Summary of Interviewee Transcript

Private actor in transportation sector

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1. **Access and how it effects people specifically in Cape Town**

   The Interviewee distinguishes between "mobility," defined as the ability to move from one location to another, and "access" which is about the ease of reaching essential services and opportunities such as jobs, shops, and facilities. Access includes the broader concept of how easily one can engage in economic and social activities beyond mere physical movement.

   The Interviewee explains how geographical features in Cape Town as a port city limit transportation routes, creating barriers to mobility and access. They detail the specific challenges of navigating within constrained spaces, where reliance on limited transit options is further complicated by issues like corruption or inadequate infrastructure.

   The discussion moves to the societal implications of these spatial constraints. The Interviewee notes that development often favours more secure or economically advantageous areas, leaving less affluent regions without significant investment in infrastructure, perpetuating social and economic disparities.

   Critiquing current urban development strategies, the Interviewee points out that private developers and city planners often focus on areas where they can maximise profits through real estate and tax revenues, frequently overlooking the needs of poorer populations. This results in a concentration of development in the Central Business District (CBD), which disproportionately benefits wealthier societal segments at the expense of poorer ones, who face longer commutes and reduced quality of life.

   The Interviewee highlights the lack of effective policies and foresight in urban planning, which exacerbates congestion and restricts access. They mention specific failed initiatives that have not managed urban sprawl or transportation effectively.

The Interviewee concludes by discussing the adverse effects of current policies on the daily lives of city residents, particularly those in lower-income areas. The poor experience longer working hours, less family time, and diminished community interaction, contributing to a cycle of poverty. There is an urgent need for bold policy changes to improve access and mobility for all city residents, warning that without such changes, socio-economic disparities and quality of life issues will continue to deteriorate.

2. **Challenges of implementing urban transit improvements due to political and social obstacles**

Implementing changes in urban planning, like reducing car dependency, has high political and social costs, potentially alienating middle-class voters who are accustomed to car-centric planning and believe in expanding road infrastructure to alleviate traffic.

The lack of strong political will to make bold urban planning decisions is highlighted. The example of London's former mayor, Ken Livingstone, who implemented congestion charging despite significant opposition, contrasts with the hesitance observed in Cape Town where leaders fear electoral repercussions.

The Interviewee reflects on Cape Town's experience with the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system introduced during Helen Zille's tenure as mayor. Zille's decisive action, including the dismissal of an executive for not meeting project deadlines, exemplifies the necessary political will to push through significant urban transit projects.

The response points out a disconnect between what city planners believe middle-class citizens want (like road extensions and pothole repairs) and broader educational efforts to inform them about the benefits of alternative transit solutions.

The Interviewee laments the lack of innovative vision in city planning, with civil servants and technical staff reluctant to advocate for comprehensive transit

solutions due to concerns about job security and pension implications. This results in a default to outdated planning models, specifically referencing a return to 1965 planning methods due to an absence of contemporary direction.

The final thoughts stress that without visionary leadership, cities risk stagnation and continued reliance on cars, leading to urban planning that fails to progress beyond established, car-centric models.

3. Minibus Taxi Industry

The Interviewee discusses the complex dynamics and underappreciated role of the Minibus Taxi industry within urban transportation, labeling it as a "grudge purchase" of urban planning decisions and comparing it to a service entrance, symbolizing its marginalised status. Despite being critical to the City's functioning, it is often overlooked and undervalued. When a major strike occurred in 2023, it demonstrated the significant power of the taxi network, capable of paralyzing the City by shutting down not just the Taxi service but also roads and airports. The Interviewee notes that this incident was the beginning of what is expected to be a prolonged struggle between the City authorities and the Taxi industry. During this strike, the Mayor effectively used crisis communication strategies to frame the Taxi industry negatively, directing public sentiment against them and forcing them to relent and accept terms they had initially resisted. This outcome illustrated that the Taxi operators, largely local individuals trying to earn a living, were unprepared for the prolonged financial and public relations battle. Overall, the Interviewee highlights that the Taxi industry is a critical but strained part of the urban fabric, propelled by the needs and frustrations of local people rather than malicious intent or external manipulation.

4. Vision for future urban mobility in Cape Town

The Interviewee discusses the challenges and the need for a clear vision in developing a comprehensive urban mobility strategy for Cape Town.

