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SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS  
SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VIR RASSEVERHOUDINGS

Report of investigation on Native taxi and bus drivers plying on the Alexandra and Sophiatown routes.

This report is the result of approximately three weeks' investigation on the Sophiatown and Alexandra bus routes.

The object of the investigation was to examine numerous complaints regarding the conduct of Native taxi and bus drivers and to consider how the situation might be improved.

The method of investigation was threefold:

Firstly: By personal observation i.e. by riding in taxis and buses and by observing the traffic systematically from certain points on the routes. I also used my own car.

Secondly: By questioning regular users of the buses and taxis, the drivers, and responsible people both in Sophiatown and Alexandra.

Thirdly: By verification of all statements made. This verification was done by personal observation and by questioning officials in public offices.

REGULATIONS Native driven vehicles are subject to the same regulations as European driven ones.

(1) TESTING All applicants for a driver's license are compelled to undergo an official test at the Municipal testing grounds in Market Street. This test is very thorough. The applicant is made to reverse into a space equivalent to that occupied by the average garage and has also to turn the car in a narrow street. This is followed by ten minutes driving in town, included in which is a test in driving round robots, parking diagonally, and stopping suddenly. A thorough knowledge of the rules of the road is also required. This test is now so strict that on an average 60% of the women who apply for licenses fail in the test. A small percentage of men fail. Taxi and bus drivers go through a special test by the Vehicles Inspector. It is very severe and a great number of Natives fail to pass it. The applicant is required to have a thorough knowledge of the geography of the city, and he is given half-an-hour's driving test through the principal streets.

(II) INSPECTION OF BUSES All buses whether European or Native owned are under Municipal supervision. They are inspected every six months for mechanical defects and any bus which is not in perfect condition is immediately taken off the road and its license suspended until such time as the inspectors are satisfied that it is fit for service.

(III) RUNNING OF BUSES There are only two regulations which apply to the running of buses and do not apply to private cars. The first of these is that a bus shall not carry more passengers than as stated on its license. Secondly, the bus must run from point to point. These points also are stated on the license.

CONDITIONS ON THE ROUTES

The method of investigation was to drive in the buses and taxis; to follow them for considerable distances and to observe all traffic from certain points on the routes for an hour at a time for several days in succession.

1. ALEXANDRA TOWNSHIP ROUTE

A. Buses

(1) Speeding.

The buses do not travel fast on this route. Forty minutes was the average time taken to go from the Township to Noord Street terminus. This time is not excessive for a distance of nine miles.

(2) Recklessness

The drivers were inclined to take chances which should never have been taken. In several cases a bus shot past a stationery car just when an on-coming car was drawing level, forcing the latter to swerve violently to the left. In ascending the hill in Louis Botha Avenue it was common for buses to attempt to pass a slow-moving car in the face of down-coming traffic. On one occasion, travelling in my own car, I very nearly collided with a tramcar in trying to avoid a bus travelling on the wrong side of the road.

(3) Overloading

Overloading is a really serious offence on this route. A bus is allowed to carry four persons standing, but I saw as many as nine persons standing on two occasions. The fact that only four persons stand does not imply that the bus is not overloaded. On three or four occasions I noticed three people squeezing into a seat designed for two. Overloading was most frequent between eight and nine o'clock in the mornings and between five and six-thirty in the evenings. In the evenings five out of every six buses were overloaded. I verified this again and again as will be seen from the following figures.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, the 12th, 13th and 14th of March, I stood at the 44th tram stop in Orange Grove, from 4.30 to 5.30 p.m. -

On Wednesday 12th, 4 buses passed from town. Of these 2 carried 7 persons standing, 1 carried 5, and the other 6.

4 Buses passed going to town of which 2 carried 5 standing, and 1, 6.

On Thursday 13th the number of buses from town was 5, of which 3 carried 9, 8 and 8 passengers respectively. The number of buses to town was 4, of which 3 carried 5, 8 and 7 passengers standing.

