

## THE WEEKEND READER

“Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Social & Economic Justice”

5/6/22

### Harare’s Public Transport Sector: A Monumental Crisis for Citizens



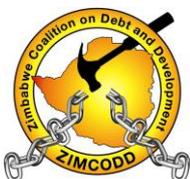
(Photo Cred: Chris Muronzi)

The current status of the Public Transport sector in Zimbabwe can only be described as being in crisis, unfortunately, to the detriment of citizens. While the government continually announces arrival or commissioning of new buses for Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO), the situation on the ground tells a different story. Furthermore, these challenges do not exist in isolation as additional difficulties such as the ever-increasing cost of living, fuel price increases, armed robberies and the COVID-19 risk create a discouraging context. As a result, citizens have continually called on government to resolve this crisis or revert to the old arrangement where private players were also allowed into the market (with regulation) and relieve the burden on ZUPCO.

The Government of Zimbabwe imposed a ban on ‘kombis’ in 2020 as part of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. Since then, there is now a commitment to completely phase out kombis with interested private players registering under ZUPCO to operate. ZUPCO may have been able to fill the gap during the lockdown period but now, they are overwhelmed. Currently, 890 ZUPCO affiliated kombis and buses are operating in Harare versus a 2018 figure of 10 000 kombis<sup>2</sup>. The difference is too significant especially considering the need to ferry millions of people. While benefits are derived in decongesting the city centre, citizens are left to queue for hours on end and also resorting to

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/blow-for-kombi-operators-as-govt-imposes-total-ban/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.herald.co.zw/why-harare-kombi-plan-failed/>



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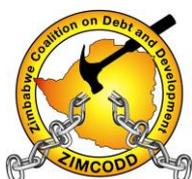
'Mushikashika' (private illegal transporters) whose operation in itself creates safety concerns for citizens.

The increased regulation of public transport and monopoly of ZUPCO has created a pandemic in the form of Mushikashika who are illegal private transporters plying majority of routes in Harare. Due to their lack of regulation, Mushikashika have exposed citizens to ever-growing safety concerns due to a lack of limited ferrying options. There are increasing reports of armed robberies, theft and sexual assaults as reported in The Sunday Mail of 27 April 2022.<sup>3</sup> Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has committed to a 'blitz' against this crisis which has however resulted in furthered challenges to citizens. Due to the ZRP action against Mushikashika, fares have been hiked on most routes while now only accepting USD payments. As is usual, citizens are left to bear the negative effects of the decisions made by the state.



As shown in the graphic above, multiple press houses have reported the arrival of buses into the country on different occasions. There is an inconsistency on the ground however, as ZUPCO CEO, Mr Everisto Madangwa states that only 445 buses are covering Harare routes. This then begs the question, "How Far nemabhazi?" Granted, there are other provinces receiving the same buses but coupled with the already existing line of buses ZUPCO had, the figures do not tally. Beyond the declarations to the press, citizen's lives should not be disrupted and government should act towards a lasting solution.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/new-blitz-targets-mushika-shika>

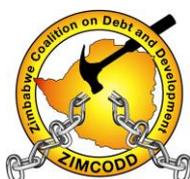


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The situation is also worsened by the runaway exchange rate of the ZWL- Greenback which is eroding incomes and making it harder for citizens to put together transport fares. While the latest results from the Foreign Exchange Auction (3<sup>rd</sup> May 2022) declared a weighted average rate of US\$1: ZWL 165.9942, the parallel market is trading between ZWL 360- 420. This glaring difference has a negative effect on the livelihoods of citizens as prices for basic goods continue to rise. Furthermore, the actual value of ZWL income continues to be eroded by the inflation and this highly unstable exchange rate. Citizens are left struggling for fares from ever dwindling incomes while government hasn't addressed this exchange rate discrepancy.

The fact that the public transport sector is in crisis cannot be disputed. Citizens are left struggling against rising fares, safety concerns and lest it be forgotten, the risk of contracting COVID-19 in these long queues. This scenario requires decisive action from government to alleviate the impact on Zimbabwean livelihoods. The Local Government Minister and other responsible authorities should immediately address this crisis with the deserved urgency. Government policy should protect rather than threaten livelihoods! In that light, the following policy positions are recommended:

- Dissolution of ZUPCO's monopoly and reintroduction of private players (kombis) in the public transport sector.
- Creation of regulatory associations specific to provinces or routes (reporting to local authorities/ council).
- Strict enforcement of routing, pick and drop locations to curb congestion in the CBD.



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