**Media Release**

**eThekwini Municipality launches new Dial-A-Ride Vehicles for People with Disabilities**

The eThekwini Municipal Mayor, Councillor James Nxumalo, launched twelve custom-designed and specially adapted midibus type vehicles for the City’s Dial-A-Ride fleet, a demand responsive public transport service for People with Disabilities (PWDs).

The service, was introduced in 2011, as the Ethekwini Municipality’s initiative and response to the access and mobility needs for People with Disabilities. The project was initiated in line with National Government’s goal to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their participation in the economy. “Public transport in South Africa, has been a limiting factor for PWD’s employment, and how they access health care, and community and social spaces,” said Cllr Nxumalo.

The sad reality that still needs to be addressed is that the existing majority public transport services (rail, minibus taxis and buses) are not meeting the needs of persons with disabilities and special needs passengers. As a result, the majority of people with disabilities are excluded / have difficulty in terms of access and mobility and have to incur huge costs for transport services.

In response to this, and given that the revision of the country’s public transport policies were in the process of being done at the time, the City introduced the service as an interim measure to address immediate needs. Now approximately 3 500 people are registered for the service, with 12 buses carrying about 2 400 passengers per month. This door-to-door transport service has been prioritized for people needing to get to places of employment at peak times, and for those needing to get to clinics, social, religious and other trips during off-peak times. It is also used for special hire and in some cases for special events transport for PWD’s.

The Dial-A-Ride model, which is heavily subsidized by the City, was developed in conjunction with organizations representing people with disabilities, and through close consultation with them, a registration process was used to prioritize it for people needing to access their places of employment in order to promote participation of people with disabilities in the employment.

The new buses are able to take between 5 and 7 wheelchairs, as well as those on crutches in fixed seats. The buses are specially adapted with hydraulic lifts and are SABS approved to ensure safety. As a standard training procedure, drivers and other operational staff from Vukasambe Investments, the company contracted to operate the service, go through a customer-care programme to deal with people with disabilities.

To further support the demand, the City currently has 3 Sukuma buses, which are designed to take wheelchairs, and to transport people with other special needs on fixed routes.

“The 2012 Census figures revealed that the eThekwini Municipality has about ten thousand (10 000) people living with disabilities,” explained Cllr Nxumalo. “It is therefore critical that we have plans in place to provide reasonable support to enable their independence and meaningful integration into community life.”

Going forward, the City’s Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network, GO!Durban, has made provision for PWD’s through universal access (UA) design of all the infrastructure (stops, stations and vehicles). UA is essentially the way in which a public transport system enables all the people of a city to reach their destinations, whether they are in wheelchairs, on bicycles or on foot. It is a means of creating transportation equity. This then supports people’s independence and ultimately helps make a city more liveable.

The GO!Durban facilities will be designed to allow safe travel by young, old, and disabled persons who have diminished visual, auditory or ambulatory abilities. For example, stations will be designed with ramps, access to buses will be level, there will be auditory and visual cues for those with visual and hearing disabilities, and priority seating and spaces will be provided for people in wheelchairs.

“Through design of the new network using UA principles, more people will be able to use the system independently, freeing up our paratransit services, like Dial-A-Ride to people who have needs which preclude them from using public transport at all,” said Cllr Nxumalo.

“With our vision to be Africa’s most caring and liveable city by 2030, the provision of universal access is a priority. The Dial-A-Ride service provides an efficient and safe interim measure as we forge ahead with our plans for GO!Durban which will provide a seamless and affordable transport experience for our citizens.”

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