated by means of a motor vehicle which is designed, or lawfully adapted, in compliance with the Road Traffic Act No. 93 of 1996 to carry fewer than 9 seated passengers, including the driver (National Land Transport Act of 2009, p. 7) [7].

Local residents use metered taxis if they are unable to drive themselves (children/ disabled persons) or to find other modes of public transport different from metered taxis like “dial-a-ride”, minibus taxis, trains or buses due to illness or disability (EThekweni Transport Authority, 2010). The tourism and hospitality industries in Durban also play a significance role in the metered taxi industry. Tourists utilize metered taxis as a form of public transport system throughout their visitation (EThekweni Transport Authority, 2010). In this research, the focus will be on the challenges facing the Metered taxi industry in Durban Metropolitan [3].

II. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

South Africa has opted to include metered taxis as part and parcel of the public transport system as it can be seen in definitions set by National Land Transport Act of 2009. As such, metered taxis operate alongside other public transport modes such as mini-bus taxis and midi-bus taxis, buses and trains. One of the side effects of sustained economic growth has been a growth in car ownership with the resultant of dramatic increase in road congestion virtually in major urban areas. In the economic heartland of the country, the Gauteng Province, a trip of 40 km between Johannesburg and Pretoria in the morning peak can take up to 2 hours or more. Similar situations are to be found in and around the metropolitan corridors of Johannesburg and Pretoria as well as Cape Town (National Department of Transport, 2009). Durban is also experiencing such problems due to increasing population size within the Central Business District (CBD).

According to (Wosiyana, 2009) the metered taxi industry in municipal boundaries is neither formalized, regulated nor properly licensed. There are a lot of illegal metered taxi operations, which do not comply with the legislative prescripts with regard to licensing and designated ranking facilities [12]. Although these are no formal

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national policies or strategies for the metered taxi industry, various papers and reports have been prepared by the Metered Taxi Working Group, a sub-committee of the National Taxi Task Team, which was established in 1996. These include:

- The Metered Taxi: Problems and Solutions. Preparation for Provincial Workshops - June 1996.
- Supplementary Final Recommendations relating to Metered Taxis – May 1997
- Report and Recommendations on 4+1 Vehicle May 1997 (Mabuse & Browning 2009) [5].
- In addition to this, the National Department of Transport produced a “Position Paper on the Regulation and Democratization of the Metered Taxi Industry” in October 2002.
- This paper made recommendations on the following: -
- National registration and democratization of the metered taxi industry
- Clear definition of the services rendered by the metered taxi industry
- Law enforcement
- Legislative amendments
- Arrangements for a national summit or indaba of all role players to initiate the representation process.

In 2009, National Department of Transport produced a document “Developing the Metered Taxi: An Implementation Strategy”. This is currently being presented to stakeholders for comment before being presented to the Minister for approval. To date, apart from legislative and regulation amendment initiatives at both the national and provincial level, none of the institutional or operational recommendations have been formally implemented although a few of the issues have been addressed in Durban and possibly other cities.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport at present does not have any policies or strategies for the metered taxi industry; however the KwaZulu-Natal cabinet, which gives the Minister of Transport the power to restructure all modes of land transport including metered taxis, has approved a Provincial Bill. The public consultation phase for this Bill was initiated, following which the MEC of transport will table it before Parliament. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport also appointed a consortium of consultants to formulate Provincial regulations that will govern the metered taxi industry.

From this it is observed that the current initiative by KZN-DOT to formulate a legal framework to accommodate the metered taxi industry and the National Department of Transport initiative to arrange a summit or indaba for all role players will provide important background for the preparation of a policy document for metered taxi operations in KwaZulu-Natal and other provinces (eThekweni Integrated Transport Plan 2010) [2].

The mass transit modes (rail, bus and minibus-taxi) are well understood. Even though there are gaps in the statistical data, but there is a wealth of information from research by government and studies by academics. By contrast, very little research is available on the metered taxi in South Africa (Public Transport Strategy 2011). The greatest challenges encountered in the developing and integrating the metered taxis in public transportation system are that, in general, little is known about it, its organizational structures and methods of operation and also that it serves a remarkably wide range of market segments [08].

