

---

# Case Study 2: Opening Cape Town streets for a low carbon future

## Leanne Seeliger

Unit for Environmental Ethics, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

## Lisa Kane

Centre for Transport Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

## Introduction

Cape Town's apartheid spatial form combined with its weak and under resourced public transport system has resulted in a resource inefficient city where many people rely on carbon-intensive private vehicles, or taxis for mobility (Wilkinson, 2000; Statistics South Africa, 2014a) More than half of the energy used in the Cape Town metro area is consumed by the transport sector (City of Cape Town, 2015). At a macro level, the city authorities and partners have drawn up strategies including the Comprehensive Integrated Transport Plan (Transport for Cape Town, 2014) and the Low Carbon Central City Strategy (Cape Town Partnership, 2014) to encourage 'own-steam' transport (e.g. walking, cycling), public transport and smarter private vehicle use (e.g. car-pooling). However, despite these policy interventions the carbon footprint of transport continues to grow (City of Cape Town, 2015).

While it is true that the current transport system, with its prioritisation of private vehicles and lack of adequate public transport, has traditionally favoured the affluent, it is not clear whether increasing the financial resources allocated to public transport will be sufficient to encourage a shift to low carbon alternatives. This case study addresses a civil society movement called Open Streets through the lens of transition theory. It suggests that this movement is a niche development in which a transformation of the way people and places are valued could occur. This niche has the potential to significantly alter the regime of the urban transport system in Cape Town and assist in shifting the city towards a low carbon urban mobility future.

## The co-evolution of urban transport systems

Transportation systems are intricate socio-technical systems (Rees *et al.*, 2016) that are difficult to change because they often involve heavy infrastructure costs and profound changes to people's behaviour patterns (Geels, 2012). Major shifts need to happen within civil society, among firms, politicians and policy makers. This process is co-evolutionary and can take decades to happen. This case study highlights two overlooked factors in co-evolution: 'conscientisation' about these often taken-for-granted systems; and experiences of streets outside of the mundane every day.

In Cape Town, like many South African cities, the issue of place-making is complicated. The city's apartheid patterns of settlement disadvantaged Black South Africans by placing them on the outskirts of cities and forcing them to spend high proportions of their low wages on public transport to get to work in the city centre (Cape Town Partnership, 2014). Now, despite the democratic political situation, the outskirts of Cape Town remain places where affordable housing is available and the central city is home to a large proportion of the jobs. This means the underprivileged remain reliant on the city's substandard public transport system.

The racial segregation of the past created a fearful society (Lemanski, 2004). Many White South Africans lived behind high walls and their use of public street space was very limited. By contrast Black and Coloured South Africans used streets for access and as playgrounds (Coetzer, 2004), in part because of limited access to amenities. Now, more than 20 years after the arrival of democracy, as South Africa seeks to transition to a lower carbon future with fewer cars and more community interaction, the privileged are still hesitant to switch to lower carbon modes of transit that require a great utilisation of what they have traditionally considered unsafe public open spaces and are less convenient in terms of flexibility (Statistics South Africa, 2014b). Moreover, the previously disadvantaged, often forced to use public transport, still see the private car as the preferred mode of transportation.

South Africa's National Department of Transport, in an attempt to address the inefficiency of travel in the country's cities and motivated in part by the hosting of the 2010 Football World Cup (ITDP, 2008; Boulle & Van Ryneveld, 2015), began a bus rapid transport (BRT) system in the country's five metropolitan areas and 10 smaller cities. This programme, which is called the MyCiti bus in Cape Town, is ambitious. The city plans to expand it so that most residents are within 500 metres of a trunk (BRT/rail) or bus feeder route, allowing for even those on the periphery of the city to be able to reach their destinations within an hour (Boulle & Van Ryneveld, 2015; City of Cape Town, 2014). However, despite these good intentions, the system has struggled to be financially viable (Lewis, 2015) and widespread public transport uptake by the higher income segment of the Cape Town population has been limited (Donaldson, 2015).