On Friday 14th. Number of buses from town was 5, of which 3 carried 6 persons standing, and the other 2, 9 and 5 respectively. There were 4 buses to town, 2 carrying 5 standing, 1 carrying 4 standing, and the other carrying 7 standing.

B. Taxis

(1) Speeding

On one occasion, as a test, I drove in front of a taxi at forty miles an hour along Louis Botha Avenue. The driver insisted on passing me although in order to do so he had to run level with me for a considerable distance. On another occasion I travelled in a taxi

and although the driver did not exceed thirty-five miles per hour, he seldom dropped below this speed, no matter how dense the traffic was. There were exceptions. I noticed three or four drivers who barely exceeded thirty miles per hour all the way from the city to Alexandria.

The average time taken to go from Noord Street to Alexandria (a distance of nine miles) was twenty minutes. This is far too fast to be safe especially as the traffic on this route is very heavy at certain times during the day.

(2) Recklessness

Apart from the speed at which they travelled, the taxi-drivers seemed to have no conception of the rules of the road. Cutting in was a common offence. On two occasions I followed Native taxis for several miles (from Clarendon Circle to Orange Grove Terminus) and though they travelled fast and cut in and out of traffic frequently, they failed to signal when doing so.

- (3) I did not observe any overloading by taxi-drivers, but two of them whom I questioned admitted that they do sometimes carry seven passengers, though authorised to carry six only. This is in spite of the fact that on March 14th, fourteen taxi-drivers were fined 50/- or seven days each, for carrying more than six passengers and for contravening the Transportation Act. On the occasion when I rode in a taxi there were only four passengers, but I paid for two seats to avoid a second passenger in front.

## II. SOPHIATOWN ROUTE

### A. Buses

(1) Speeding

While travelling down High Road at forty miles an hour I was passed by a fully loaded Native bus. To pass me at the rate it did the bus must have been travelling at very nearly fifty miles an hour, whereas the municipal speed limit at that point is fifteen miles per hour. On three occasions I made observations at different points on High Road, for an hour at a time, and though the buses did not travel as fast as the one mentioned above, they exceeded the speed limit by a great deal.

(2) Recklessness

I observed buses cutting into traffic without giving any warning, to quite the same extent as was done on the Alexandria route. I noticed this particularly on the road through Brixton, where the traffic is very heavy and the road very narrow.

(3) Overloading

Overloading was very common between the hours of five and six in the evening. I was told that there is a great deal of overloading in the early morning too. Cases were described to be where buses licensed to carry twenty-two persons carried no fewer than thirty-two. Between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when most of my observations were made, I noticed only two cases of overloading. On the two occasions when I made observations from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. I noticed a great deal of overloading.

### B. Taxis

There are no Native taxis on this route.

## GENERAL REMARKS

The bus drivers on both routes and the taxi drivers on the Alexandra route are a constant source of danger to the public. There are exceptions on the Alexandra route but all the buses I observed on the Sophiatown route travelled far too fast. Apart from other considerations these buses are a great danger to the five hundred or more Natives who cycle to the city and back morning and evening,

I received official information that municipal traffic inspectors and "speedcops" are stationed along all the bus routes. But although I looked out specially for them, I did not see any all the time I was making my investigations. I was told that traffic inspectors are sometimes seen but that they are easily avoided by a system of pre-arranged signals which the drivers use. Thus if a bus driver coming from Sophiatown notices a "speedcop" or inspector on the road, he will switch his headlights on and off and thereby warn on-coming drivers. If a bus so warned is overloaded, the driver will stop, and make some of the passengers get off. The same informant told me of a further evil that arises from this in that young children are often forced to get off the bus in lonely and deserted places.

