



# Governance Fragmentation and Implementation Deficits in Durban's Sustainable Transportation Transition

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## Abstract

Durban, South Africa's third-largest metropolitan economy, illustrates the challenges of sustainable transportation transitions in rapidly urbanising Global South cities. Despite ambitious initiatives such as the GO!Durban Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network and alignment with national climate and development policies, progress remains constrained by governance fragmentation and implementation deficits. Overlapping mandates across municipal, provincial, and national agencies, combined with institutional silos, stakeholder conflict, particularly with the minibus taxi industry, and limited technical capacity, have undermined project delivery. These dynamics have reinforced automobile dependence, persistent spatial inequities, and rising greenhouse gas emissions, while eroding public trust. Drawing on political ecology and sustainability transitions frameworks, this study critically examines Durban as a case of systemic institutional misalignment that produces a persistent "planning–implementation gap." The analysis demonstrates that achieving transformative mobility requires metropolitan-scale governance integration, enhanced participatory mechanisms, and capacity building to align infrastructure delivery with equity and decarbonization objectives. Durban's experience offers broader lessons for secondary cities in the Global South facing similar governance and institutional constraints.

**Keywords:** Sustainable transportation, Governance fragmentation, Implementation deficit, Institutional capacity, Urban mobility transitions, Global South cities, Decarbonization

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Contextualising Durban's Sustainable Transportation Transition

Sustainable urban transportation is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of the global shift toward environmentally responsible, socially inclusive, and economically viable cities. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) calls for making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, highlighting the need for efficient and sustainable transport systems that enhance access to economic opportunities, reduce emissions, and improve urban liveability (UN-Habitat, 2020). For cities in the Global South, however, the transition to sustainable transportation presents a host of structural, institutional, and socio-political challenges. Durban, the third largest city in South Africa and part of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, serves as a critical case study in this context. It is a city facing both the urgency of transformation and the reality of deeply entrenched implementation and governance constraints.

Durban's spatial structure, inherited from apartheid-era planning, is characterised by extreme fragmentation, with large portions of the population residing in peripheral settlements far from economic hubs (Turok, 2012). This has created a dependency on long, inefficient, and costly commuting patterns, primarily serviced by an informal and poorly regulated minibus taxi industry. In response to

these challenges, the eThekweni Municipality launched the GO!Durban Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network (IRPTN) in 2013, which envisioned a modern, efficient, and inclusive transportation system designed to reshape urban mobility, enhance connectivity, and reduce inequality (eThekweni Municipality, 2017). The IRPTN represents one of the city's most ambitious public infrastructure investments in the democratic era, aligning with national policies such as the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) and the National Development Plan 2030 (Republic of South Africa, 2012; CoGTA, 2016).

However, more than a decade into its implementation, progress has been uneven and slow. Several of the planned corridors remain incomplete, while critical elements of integration across transport modes, such as between rail, bus, and non-motorised transport, have yet to be realised. Central to these delays are deep-seated governance and institutional issues. The eThekweni Municipality, the provincial Department of Transport, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), private contractors, and minibuss taxi operators all operate in a fragmented policy and institutional landscape, with misaligned mandates, funding streams, and operational agendas (Van Ryneveld, 2016; Mabin, 2020). This has resulted in a governance environment characterised by duplication of efforts, lack of accountability, poor coordination, and ultimately, suboptimal service delivery.

Governance fragmentation, in this context, refers to the division of authority, responsibility, and decision-making power across multiple agencies and tiers of government without clear mechanisms for coordination and integration (Pierre & Peters, 2005). In transportation planning and implementation, fragmentation manifests through overlapping jurisdictions, contradictory policies, siloed planning frameworks, and inconsistent stakeholder engagement. This is not unique to Durban; cities across the Global South struggle with similar governance pathologies, which are further complicated by historical legacies, political contestation, and capacity constraints (Bongardt et al., 2019; Rode et al., 2017). Yet in Durban's case, these dynamics are especially pronounced due to its complex institutional structure, legacy of racialised spatial planning, and persistent inequalities in access to public services.