The Interviewee emphasises the need for a collaborative partnership between the Province and the City to agree on a shared vision for urban mobility. This involves choosing a primary mode of transportation - whether car, rail, or bus - and ensuring all policies support this choice.

The current political environment lacks the will to prioritise public transport, partly because doing so might alienate influential groups like the middle class, who are significant political contributors. There's also a disconnect between political actions and the needs of the community, with politicians focusing more on maintaining power than implementing effective transportation solutions.

Effective communication and clear direction from leaders are crucial. However, there is a leadership vacuum with politicians and officials hesitant to advocate for bold moves in urban planning due to fears of losing their positions.

The Interviewee, due to their independent status and not being tied to political outcomes, finds themselves being pulled into discussions to voice opinions that insiders are hesitant to express. This dynamic indicates a dependency on external validation in decision-making processes within the city's governance.

Despite having an integrated transport plan, there is a failure to translate this into actions that the public and politicians can understand and support. The Interviewee criticises the tendency to treat important plans as mere formalities rather than actionable blueprints.

The Interviewee suggests that real change in public transport would require bold political will, akin to notable examples in other cities where leaders have left a significant impact through transport reforms. The challenge remains in motivating local politicians to undertake similar visionary changes amidst competing priorities like crime and infrastructure crises. In conclusion, the Interviewee outlines the need for a decisive and educated political figure to champion a robust public transportation strategy, which is seen as essential

for resolving ongoing urban mobility issues in Cape Town. Without such leadership, the City risks continued stagnation and crisis in its transport sector.

5. Instruments to influence

The Interviewee emphasises the importance of evidence-based research in shaping transport policies. They express some uncertainty about the effectiveness, in truly altering the core problems in urban planning due to their nature as a corporate entity restricted to certain roles.

Despite primarily operating in a business capacity, the Interviewee finds themselves lobbying and attempting to influence political decisions. They believe that influencing politicians can lead to substantial benefits, indicating the necessity of political engagement for meaningful change in transport policies. The Interviewee clarifies that their job is not to lobby the government or solve political issues directly. They value their independence from major funding pressures and political expectations that might compromise others in the field. This independence stems from not being reliant on constant project approvals or funding streams, which allows for more candid assessments and actions.

The Interviewee is aware that if the planning direction chosen is flawed, the data can only reflect those flaws. They express a frustration that often the data they provide is used to support misguided directions rather than to guide better decision-making. The Interviewee sees a unique value in their ability to speak freely about the real issues facing urban transport planning - issues that many may recognize but are hesitant to address openly due to political or professional restraints. This freedom to articulate the underlying problems is seen as crucial to potentially resolving deeper systemic issues in urban planning.

6. Localising the Rail

The Interviewee discusses the challenges and potential solutions regarding rail transport governance and accountability in Cape Town.

The Interviewee notes that while Cape Town has advantageous rail servitudes that other cities lack, the rail infrastructure is vulnerable to vandalism and theft. This degradation happens gradually, starting with minor damages that escalate to significant theft and damage, demonstrating a need for better security and maintenance.

The Interviewee suggests that for effective management and improvement of the rail system, there needs to be a devolution of responsibilities, including policing and intelligence related to rail, to local authorities rather than national government control. This would mean Cape Town managing its rail assets independently, which would require substantial changes in national policy and possibly constitutional amendments.

Currently, there is a lack of accountability in the system, with failures not being promptly or effectively addressed. The Interviewee proposes that more localized control could lead to faster and more effective responses to issues because local managers and officers would be directly accountable.

The Interviewee believes that reorganising the rail system under local control could lead to more efficient transportation systems, which in turn would economically benefit the city by reducing costs associated with congestion and inefficient transport practices. They suggest that aggressive regulation and a redesign of the transportation regulatory framework could improve safety, quality, and efficiency.

Finally, the Interviewee notes that while data can help diagnose problems, the real issues are socio-political and technocratic, driven by a risk-averse culture among politicians and officials. The current status quo is maintained because it presents the lowest risk, but this approach can lead to systemic failures if unaddressed until crises force change. Overall, the Interviewee advocates for a radical restructuring of rail and public transportation governance to improve efficiency, accountability, and service quality in Cape Town, highlighting the necessity of local management to effectively address these challenges.