

Commuters Demand the Resumption of Train Operations

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The residents of the West Rand are forced to pay exorbitant taxi fares from their respective areas every day. Monthly, they are losing about R3 000.00 on taxi fares. This is because there are no operating trains in the West Rand anymore.

During apartheid, trains used to run smoothly. When there were faulty trains, the apartheid government would provide alternative means of transport for their commuters. But when the African National Congress (ANC) led government took over in 1994, things fell apart.

First, they scrapped trains that were operating from Johannesburg to Klerksdorp, via Randfontein and Oberholzer. Later, the Welverdiend train station was also scrapped, which meant that the its residents had to pay more money in order to get to work.

In 2019, the Westonaria train station (west of Johannesburg) was also closed down. In August 2020, the Randfontein train station's cable lines were stolen and the train station was vandalised. This resulted in the closure of the train station, which meant that residents from Khutsong, Carletonville, Welverdiend and Wedela, were now paying more for taxi fares to Johannesburg every day. The reason is because Metrorail failed to provide alternative transport for commuters.

Recently, the Department of Transport confirmed that the safety and the rights of commuters remains one of their main priorities. The government, through the words of the Minister of Transport, Fikile Mbalula, expressed their aim to renew public transport fleets such as trains, buses, and taxis. And that they would make sure that the rights, comfort, safety and dignity of commuters are respected.

But the rights of passengers are violated every day since the dawn of democracy. Residents of the West Rand are being bullied by the taxi operators, and commuters are not allowed to say anything even when they are the ones paying in the taxis.

Essentially, commuters are being ill-treated, harassed, and discriminated against. Taxi drivers do not pay attention to commuters' safety and the rights of their passengers. For example, they do not have customer services where the commuters can complain, or identify problem areas and ask that action be taken to remedy the situation.

Taxis also do not have the Transport Sector Charter in all their vehicles, where telephone numbers and the address where complaints can be directed towards. Taxi drivers are also harassing and intimidating commuters with no legal actions taken against those particular drivers. Simply put, taxi-operators do not have respect for commuters, and they have forgotten that it is the commuters that are contributing to the country's social and economic developments.

Another example is how commuters are not allowed to ask the driver not to overload the taxi, as per the maximum number of passengers meant to be carried in the taxi.

The ANC-led government has assumed the responsibility to ensure that commuters' rights are protected and respected. Unfortunately, it seems like they were just giving lip service. The West Rand commuters are not finding joy in this mode of transport. They demand trains return for the poor working class.

Commuters are not allowed to choose their preferred mode of public transport that they would like to use. Taxi fares are very, very high and working class people cannot afford to pay for a taxi to and fro work every day. Their right to choose was violated, and they are too intimidated and harassed to speak out.

West Rand commuters have written to the government about their demands calling on the state to re-open train stations as soon as possible. Other demands include calling on the Transport Department to bring back the railway police, and get rid of the private security companies, that are exploiting security guards.

Another demand is that the residents of the West Rand are calling for government to in-source the security guards. And, lastly in cases where there are faulty train issues, commuters demand that buses like ReaVaya must take them to and from work,

The complete list of West Rand commuters' demands are:

1. The right to choose which mode of transport to use choice without intimidation and harassment.
2. To resume all suspended train operations with immediate effect.
3. The rights to comfort, safety and dignity for commuters to be respected at all times.
4. The right to not travel in an overloaded taxi, when using that mode of transport.
5. Commuters demand safe and reliable and affordable transport for all
6. That officials employ skilled people in top positions

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