Metered taxis are very popular form of public transport in many cities throughout the world. In some major cities, most notably in London and New York City, metered taxis are highly recognisable

symbol of those cities. Virtually every city and large towns in the world has some form of metered taxi service, however, not all are effective or function efficiently (www.Tfl.gov.uk) [10].

In South Africa especially in Durban they are not commonly used form of public transport by local population for various reasons. The affordability of the fares especially for an individual commuter and the availability of minibus taxis, the convenience of private transport are probably the main reasons for the lack of demand. Also, the relatively low levels of congestion on South African cities road networks and the easy accessibility to parking spaces encourage the use of private vehicles as opposed to metered taxis. Apart from eThekweni Municipality bylaws that regulate the metered taxis, the industry has no holistic framework in which to operate or reference base from which to move forward. The environment in which metered taxis operates, is also in a state of transformation as the Inner City continues to evolve into a typical First and Third World merging city with increasing residential densities of lower income households and with increasing number of tourists (both local and foreign) visiting the Durban city.

Coupled to this, metered taxi services are being challenged by novelty transport services such as Tuk-Tuks (Tri-cycles used along the beach front to move people around), hospitality courtesy transport services, illegal operators, driver hire from car hire companies and the minibus taxi industry. At night there is lack of enforcement of the carrier permits system and there are many illegal operators (moonlighters) during the night (eThekweni Integrated Transport Plan, 2010).

Associated with this are the challenges to the industry such as vehicle maintenance, inter-association rivalry, industry sustainability and the fleet age profile. Public transport in developing countries is also generally characterized by a lack of adequate financial resources to fund operational subsidies – not that it is not an issue in any other country, but it seems to be exacerbated in the developing world. The demands of affordable housing, education and health services are just so great that it limits the amount of money that can be set aside for public transport development and support (Walters, 2008) [11].

This gives rise to issues such as lack of timeous capital investments to replace rolling stock, lack of integrated public transport planning, absence of a firm commitment to public transport, etc. On the other hand most of the captive users of public transport are generally not in a position to contribute significantly towards the fare box due to low levels of income and unemployment. Law enforcement in both road traffic and public transport is often also deficient and problematic in the developing world. This often gives rise to unlawful operations and poor driving habits (Walters, 2008). The bottom line is funding from the government to provide infrastructure, enforcement and subsidies which is lacking.

A National Household Travel Survey was undertaken amongst 50 000 households throughout South Africa in 2003 (Walters, 2008). The purpose of the survey was, amongst others, to understand the transport needs of households and travellers, to ascertain the cost of transport and assess whether households can afford to pay for the mobility which is essential to their survival, to assess attitudes towards transport services and facilities, to measure the availability and use of motor cars and to understand the travel choices of different market segments (Key Results of the National Household Travel Survey, 2003). This survey is certainly the most comprehensive of its kind in South Africa and was used to describe public transport characteristics in the country [6].

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives for carrying out the study are as follows:

- To investigate challenges faced by metered taxi industry in their day-to-day operations.
- To investigate other areas that the government can help with to improve the metered taxi industry in Durban

The limitation of this research is that the outcome cannot be generalized since the study concentrates on data collected from the survey conducted within eThekweni Municipality only for analysis.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Blumberg et al. (2008) suggest two methods of data collection namely, monitoring method and interrogation/communication study method. In the monitoring method, the researcher inspects the activities of subject without attempting to bring out responses from anyone. In the interrogation/communication study method data collection however, the researcher questions the subjects and collect their responses by personal or impersonal means through interview or telephone conversation, self-administered or self-reported instrument sent through mail [1].

In this research, the interrogation/communication study method of data collection was adopted where the researcher personally contacted the subjects and asked them questions through laid down structured questionnaire and the responses from each subject interviewed were recorded. Table 1 shows a summary of the profiles of the respondents.

