

Lack of wheelchair access leads to abuse of disabled

Mbuso Kunene and Tracey Turner

WHEELCHAIR-BOUND uMhlathuze residents have shared their frustrations with the lack of accessibility on public transport systems.

Zamanjeke Mdamba (49), an Mzingazi village resident and administrator at King Cetshwayo District Municipality Community Services Department, has been in a wheelchair since 1983 due to polio.

"I struggle because taxi drivers are not all the same and I face issues with getting the wheelchair in the taxi," she said.

In a desperate attempt, Mdamba now leaves her wheelchair with her son at the taxi rank, and gets help from a colleague using a second wheelchair at work.

She says verbal abuse is another challenge from both passengers and drivers.

"Sometimes the driver is a bit moody and problematic. They call us names and say bad things, so we suffer a lot because of people like that."

Similarly, Nomusa Mkwanzani (49), a KwaDlangezwa resident who has been using a wheelchair since 2007 due to meningitis, has stopped using public transport altogether.

"I am unable to commute with public transport as the bus is too high. Taxi and minibus [drivers] have told me that this [wheelchair] does not enter the taxi."

Instead, she relies on private cars for travel, which is not always reliable. "Sometimes I miss clinic appointments because of this situation."

Mdamba says she hopes for better-

designed transportation options for disabled individuals.

"Sometimes, you wish you had a car designed for you as a disabled person because the community doesn't treat us fairly.

"I think it's appropriate for the government to provide transportation from home to work and back.

"The cars that we use should have proper seating arrangements to accommodate us as disabled people, as it's hard to use normal transport like everyone else," she says, adding that low steps on buses would also help.

Mkwanzani said there's a need for more societal respect. "Our community should respect us, love us and address us as human."

Echoing the same sentiments Nawe Zifunze Disabled Association (NAZIDI) chairperson, Bongani Gonya said there is a lack of inclusion of disabled persons in decision-making bodies.

"We understand that everything won't happen immediately. We need assistance, not sympathy. People must respect designated areas for disabled persons," said Gonya, adding that more disability awareness campaigns are pivotal in educating the community.

Loosely translated, 'nawe zifunze' means 'you are capable of doing it yourself' in isiZulu, and Mdamba acknowledged their support in securing employment.

uMhlathuze Municipality connected with the NAZIDI group which was doing handicraft work, enrolling them in college which has led to jobs in uMhlathuze Municipality, King Cetshwayo District Municipality, and



Despite her challenges with limited public transport, Nomusa Mkwanzani retains a curiosity for exploring her environment

the library.

This forms part of the government's 7% disability employment initiative.

"I really wish it could continue that way, for us to be hired because we are all people and we're all equal. We only differ by the way we walk," concluded Mdamba.



Zamanjeke Mdamba navigating her daily commute in a wheelchair, involving multiple transfers and assistance from her son and colleague, due to the inaccessibility of wheelchairs on public transport

Quality remains key for Richards Bay Clean Air Association

Dave Savides

AIR quality monitoring over the year 2023 was severely affected by several incidences.

This was unpacked during a presentation at the AGM of the Richards Bay Clean Air Association, held at the Blue Marlin Guesthouse on Friday.

Lance Coetzee of consultants Air Impact Measurement Specialists, said the effect of the Russian-Ukraine conflict, resulting in increased coal demand, coupled with the collapse of Transnet Freight Rail and subsequent influx of dust-generating trucks, were reflected on the pollution statistics.

This was exacerbated by the lack of effective dust mitigation measures during coal stockpiling and handling operations by Transnet Port Terminals (TPT).

The massive woodchip stockpile fire at NCT resulted in significant air and water pollution, although the 'open and transparent manner, with a high level of cooperation with all authorities' was commended.

There were a large number of lost monitoring days.

"One of the significant causes of data loss and damage to instrumentation is power outages, including load-shedding," said Coetzee.

"In 2023, South Africa experienced a severe power supply crisis, resulting in a staggering 332 days of load-shedding; this was a significant increase from 205 days in 2022, indicating a deepening energy crisis within Eskom, the national power utility.

"Out of these 332 days, a record-breaking 74 days saw Stage 6 load-shedding, the most severe level. The increase in load-shedding was primarily a result of breakdowns in power generation units, inefficiencies at critical stations, corruption, and criminal elements in Eskom."

A total of 198 air quality complaints were received during 2023, compared to the 875 logged in 2022.

Following an informal presentation on how the association was formed and

grew, new members were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the history and workings of the RBCAA.

Proud history

RBCAA managing director Candice Webb, outlined in her annual report the many involvements of the body over the past year.

She congratulated the Special Projects Committee on their outstanding achievement of both obtaining and maintaining ISO 9001:2015 certification over the year in review.

"The committee works tirelessly, compiling, and reviewing documentation, often after hours to ensure the RBCAA maintains compliance to the standard.

"ISO 9001 certification assures our members, stakeholders, authorities, and our community that the RBCAA strives to consistently provide high-quality data and service.

"The quality of work and data remain our key asset as it is an important tool for

improving air quality, protecting public health, and ensuring compliance with regulations. It is also used by our members to identify pollution sources and support research and development," said Webb.

"The key functions of the RBCAA remain to: ensure access to a wide and well-maintained, real-time ambient data network; give access to real-time air quality data for both our members and the public; provide expertise in understanding cumulative air quality impacts; serve as an independent monitoring body, with high support from the regulators; collaborate and host a complaints handling system."

During the AGM, the incoming Board of Directors was elected: Corporate - South 32, Foskor, RBM, Mondi and RBCT; Non-corporate - Zululand Fire Protection Association (public member) and Founder Member Sandy Camminga.

The Zululand Observer was acknowledged for its part in highlighting air quality issues and supporting the work of the RBCAA.



The AGM was extremely well attended by the city's major industries and role players