

I was an hour late for my job interview

“I was late for my job interview” – a dreaded phrase, yet a daily lived experience for the millions of job seekers in South Africa. I recently had a first-hand experience of how it feels to be an hour late for a job interview. I explain how and why this happened, and what this means for fixing our urban transport system.



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I undertook vacation work at the CSIR during July 2022 under the guidance of Dr Mathetha Mokonyama. For me to understand part of the scope of research work the CSIR undertakes, I was asked to carry out ethnographic research entailing being a job seeker who is completely reliant on public transport, embarking on a journey to attend a job interview.

I was asked to plan and undertake a journey from the CSIR student accommodation in Brummeria, Pretoria, to

Springs Mall in Ekurhuleni (about 85 km away), for arrival at 09:00 on a Tuesday, and record my experience in detail for subsequent analysis. I pre-planned my trip using Google Maps, which indicated that the trip would take about 1 hour and 10 minutes, making use of minibus taxis. I therefore set my departure time to 6:30, with an expected arrival time of 8:00.

THE JOURNEY

My journey started at exactly 06:30. I had to wait for about 15 minutes for a minibus taxi to arrive near the CSIR Campus, en route to Pretoria central. I paid R20 for the trip. Upon arrival at Pretoria central, I was transferred to another minibus taxi, and had to wait for about 15 minutes for

the taxi to fill up to its passenger capacity. I paid R15. Thereafter, the taxi proceeded to Bosman taxi rank, which is a major regional public transport hub. I arrived at the Bosman taxi rank at 07:30 and got onto my next minibus taxi to Springs. I had to wait for 45 minutes for the minibus taxi to fill up. I paid R65. I arrived at the Springs Station taxi rank at exactly 09:20, where I proceeded to another minibus taxi to Springs Mall, waiting a further 20 minutes for that taxi to be full. I paid R17.

I arrived at Springs Mall at exactly 10:00, two hours later than I had planned, and an hour late for my “interview”. The total amount of time to travel to Springs Mall was approximately 3 hours 30 minutes, costing a total of R117. The return

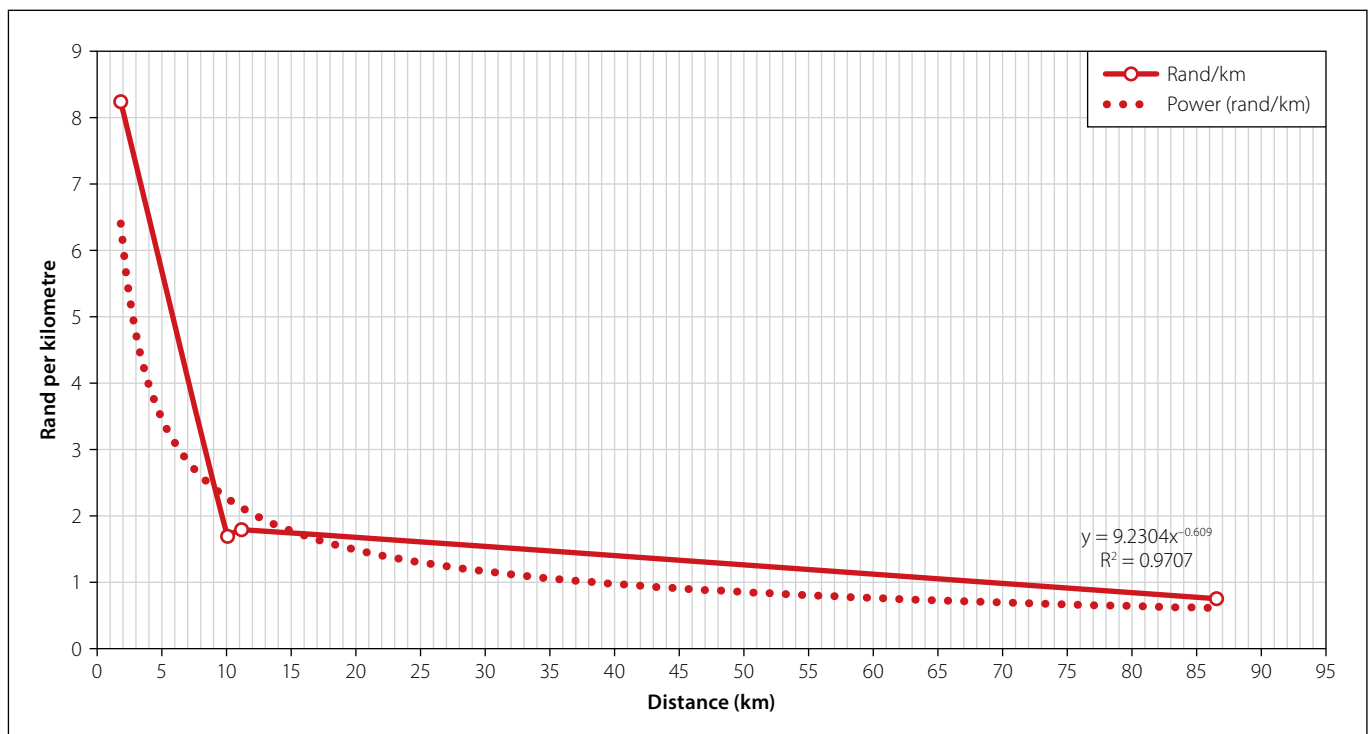


Figure 1 Relationship between distance and minibus taxi fares

journey cost the same, but took 2 hours and 30 minutes.

NOTABLE OBSERVATIONS

With every leg of the trip, I had to ask for directions. I often felt unsafe to the extent that I could not use my mobile phone to take photographs along the way as originally requested. Hygiene at several of the minibus taxi ranks was not good, and using the nearby toilet facilities while waiting was not an option. Minibus taxis servicing longer distances tended to be in good condition, whereas those servicing shorter distances, including for transfers, tended to be dilapidated. While the Bosman and Springs Station taxi ranks have some passenger rail connection, the train service was not available.

On the positive side, the proximity of the minibus taxi rank facilities to supermarkets and other forms of trade appears to make life easier for passengers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR JOB SEEKERS

Most South African job seekers live geographically far away from job

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opportunities. It is likely that the cost of public transport contributes to the high rate of unemployment in the country. Over and above the direct cost of transport, the time spent travelling, waiting, and transferring between modes of transport has implications for the country's productivity. I calculate that, on the basis of the country's GDP and the number of productive hours, time costs R54.83 per hour. The cost of waiting in between services is ordinarily not accounted for in the economy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

On the basis of the fares paid on my trip to Springs Mall, Figure 1 estimates the relationship between minibus taxi fare and distance travelled for every leg of the trip. It is estimated elsewhere that South Africans spend about 38.18 minutes

travelling to work or school over an average distance of 21.90 km (www.numbeo.com, 2022). Were government to make public transport free for job seekers, as has been proposed by some political parties, it would cost about R250 million per day to subsidise the current volume of job seekers using minibus taxis, assuming the fare structure in Figure 1, and a similar proportion of job seekers as workers making use of minibus taxis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I ponder my career options post-university, I see that much needs to be done to improve public transport service offerings for job seekers. Without decisive action, public transport services will continue to fail job seekers and worsen unemployment. When transport planners make policy and design recommendations, it is important that they think practically about the lives impacted by their methods and tools. Implementing predictable services will go a long way to improving the lives of job seekers. □



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