



Public Policy in Africa
Initiative

Reimagining Nakuru's Urban Mobility: The Transformative Value of Just and Sustainable Urbanization in Socially Just Public Transport

Reimagining Nakuru's Urban Mobility: **The Transformative Value of Just and Sustainable Urbanization in Socially Just Public Transport**

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This paper was developed under and supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Kenya. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial advisers, The Public Policy in Africa Initiative and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

We wish to thank the following reviewer: Dr. Phemelo Tamasiga.

Particular thanks are due to Dr. Kenneth Nsah for editing this article.

Executive Summary

Nakuru's strong commitment to sustainable urbanization, guided by the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (NUA) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, positions it at the forefront of urban development. In this context, questions arise regarding how Nakuru can domesticate NUA and SDG 11 for sustainable development and also become a more just place for its citizens. This paper introduces socially just urban mobility as a transformative force which can harness the values of sustainable urbanization by linking them to the Just City principles. Specifically, it shows how socially just public transport can optimize the city's social and intangible values through fostering public participation, inclusivity, urban governance, and management. The paper highlights the Just City's outstanding potential to domesticate NUA and SDG 11 for a just and sustainable Nakuru. It presents six policy recommendations with which the city can reimagine its urban mobility through socially just public transport into a more citizen-centered, democratic, and just space.

Nakuru, home to over 400,000 people and the fourth largest city in Kenya, is at the forefront of addressing urban challenges in Africa. After Nakuru has embarked on an innovative strategy to become a model city which enhances quality of life and economic prosperity for residents (FES, 2022), its agenda of sustainable urbanization is now triggering the city to reimagine urban regeneration. Nakuru's determination is reflected in a continuous commitment to the United Nations (UN) New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11. Achieving the targets of NUA and SDG 11 is expected to foster sustainable urbanization through cultivating a city's economic, environmental, social, and intangible values (UN-Habitat, 2020); hence, domesticating them has become a key objective for Nakuru.

Doing so, however, is a challenge. Not only is the very meaning of sustainable urbanization put forward by NUA and SDG 11 hard to decipher, but it also remains unclear if such a "model city" transformation would make Nakuru more just. As of now, millions of Africans move into cities where urban benefits are not shared equally, leaving many city dwellers "invisible" and "unheard" (Wasonga et al., 2022). In an overriding perspective, this raises the question of how Nakuru can domesticate NUA and SDG 11 for sustainable development and also become a more equitable place for the majority of citizens and not only the wealthy few.

The Just City, a conceptual framework which promotes just urbanization, helps to tackle this issue (FES, 2020). The Just City argues that an optimization of a city's social and intangible values put forward by NUA and SDG 11 is possible in an environment which promotes dignity, equity and diversity, rights and responsibilities, and democracy – the Just City principles. To reimagine urban regeneration, the Just City implies that Nakuru must target areas where transformation cannot only boost sustainable and just change.

Such an area is urban mobility (FES, 2020; Haas, 2022; López-García, 2022). In Nakuru, over 400,000 people rely on transport to perform their everyday tasks. On the employment side, the mobility sector accommodates a large proportion of local wage earners in the city (County Government of Nakuru, 2018). Urban mobility also influences Nakuru's local economy and key sectors. For instance, the productivity of the city's strong agriculture industry is heavily dependent on transport systems which move goods and workforce efficiently. Nakuru's ever growing tourism, another main source of income, relies on diversified means of transport which are safe, reliable and easy to use. Although the impact of urban mobility on social and economic life is unequivocal, Nakuru's existing transport networks and services do not meet the needs of the sprawling city.

That said, it is clear that the lack of proper urban mobility affects Nakuru's economic, environmental, social and intangible values to enhance quality of life and economic prosperity for its residents (UN-Habitat, 2020). Under these conditions, domesticating NUA and SDG 11 in a just way is unlikely. This paper aims to address this issue. It argues that the Just City provides an ideal case that reimagining urban mobility in a socially just way can allow Nakuru to drive both sustainable and just urbanization. Since socially just urban mobility fosters "social economic empowerment for all" (Governor Susan Kihika, 2022, p. 2), it is key to put the city's vision of a "secure, cohesive and industrialized County" (County Government of Nakuru, 2018, p. ii) into reality. Against this background, the paper introduces socially just urban mobility as a transformative force which can harness the values of sustainable urbanization by linking them to the Just City principles. In particular, it argues that Nakuru's social and intangible values can be optimized through socially just public transport which promotes public participation, inclusivity, urban governance and inclusive/efficient urban management. Doing so, the paper highlights the Just City's ideal of public transport outstanding potential to domesticate NUA and SDG 11, allowing Nakuru to reimagine its urban mobility into a more citizen-centered, democratic, and just space.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: First, the concept of socially just urban mobility is described, incorporating the value intersections of sustainable urbanization and the Just City principles. Second, it shows how socially just public transport as a manifestation of socially just urban mobility can optimize the social and intangible values of sustainable urbanization. Finally, six policy recommendations are presented with the aim of enabling Nakuru to harness its urban mobility potential.