TABLE 1
THE SUMMARY PROFILES OF THE RESPONDENTS

Metered Taxi Drivers Age Group		
Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
20 to 30	10	10.87%
31 to 40	32	34.78%
41 to 50	44	47.83%
51 to 60	5	5.43%
61 and over	1	1.09%
Total	92	100.00%
Metered Taxi Drivers Gender		
Sex	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	50	54.35%
Female	42	45.65%
Total	92	100.00%
Metered Taxi Drivers Years of Experience		
Years of experience	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 to 5	25	27.17%
5 to 10	45	48.91%
Over 10	22	23.91%
Total	92	100.00

(Blumberg et al. 2008 state the great strength of survey as primary data-collecting approach is its flexibility and that surveying is more efficient and economical than observation. Communication survey approach has its short comings as well. The quality and quantity of information secured depends heavily on the ability and willingness of participants to cooperate. To overcome these short comings, participants were told the purposes of the survey for them to make decision whether they want respond to the questions or not. This section aimed at knowing the age, sex, educational level and the level

of experience of all the participants in the metered-taxi business. In all 92 metered taxi drivers and 3 DoT officials were interview. The following is a quantitative analysis of respondent's profiles.

According to (Zikmund, 2003, p.73) all forms of data analysis attempt to portray consistency in the data so that the results can be studied and interpreted in a brief and meaningful manner [13]. As with quantitative data, analysis was required to bring order and understanding. Since the data collected was descriptive and text data not quantitative, content analysis method was employed to analyze data. Content analysis involves systematic analysis of data. The best way to analyze the data obtained above was through the grounded method of data collection. Information was coded into various emerging themes, consistencies and contradictions were highlighted, these were then analyzed in light of any legislation in existence. Tables graph and charts were used to analyze and present the data.

V. RESULT

A. Challenges facing the metered taxi industry

The results of the investigation into the challenges facing the metered taxi industry are discussed as follows;

High Interest Paid On Loan: Since many drivers (60%) interviewed are still making payments to the bank in order to acquire their metered taxis, this research tried to seek the information regarding the interest they are paying as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
INTEREST PAID ON LOAN RECEIVED FROM THE BANKS

Interest paid on loan	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 - 5%	4	4%
5 - 10%	22	24%
Over 10%	26	28%
Do not know	15	16%
Not applicable	25	27%
Total	92	100%

From table 2, out of 92 metered taxi drivers interviewed, 4% pay between 1 – 5%, 24% of them pay between 5 –10% interest on the loan they received from the bank to purchase the taxi, 28% of them are paying over 10% interest on the loan, 16% of them do not know the interest being paid on the loan and 27% of them are not paying any interest. Those people who are not paying any interest are in the category of drivers who purchase their taxi with cash. Those who did not know are in the category of drivers driving someone else's taxi. Drivers are applying different interest rates as they may have received the loan from different banks and banks are charging interests according to the level risks they taking to lend money to that particular owner. The lower the risk of the applicant, the lower the interest, vice versa. An interest of over 10% on loan is considered to be too high considering the current rate of inflation of about 8%.

High Expenditure of Fuel: Fuel is a major daily expenditure in the taxi industry. Drivers were therefore asked about how much they spend on fuel daily. The data gathered on the daily expenditure by all the metered taxi drivers interviewed is shown in Table 3.

It can be seen from Table 3 that 22 out of 92 drivers interviewed spend between R100 – R300 on fuel daily for their operations, 67 of the drivers spend between R300 – R500 on fuel daily and 2 of them spend over R500 on fuel per month.

TABLE 3
DAILY EXPENDITURE ON FUEL SPENT BY METERED TAXI DRIVERS

Daily expenditure on fuel	No. of Respondents	Percentage
R100 - R300	22	24%
R300 - R500	67	73%
Over R500	2	3%
Total	92	100%

Low daily Sales: The daily sales of the taxi drivers were also investigated. This was done to enable the researcher to compare the monthly expenditure with monthly sales. This will enable the researcher to determine the profit level per month in the taxi business. The daily sales per month of the drivers is shown in Table 4

TABLE 4
DAILY SALES OF THE TAXI DRIVERS

Daily sales	No. of Respondents	Percentage
R100 - R1000	7	8%
R1000 - R3000	82	89%
Over R3000	3	3%
Total	92	100%

From Table 4, 8% of the drivers are getting a daily sales of R100 – R 1000, 89% of them are making a daily sales between R1000 - R3000 and 3% of them is making daily sales more than R3000.