The IRPTN has also encountered serious resistance from key stakeholder groups, most notably the minibuss taxi industry. As the dominant provider of public transport in South Africa, the taxi industry serves approximately 68% of daily commuters nationally (Stats SA, 2016). However, it remains largely informal, self-regulated, and resistant to reform efforts that are perceived as threatening its market share or autonomy. In Durban, planned BRT corridors have been met with protests, service disruptions, and political lobbying from taxi associations, leading to project delays and, in some instances, re-negotiated project designs that compromise the original sustainability goals (Van Ryneveld, 2016). The lack of a coherent strategy for stakeholder engagement and integration has only intensified these conflicts, reflecting broader deficits in participatory governance.

In addition to inter-agency fragmentation and stakeholder conflicts, institutional capacity within the eThekweni Municipality has been a major barrier to implementation. Key challenges include limited technical expertise in transport planning, project management, procurement, and financial oversight. Furthermore, political turnover, corruption allegations, and administrative instability have undermined continuity and accountability in project execution (World Bank, 2019). These implementation deficits are compounded by external shocks such as economic downturns, budget cuts, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have diverted attention and resources from long-term infrastructure projects to short-term survival priorities.

There is, therefore, a growing body of scholarship calling for a rethinking of governance models for urban mobility transitions in Africa. Scholars argue that sustainable transportation cannot be achieved through technical solutions alone, but must be anchored in institutional reforms, stakeholder alignment, and inclusive governance structures (Bakker et al., 2018; Brown-Luthango et al., 2017). For Durban, addressing governance fragmentation and implementation deficits is not merely a matter of administrative efficiency; it is a prerequisite for achieving social equity, economic inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

This paper aims to analyse the structural and institutional barriers to Durban's sustainable transportation transition, focusing specifically on how governance fragmentation and implementation gaps have undermined the IRPTN. Through a qualitative analysis of policy documents, municipal reports,

academic literature, and project evaluations, the study interrogates the governance architecture of the city's transport sector. It seeks to answer the following research question:

- How has governance fragmentation manifested in Durban's transportation planning and implementation?

Therefore, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable urban governance, offering critical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and urban scholars interested in inclusive and resilient mobility systems in the Global South

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### ***2.1 Conceptualising Sustainable Urban Transportation***

Sustainable urban transportation encompasses systems that promote accessibility, affordability, environmental protection, economic efficiency, and social equity (Bannister, 2008; Givoni & Bannister, 2010). In contrast to traditional transportation paradigms focused solely on vehicular mobility, sustainable transport frameworks emphasise multi-modality (including walking, cycling, and public transit), reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and integration with land-use planning (UN-Habitat, 2020). The relevance of sustainable transportation is amplified in the context of African cities, where urban populations are growing rapidly, informal settlements are proliferating, and spatial inequality remains entrenched.

In South Africa, the concept of sustainable transport is intertwined with the post-apartheid imperative to redress the spatial legacies of segregation, which have left low-income communities disconnected from urban cores and economic opportunities (Turok, 2012). In cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, efforts to build integrated and sustainable public transport networks have gained momentum in the past two decades. Projects such as Johannesburg's Rea Vaya, Cape Town's MyCiTi, and Durban's GO!Durban have been launched under the National Department of Transport's Public Transport Strategy (2007), which aimed to promote modal shifts from private to public transport and support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) development (Department of Transport, 2007).

### ***2.2 Governance Fragmentation in Urban Transport Systems***

Governance fragmentation refers to the disconnection and poor coordination among multiple institutions or agencies tasked with delivering a common public good (Pierre & Peters, 2005). In the urban transport context, this fragmentation can occur across spatial, sectoral, and jurisdictional boundaries. It frequently results in overlapping mandates, bureaucratic delays, inconsistent policy implementation, and the underutilization of limited resources.

In South Africa, transport governance is constitutionally distributed across three spheres of government: national, provincial, and local, each with varying degrees of authority and operational responsibility (Republic of South Africa, 1996). While metropolitan municipalities such as eThekweni are tasked with delivering urban public transport, they rely on national agencies for funding (e.g., Public Transport Infrastructure and Systems Grant) and on provincial departments for regulatory functions. Studies have found that this decentralisation without coherent coordination mechanisms often hampers project execution and long-term planning (Walters, 2013; Khosa & Naidoo, 2016).