2.

The Transformative Value of Socially Just Urban Mobility

In the recent years, the rapid growth of African cities has shifted the focus of sustainable urbanization to intermediary cities of 50,000 to 1 million inhabitants (Wasonga et al., 2022). Given their unique scale, spatial distribution, and consumption patterns, cities like Nakuru hold the promise to provide a more inclusive, safe, and resilient urbanism which could also trickle down to a more citizen-centered urban mobility.

To date, investments in Nakuru's urban mobility are skyrocketing, yet their impact is far from being transformative. For instance, in the period 2013 to 2017 Nakuru graded and graveled 4000 km of roads and installed over 1000 streetlights (County Government of Nakuru, 2018). While these efforts are needed to build a comprehensive mobility ecosystem, they exemplify Nakuru's heavy focus on road infrastructure which often does not solve traffic issues, but incentivizes private vehicle use, which now makes 6 % of the used transport modes in Nakuru. In contrast to that, over 60 % of urban mobility in Nakuru is done by foot, mostly by women and members of low-income households (County Government of Nakuru, 2018). Nakuru's urban mobility efforts have been mainly targeting motorized, high-cost transport at the expense of non-motorized mobility and public transport. As a result, city movement is a luxury which puts most city dwellers at a disadvantage, an issue that causes spillover effects to the local economy, environment, and citizens' social welfare. It shows a neglect of citizen-centered urban mobility that hinders Nakuru to unlock its full potential, being constantly pressured by safety issues, pollution, heavy traffic, and dissatisfied citizens.

To change this, socially just urban mobility can be a tool of choice. Socially just urban mobility links the values of sustainable urbanization put forward by NUA and SDG 11 to the Just City principles of dignity, equity and diversity, rights and responsibilities, and democracy. Their specific intersection revolves around the social and intangible values of a city: Social values embrace quality of life (dignity) and inclusivity and equity (equity and diversity); intangible values embrace governance systems, urban culture (rights and responsibilities) and urban policy coherence (democracy). Using this link as a transformative force, socially just urban mobility aims for more than just "improving the transport network" (County Government of Nakuru, 2018, p. xix). Instead, it acknowledges that urban mobility is not only about infrastructure, but rather comprised more broadly of the actors who design it, the workers who operate it and the citizens who depend on it (Haas, 2022).

A concrete way to reimagine how socially just urban mobility can look like in Nakuru provides the Just City model of socially just public transport (SJPT) (FES, 2020). Although there is no minimum standard of SJPT, its main goal is to ensure that it serves citizens irrespective of their background. SJPT holds promise to provide manifold positive externalities, such as a seamless and affordable connection between people, their homes and workplaces, a decent work environment, a non-discriminatory access and routing for passengers, local ownership, economic growth, and environmental benefits (Haas, 2022). SJPT can bring these externalities to Nakuru. It does so by internalizing five key pillars informed by the Just City principles:

- **Availability:** SJPT is available, adequate, and convenient for all users, including vulnerable groups. It offers different forms of transport infrastructure and enhances intermodal connectivity within major urban areas and their environs (UN, 2016). For instance, SJPT provides last-mile connectivity, alternative safe transport modes, adequate modal integration, and reliable fleet schedules that result in less travel time (FES, 2020). This allows all members of the public to participate in urban life.
- **Accessibility and Affordability:** Providing accessible and affordable public transport is crucial for establishing inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, as target 2 of SDG 11 suggests. SJPT is a pathway to realize this goal and ensures safe and affordable access for all users, including persons with disabilities (PWDs), the sick, children, (pregnant) women, the poor and the elderly. Additionally, SJPT also makes provisions that protect female users from sexual harassment, for instance by providing reporting mechanisms, such as hotline numbers or digital reporting platforms (Flone Initiative, 2023; UN Women, 2021). To enhance fairness and accountability, SJPT offers regulated and standardized fare charges, and displays information on routes and fares in accessible places of the city.

- **Inclusivity:** In line with the SDG 10 principle that no one should be left behind, SJPT strives for inclusion and reduction of inequality. An inclusive public transport system provides user-friendly information (e.g., through different display formats), adequate space for different categories of users (e.g., reserved seats for physically challenged), and involves different stakeholders in the planning, design and implementation of urban mobility policies and projects in the city, allowing them to take part in urban governance and management (Flone Initiative, 2023). In SJPT marginalized members of society are considered in public transport investment, operation, regulation, and enforcement to ensure socially just elements are incorporated in urban mobility.
- **Human Rights and Equity:** Freedom of movement is a human right that is also enabled through public transport. SJPT ensures that all users have equal access to mobility and their individual transport needs are not limited by insecurity, lack of privacy or failure to uphold human dignity (López-García, 2022). The government and service providers must offer safe and dignified transport that does not discriminate users. For SJPT, the government needs to allocate budgetary resources to create an enabling urban mobility environment which also allows for equal access to employment opportunities. Measures to deter discrimination and all forms of abuse, violence, and harassment towards users and providers should be in place. In a nutshell, SJPT grants citizens freedom of movement since every passenger can choose from different travel options, settle on the preferred transport mode, and move freely without interference.
- **Sustainability:** While SJPT is indispensable to meet SDG 11, it is also a pathway to address SDG 13 on combating climate change and cultivating a city's resilience (Life & Peace Institute, 2022; UN, 2016). Urban mobility is linked to global warming, with the current greenhouse gas emissions from this sector in Kenya estimated at 15 %, most of this from major cities like Nakuru (FES, 2020). To compensate this, SJPT considers climate change challenges. For instance, SJPT planning and operation involves the protection of road reserves, regulation of public spaces, reducing air and noise pollution, promoting of affordable clean energy solutions, encouraging non-motorized transport, expanding greenery, adopting mixed land-use approaches, and incentivizing its use as an alternative mode of transport to private vehicles.