Physical Attack on By Arm rubbers: Drivers were asked whether they have experienced any physical attack in their daily operations from any other person. This was done to assess how safe their work is as they are supposed to transport commuters safely to their destinations. The response to this question is shown in Figure 1.

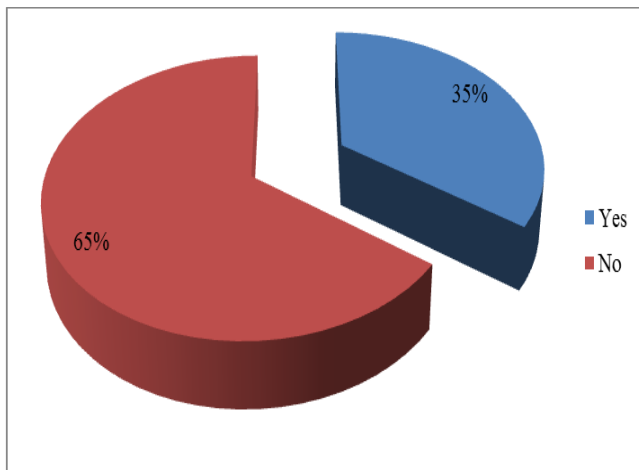


Fig. 1 A pie chart showing physical attack experienced by drivers in their daily operations

From figure 1, 65% of the drivers who were interviewed have not experienced any physical attack in their daily duties whilst 35% of them have experienced physical attack. Some of the physical attacks they have experienced are arm robbery and passenger attacks. The tools used in these attacks are guns, knives and sticks. Most of them sustained injuries and end up in hospital whilst others lost their money in the process. From the analysis above, one can generally say that the industry is relatively safe to operate since more than half of the people interviewed have not experienced any physical attack.

However more should be done by the law enforcement bodies like the police to eradicate any form of physical attack in the taxi industry to make drivers and commuters safe.

Lack of assistance from Metro Police: Drivers were asked about the assistance they are receiving from the metro police in clamping down on the illegal operators in the system as well as the physical attack they encounter in the daily operations. The response is shown in Figure 2.

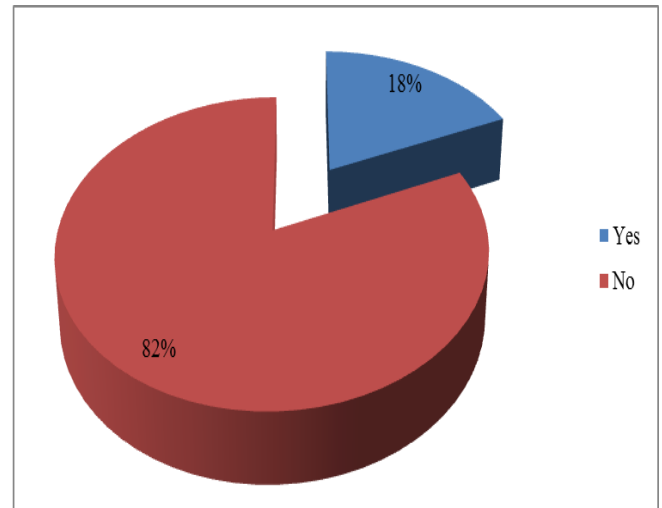


Fig. 2 A Pie chart showing the assistance from the metro police

From Figure 2, surprisingly 82% of the drivers believe that Metro Police are not assisting them to eliminate the illegal operators from the system. They believe police are not interested in arresting or investigating any illegal operations reported to them. Police do not investigate any robbery reported to them. Only 18% of them agree that the police are helping in solving their problems when they report to them. This revelation is very serious since the drivers have lost faith in the police. The law enforcement must therefore do something about this phenomenon since it is their responsibility to enforce the law

Lack of Association support in Solving Member's Problems: The main function of any association is to fight for the interest of its members and help in the welfare of their members. Drivers were therefore asked about the help they receive from their association when they're in need. The response to this question is shown below on Figure 3.