In Durban, the governance of the GO!Durban project involves coordination between the eThekweni Transport Authority, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL), PRASA, and minibus taxi stakeholders. These actors often pursue divergent goals, operate under different timelines, and face conflicting policy pressures. According to Mabin (2020), the result is a "governance patchwork" that obstructs strategic decision-making and responsiveness.

Elsewhere in Africa, similar patterns of fragmentation have been observed. In Nairobi, the failure of transport reforms such as the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has been linked to overlapping mandates between the national Ministry of Transport, the Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (NaMATA), and local government (Gota et al., 2019). In Lagos, Nigeria, institutional conflicts between the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) and local councils have delayed the full implementation of the city's mass transit blueprint (Oni & Okanlawon, 2016). These examples

underscore a broader governance challenge faced by African cities attempting to transition toward integrated and sustainable transport systems.

### ***2.3 Implementation Deficits in African Urban Mobility***

Even when policies are well-articulated, African cities often struggle with implementation. Implementation deficits refer to the gap between policy intentions and outcomes due to administrative inefficiencies, inadequate funding, stakeholder resistance, and insufficient capacity (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). In the context of urban transport, these deficits are commonly seen in project delays, incomplete infrastructure, and failure to achieve ridership or modal shift targets.

In South Africa, several metropolitan transport interventions have failed to reach their operational potential. For instance, Cape Town's MyCiTi BRT system initially launched to great acclaim, but has since faced financial sustainability issues, operational losses, and resistance from existing taxi operators (Lloyd, 2018). Johannesburg's Rea Vaya also suffered from protracted negotiations with taxi associations and high infrastructure costs, leading to limited coverage and low integration with other transport modes (Venter et al., 2018).

Durban's GO!Durban system presents a particularly striking example of implementation failure. Launched in 2013 with a target completion date of 2020, the project has been plagued by long delays, cost overruns, limited stakeholder buy-in, and violent disruptions (Van Ryneveld, 2016; eThekweni Municipality, 2021). The minibus taxi industry, which transports over 60% of the city's commuters, has consistently opposed the project, fearing marginalisation. The lack of a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy and the municipality's limited ability to manage conflict have stalled progress. Additionally, corruption scandals and project mismanagement have further eroded public trust and institutional effectiveness (Corruption Watch, 2021).

At the continental level, studies suggest that many African urban transport reforms suffer from similar deficits due to constrained municipal capacity, donor dependency, and politicisation of infrastructure projects (Rizzo, 2017; Behrens et al., 2016). Implementation is often donor-driven, with limited local ownership, and insufficient post-project maintenance or integration into broader urban development plans.

### ***2.4 Participatory Governance and Social Legitimacy***

One critical but underdeveloped component in many African urban transport reforms is participatory governance. The legitimacy and success of transportation transitions depend on meaningful engagement with users, especially those in informal settlements and marginalised communities (Brown-Luthango et al., 2017). Failure to incorporate local knowledge and community concerns can result in low uptake, vandalism, or outright opposition to transport projects.

In South Africa, while participatory mechanisms are constitutionally mandated, they are often reduced to formalistic consultations without substantive influence (Pieterse, 2008). In Durban, communities affected by the GO!Durban corridors have repeatedly complained about inadequate information dissemination, non-transparent relocation processes, and insufficient inclusion in decision-making (eThekweni Municipality, 2021). Similarly, minibus taxi operators, key players in urban mobility, have not been effectively integrated into transition plans, reinforcing conflict and resistance (Walters, 2013).

Participatory deficits not only hinder project implementation but also perpetuate public distrust in municipal institutions, undermining long-term sustainability and social inclusion

## **3. Unpacking Governance Fragmentation in Durban's Transport Transition**

### ***3.1 Durban's Sustainable Transportation Ambitions and Strategic Context***

The GO! Durban Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network (IRPTN) was envisioned as a transformative project aimed at addressing the long-standing spatial and socio-economic challenges in Durban. It was designed to establish a multi-corridor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system integrated with rail and feeder services, targeting improved mobility for the city's working-class populations—many of whom reside in townships and peri-urban areas far from economic centres (eThekweni Municipality, 2017). Framed within South Africa's broader development goals, including the National Development

Plan (NDP) 2030 and the Integrated Urban Development Framework (CoGTA, 2016), the GO! Durban project aligns with international agendas such as the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11.