## COMPETITION

An important factor on the Sophiatown route is the excessive competition. There are more than fifty buses to supply the needs of a population of approximately six thousand five hundred. All these buses are owned by Europeans who hire Native drivers at an average weekly wage of about £2 : 5s. I have it from a reliable source that a driver is liable to be dismissed at a moment's notice if his takings do not reach a certain average per week. The result is that drivers have to be perpetually racing each other so as to be the first to reach waiting passengers. Under conditions such as these, careful driving is impossible.

It is worthy of note that on the Alexandra route where there are only eleven buses there is not nearly the same amount of reckless driving. The buses are enabled to run according to a definite timetable and this cuts out the inevitable chasing of one another for positions which arises from excessive competition. The drivers, moreover, are more certain of retaining their jobs than those on the Sophiatown buses are.

## CONDITIONS OF WORK

The drivers on the Sophiatown route have no special drifts. There is only one driver per bus. This means that a driver may be kept at his job for as long as fifteen hours at a time. For in order to be first on the rank some of the buses start taking up their positions at 2 a.m. The only rest these drivers get is while they are waiting at the terminus. Yet some of them go on driving until ten o'clock at night. It is obvious that a man who has been driving almost continuously since two o'clock in the morning, will not have his wits about him at eight o'clock in the evening.

On the Alexandra route the driving hours are, on an average, from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. Even these are too long, though considerably shorter than the driving hours on the Sophiatown route.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Alexandra Township Route

1. Control

1. Control.

The reckless driving on this route can be stopped by means of more rigid control.

- (i) There should be more inspectors who should be given the authority to stop buses and count the number of passengers. Some of the drivers will escape this vigilance, but there can be no doubt that constant supervision will eventually have the desired effect.
- (ii) When a driver has had, say, two convictions for reckless driving or disregarding regulations, his driver's license should be suspended or taken away.

2. Working Hours.

There should be definite shifts for drivers. No driver should be allowed to remain on duty for more than eight hours per day.

B. SOPHIATOWN ROUTE

1. Control

On the Sophiatown route matters cannot be remedied as easily as on the Alexandra route, until the excessive competition, which is the main cause of the reckless driving, has been diminished, there can be no question of appreciably improving the present state of affairs. At the moment there is no limit to the number of buses which may work a given route. Control, however, should be exercised. If the number of buses cannot be limited then the only alternative is to create a time table according to which all buses must run; inspectors will have to be appointed to see that the time table is adhered to. Further, owners of buses should not be allowed to dismiss drivers when the takings of a bus do not reach a required figure. If necessary contracts should be drawn up between owners and drivers to protect the interests of the latter. If the drivers could feel secure in their billets there would not be the same incentive to recklessness. These proposals are very drastic but it is time something really drastic were done. The people who use the buses are fully aware of the danger they run, and all those whom I questioned said they were prepared to put up with anything that would tend to improve matters. To replace Native drivers by Europeans is quite out of the question. In the first place it is not certain that Europeans would be less reckless than Natives under present conditions. As it is I have seen European bus drivers on the Norwood route cutting into traffic without giving any indication at all. Secondly there is no reason why a Native should not be able to drive just as efficiently as a European.

2. Working Hours.

The working hours on this route should be considerably shortened. This is even more essential than on the Alexandra route, as the traffic, particularly through Brixton, is much heavier and the streets much narrower.

C. GENERAL

1. Inspection of Buses

At present all buses are inspected once every six months for mechanical defects. In view of the reckless manner

in which some of the buses are driven, incurring the frequent and sudden application of brakes, it would be advisable for all buses to be inspected more often. The brakes at least should be examined every three months.

(2) Third Party Risk

All buses should be insured for third party risk. A large proportion of the buses are not covered by insurance at all. Since insurance is a form of protection which it is the right of every passenger to have, one of the conditions when granting a license should be that the bus concerned be fully insured for third party risk. There are, however, important considerations to be kept in mind on this matter, e.g. It is thought that insurance companies would refuse to accept risks in respect of Native drivers.

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