From Figure 3, 73% of the drivers stated that they do not receive any help from their associations. Only 11% of them stated that the association helps them to resolve their problems. 16% of them did not express their opinion on this question probably because they do not belong to any association. The high numbers of people (73%) who believe they do not get any help from their association support the reason why 80% of the drivers interviewed do not see the need for forming taxi association. They may have experienced a situation whereby those who are members of the association suffer when they need help from their various associations.

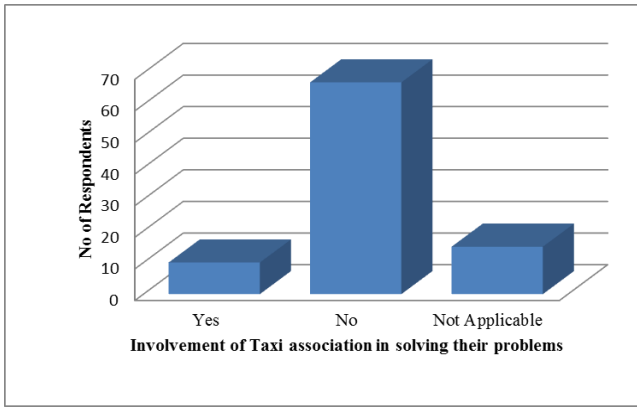


Fig. 3 A bar chart showing involvement of association in solving member's problems

From Table 5 almost all the drivers interviewed (98%) responded that the facilities made available to them by the municipality are seriously inadequate for them considering the number of the metered taxis currently in operation. More facilities at good point in the municipality are therefore needed to be made available to them.

TABLE 5
ADEQUACIES OF THE METERED TAXI FACILITIES

Facility enough	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	2	2%
No	90	98%
Total	92	100%

Low Patronage by Commuters: Metered taxis are not effectively patronized by its commuters as compared to other mass public transportation due to the huge gap in fare differences. Other minibus taxis and buses have relatively cheaper fares and easily available to commuters that is why the commuters use them the most than the metered taxis. Metered taxis are not readily available as compared to other mass public transportation vehicles.

Slow Pace of Issuing Operating Licenses: Metered taxi industry believed that the issuing of the Operating Licenses takes way too long to be processed because of the back logs as the Pietermaritzburg Operating License Board services the whole of KwaZulu Natal. The problem is that this function is centralised at the provincial level instead of being done at the local level. This challenge has led to the provincial officials to take bribes from the operators to fast track the processing of their permits. This is the major problem they facing as they cannot operate without the operating permit. EThekwini Transport Authority which is part eThekwini Municipality is planning to take over this function from the province in the near future to service the operators of eThekwini and fast track the issuing of operating licenses.

Negotiation of Fares With Passengers: Often drivers and passengers who come for their services negotiate the fare to be charged to the customer even though they have standard fare charged for each route and distance they operate. This also affects their cash flow badly as drivers have to accept the negotiated fares for them to make money.

B. EXPECTED INTERVENTION FROM GOVERNMENT

Below are some of the interventions that the metered taxi industry expect the government and the municipality officials to take care of.

Licensing of Vehicles Should Be Done At Local Government Level:

Licensing of vehicles and issuance of the operating permits should be decentralized to make it more accessible and also reduce the process it takes to issue the licenses and permits. Currently, the licensing offices are not enough and considering the volume of applications received from the citizens, it takes way too long for these applications to be processed. Government should therefore built more of the licensing institutions at the local level to make it easier for the licenses and permits to be issued timeously.

Negotiations with Banks for Easy Access to Loans: Government should assist with the negotiations of loans with the banks especially on the interest paid on loans. Government should also talk to the banks on their behalf so that they have an easy access loans and also lengthen the loan repayment period. This will help them pay reasonable monthly instalments to the banks and enable them to have some savings after other expenses are paid at the end on the month.

Law Enforcement on Illegal Operators: Illegal operators in the metered taxi industry should be wiped out. Police must enforce the law on the illegal operators who are taking the business away from the legitimate operators and stop taking bribes from them.

Provision of More Infrastructures: More metered taxi rank stands, call centres, on street ranks with shelters and ablution facilities should be provided at vantage points to make the industry more accessible to its commuters. Ideally wherever there is station for the mass public transport vehicles, there must be a metered taxi station provided. This will enable commuters have easy access to metered taxis as it is the case in the mass public transport vehicles.