Despite this alignment and a clear strategic vision, the initiative has encountered considerable implementation difficulties. After more than a decade of planning and development, only a fraction of the proposed corridors is operational, with significant delays in construction, infrastructure readiness, and modal integration (eThekweni Municipality, 2021). This underperformance highlights the disconnect between policy aspirations and institutional delivery capacity.

### ***3.2 Manifestations of Governance Fragmentation***

The most prominent challenge facing GO!Durban is characterised by the fragmented nature of transportation governance in the eThekweni Metropolitan area. Governance fragmentation is evident in three key dimensions:

#### **3.2.1 Intergovernmental Disjuncture**

In South Africa, public transport functions are divided between national (policy and funding), provincial (oversight and regulation), and municipal (operations and infrastructure delivery) levels (Walters, 2013). In practice, this division often results in duplicated efforts, unclear lines of authority, and inconsistent project execution. For instance, the coordination between the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport (KZN DoT) and eThekweni Municipality is weak, with limited communication around infrastructure maintenance, route alignment, and modal integration. Moreover, national parastatals like PRASA, which manage urban rail services, are seldom meaningfully engaged in local planning discussions, leading to isolated infrastructure upgrades without systemic connectivity (Van Ryneveld, 2016).

#### **3.2.2 Fragmented Stakeholder Ecosystem**

GO! Durban operates in a stakeholder environment that includes municipal departments, national and provincial agencies, private contractors, consultants, minibus taxi associations, community leaders, and civil society actors. While stakeholder engagement mechanisms exist on paper, their effectiveness is undermined by mistrust, power asymmetries, and conflicting interests (Brown-Luthango et al., 2017). The taxi industry, for example, has fiercely opposed aspects of the IRPTN, fearing revenue loss and displacement. In response, the city has made concessions such as modifying routes or delaying infrastructure deployment, resulting in inconsistent project rollout and loss of project fidelity.

This fragmented stakeholder environment mirrors challenges experienced in other African cities. In Lagos, Nigeria, for example, institutional overlaps between LAMATA and local councils have undermined the integration of formal and informal transport providers (Oni & Okanlawon, 2016). Similarly, Nairobi's failed BRT pilots have been attributed in part to poor coordination between city authorities and national transport bodies (Gota et al., 2019).

#### **3.2.3 Internal Municipal Fragmentation**

Within the eThekweni Municipality itself, siloed governance practices hinder cross-departmental coordination. The IRPTN requires collaboration among the transport planning, housing, engineering, urban design, and economic development units. However, institutional inertia, weak project management systems, and political turnover have contributed to departmental isolation. As noted by Mabin (2020), these internal fragmentations are emblematic of broader urban governance weaknesses in South Africa's metropolitan municipalities, where institutional reform has lagged infrastructure ambitions.

### **3.3 Political Dynamics and Resistance to Change**

The politicisation of urban transportation projects further complicates their implementation. GO! Durban has been mired in political controversies, including procurement irregularities, leadership instability, and patronage-related conflicts. Corruption investigations and legal disputes have delayed

tender processes and eroded public trust (Corruption Watch, 2021). Moreover, elected officials sometimes interfere with project timelines or reallocate funds to more politically expedient initiatives, prioritising short-term political gains over long-term transport equity.

Resistance from informal transport operators, particularly minibus taxi associations, has also introduced political and operational risk. While the city attempted to incorporate the taxi industry into GO! Durban via proposed ownership models and retraining schemes, these measures were perceived as inadequate or disingenuous. The failure to establish durable trust with the taxi sector has led to protests, route blockades, and in some cases, threats to contractors and municipal staff (Van Ryneveld, 2016). This reflects broader tensions in African cities where informal actors hold considerable economic power but are excluded from formal planning processes (Behrens et al., 2016).

### ***3.4 Institutional Capacity Deficits***

A critical barrier to GO! Durban's success has been the limited institutional and technical capacity of the eThekweni Municipality. Although it is one of South Africa's more financially stable metros, the city faces chronic shortages of skilled planners, engineers, and project managers in its transport department. This capacity gap affects everything from feasibility studies and procurement to contract supervision and monitoring. Project timelines are frequently revised due to poor forecasting, and key deliverables are delayed due to miscommunication or lack of oversight (World Bank, 2019).