Fast-Track the Issuance of Operational Licenses: Currently it takes too long for an operating license to be issued to the operators who wants to enter into the metered taxi business. The process should be fast-tracked to enable operators to get their operating licenses within the shortest time possible

Proper Regulation of The Industry: The metered taxi industry must be properly regulated to make it more difficult for the illegal operators to operate. A proper regulation will make it easier to flush out these illegal operators. Metro Police has to police this industry to make it work properly

C. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research provides some empirical evidence concerning the major challenges facing the metered taxi industry in eThekwini Municipality. The research also shows that most of the challenges faced by the metered taxi industry will best be solved by the government putting heads together will all public transport stakeholders to be a success. All efforts must be made by these bodies to solve the existing problems enumerated in this research.

Formation of Co-operatives: Various taxi owners should move from individual ownership to co-operatives ownership. This will help them to have access to joint professional advice and other things such as legal and financial matters. This will also help them to have access to start-up funds from the Co-operative Incentive Scheme of the Department of Trade and Industry. Other financial assistance may be available from several empowerment funds. Members of the co-

operatives may in due course arrange to form a company which will own the vehicles and other assets. The current individual operator may become a shareholder, and thus move from being an informal-sector income-generator to the wealth-creating formal sector. This will also reduce the burden of paying loans as an individual as the co-operative will purchase the vehicles on behalf of the members.

Leaders of Various Associations: Leaders of various taxis and other public transport associations should do more to help the unfortunate situations faced by its members. Solving problems of the members should be a paramount priority of the leaders instead of seeking their own interests when they are voted into power. This will help them to gain confidence of their members and that will encourage other drivers to be part of the associations. When that happens leaders may even negotiate with financial institutions about the interest paid on loans by their members which is currently a part of their primary functions.

Standard Fares: It is difficult for potential customers to know before trip begins how much the journey will cost him/her, or even to know whether there is a legally-prescribed fare and if so, how much it is because a price list is not displayed anywhere. Therefore it makes it difficult for both the client and the driver as they have to negotiate the fare during the trip. In some instances, that situation may even lead to an argument at the end of the journey as the customer may not be prepared to pay an exorbitant fare. Standard rates for various routes should be agreed upon amongst the taxi associations and these fares should be displayed at each and every station or transport hub so that clients will be able to view correct fares before embarking on the metered taxi journey. Further to that the same price list must be displayed on the outside doors of the metered taxis and to those taxis without taximeters so that there will be no argument at all between the driver and the customer.

Customer Awareness: It is quite difficult for the potential first-time user to find out about the taxi services available in the area. There are no telephone directories with the list of phone numbers and the information that describes the area in which a company exist. Some of the larger taxi companies have a website address or some other form of information readily available about their services, but there are too many metered taxis which operate individually with no information at all readily to their potential customers and they are depending on a limited market. This is in turn limits both the availability of service to the customer and decreases the productivity of the taxi drivers as well as their income.

Integration with Other Modes of Transport: The provision of suitable and accessible taxi ranks is critical in order to provide a seamless and reliable public transport system. It is therefore important that customers are able to access public transport service in a suitable, safe and accessible transport hub. An inadequate number, location and accessible of taxi ranks are the major concern in many areas of the public transport network. Metered taxi ranks should be integrated with the mass public transport stations to make it more accessible to the commuters. Metered taxi ranks are sometimes located at the transport hubs together with other public transport modes, but there are no co-ordinated operating plans in place with other modes. Metered taxi industry should therefore be integrated with other forms of public transport system to make its more accessible to its commuters. Terminal must built at various mass public transport nodes where metered taxis are accommodated at the entry and the exit points of the terminal. Each minibus taxi rank must have permanent visible rank for metered taxis.

Law Enforcement: Many metered taxis are operating without any form of authority. Illegal metered taxi operators in the system should be dealt with vigorously according to the law to deter others from doing the same practice. Training for enforcement officers must always be in line with the changes taking place in legislation and the city bylaws.

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