The situation is not unique to Durban. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, cities struggle with limited human capital, inadequate data systems, and over-reliance on external consultants for infrastructure design and implementation (Rizzo, 2017). These conditions result in fragile delivery systems that are ill-equipped to handle the complexity of large-scale, multi-stakeholder transport projects.

### ***3.5 Participation, Trust, and Legitimacy Deficits***

Public engagement is widely recognised as a prerequisite for successful urban transportation reform, particularly in contexts of high inequality and informality. However, GO! Durban's participatory processes have been largely procedural rather than transformative. Community members in areas affected by route developments have reported limited access to project information, a lack of compensation clarity during relocations, and exclusion from decision-making forums (eThekweni Municipality, 2021). This has created perceptions of imposed development, undermining the legitimacy of the transport transition and contributing to social resistance.

Research from Cape Town's My Citi system illustrates similar shortcomings: despite initial public support, perceptions of elitism and spatial exclusion emerged when working-class users felt that routes prioritised tourists and wealthier suburbs (Venter et al., 2018). The lesson is clear—without deep engagement that empowers affected communities, sustainable transport projects risk becoming technocratic exercises with limited social buy-in.

### ***3.6 Missed Opportunities for Integration***

Finally, the failure to align transport planning with other urban development objectives, such as housing, land use, and climate resilience, has further constrained GO!Durban's impact. While Durban is part of the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and has ambitious climate adaptation plans, these have not been meaningfully integrated with transport infrastructure decisions. For example, BRT stations and feeder lines are often developed without coordination with affordable housing or economic development zones, limiting their capacity to generate transformative change (Bickford, 2016).

Effective transport transitions require integrated urban planning frameworks that co-locate mobility investments with high-density, mixed-use developments, thereby encouraging modal shift and reducing car dependency (Bannister, 2008). This kind of integrated planning remains underdeveloped in Durban, where institutional silos and sectoral competition hinder collaboration

## **4. Conclusions and Implications**

Durban's pursuit of sustainable transportation illustrates the profound governance and institutional challenges facing many African cities. Despite ambitious policy frameworks such as the Integrated Public Transport Network (IPTN) and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP), implementation

has been undermined by fragmented authority, overlapping mandates, limited technical capacity, and inconsistent political will. These weaknesses have produced a persistent “implementation gap,” where progressive plans fail to translate into operational outcomes. The resulting consequences, continued automobile dependence, spatial inequities, and weak public confidence, are compounded by the historical legacies of apartheid planning and entrenched socio-economic disparities.

The analysis also shows that the politicisation of infrastructure delivery prioritises short-term visibility over long-term structural transformation, leading to piecemeal interventions and poorly integrated networks. Durban’s experience demonstrates that decentralisation without adequate fiscal and institutional support is insufficient to drive systemic change, particularly when multi-level government coordination remains weak.

Yet, the city’s policy environment also reveals important opportunities. Strong strategic frameworks, international climate commitments, and growing local awareness provide a foundation upon which more coherent governance arrangements can be built. To advance, Durban and similar secondary cities in the Global South must recalibrate governance structures, strengthen institutional capacities, and embed inclusive practices that align mobility transitions with climate and equity objectives.

This study identifies five interrelated priorities: (1) Institutional realignment through a metropolitan transport authority with statutory coordination powers; (2) Enhanced stakeholder engagement to build trust and legitimacy, particularly with minibus taxi associations and marginalized communities; (3) Capacity building in planning, project management, and oversight to strengthen local delivery systems; (4) Integrated planning frameworks that link transport, spatial development, and climate adaptation agendas; and (5) Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability, track decarbonization progress, and foster public transparency.

In conclusion, Durban’s transport transition underscores the urgency of addressing governance fragmentation as a precondition for achieving sustainable urban mobility. The lessons from this case extend beyond South Africa, offering valuable insights for other African cities navigating similar institutional constraints. Building more integrated, inclusive, and accountable governance systems is essential if sustainable transportation is to deliver on its promise of equity, resilience, and low-carbon development.

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