This way SJPT becomes a core element of a city's resilience in the face of global warming, leveraging it to a central instrument of urban governance and management to combat, mitigate and adapt to climate change. SJPT – being an explicit manifestation of socially just urban mobility – can be a powerful tool to reimagine Nakuru's urban mobility at the forefront of public awareness. While SJPT speaks to local economic, social, and environmental policy objectives (County Government of Nakuru, 2018; FES, 2022; Governor Susan Kihika, 2022), its intersection of the values of sustainable urbanization and the Just City principles can be a key transformative force to domesticate NUA and SDG 11 in Nakuru (Wasonga et al., 2022).

3.

Social Value and the Just City in Socially Just Public Transport: Public Participation and Inclusivity

To illustrate that SJPT can domesticate the social value of sustainable urbanization in Nakuru's urban mobility, this paper isolates public participation and inclusivity as positive externalities SJPT can bring. Inclusivity refers to the possibility of participating in society on a basis of diversity and dignity, particularly for disadvantaged people, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights (UN DESA, 2016). Public participation is the process by which the interested or affected public are involved in planning and decision-making, allowing citizens to have an equitable right of speech and action in urban matters concerning their quality of life (Aletta & Xiao, 2018). When public transport is socially just, it fosters public participation and inclusivity as integral elements of the social value by:

- Connecting citizens to the city without delay and discrimination;
- Being safe, secure and affordable, particularly to low-income earners;
- Leaving no one behind as it actively considers and involves PWDs, the sick, children, (pregnant) women and the elderly in planning and design;
- Being non-discriminatory in terms of routing/access and by offering decent labor standards to workers. Like in other parts of Africa, Nakuru's public transport system is largely informal and private. Most public transport is run on a commercial basis by providing individualized rides without fixed routes or timetables, also known as paratransit or Matatus.

Their operation comes along with various challenges (Haas, 2022). As regulation of paratransit across Kenya has been difficult due to the clout of Matatu owners, corruption and conflict of interests on ownership level, passenger safety and work standards have been a constant issue in this sector (Mungai, 2013). The proliferation of small private vehicles on the road and lack of proper public transport, e.g., buses, or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), also contributes to Nakuru's heavy traffic congestion and high levels of urban pollution (FES, 2022), particularly since most of the existing transport vehicles do not comply with emissions standards. While this makes travelling in Nakuru time-consuming, expensive and puts workers and citizens at risk of psychological and physiological stress, some user groups are more predisposed to these issues than others (Flone Initiative, 2023).

In this sense, PWDs, the sick, the elderly, children but also women and men in general experience public transport in Nakuru differently. As "urban invisibles", the physically challenged and disadvantaged citizens live a life of unfulfilled hopes and challenges in the city (FES, 2020; Flone Initiative, 2023).

For instance, sexual violence and other forms of harassment affect women's mobility in urban areas which severely impacts their contribution to the local economy (UN Women, 2021). Particularly, women have reason to feel unsafe in urban mobility spaces due to poor infrastructure (e.g., insufficient lighting, lack of sanitation), inadequate public transport itineraries (e.g., lack of bus stops), woman-unfriendly zoning laws (e.g., difficulty for women to balance domestic and income-earning duties due to spatial distance) and lack of childcare at work (FES, 2020). PWDs, as another example, face similar challenges in accessing transport due to a lack of level boarding possibilities, directional indicators, robust public transport information and the like. Discriminatory barriers like these make groups at disadvantage travel less and rely more on ineffective modes of transport

such as walking, for which many low-income citizens must opt anyway in the ever-growing city of Nakuru. The issues described are not exhaustive, yet they show that urban mobility in Nakuru is highly exclusive and public participation limited. Hence, urban mobility in Nakuru is neither just nor sustainable. Public participation and inclusivity among citizens is key to improve a city's quality of life and economic prosperity as the NUA and SDG 11 demand. The following case study illustrates how a successful development of SJPT can boost urbanization through domesticating the social value in Nakuru.

In 2021, the Nakuru city mobility catalytic project made it on the county government's agenda to improve mobility and access to transport, specifically for socially disadvantaged groups. The project includes plans on relocating bus stops from the CBD to the outskirts of the city, introducing BRT along mass transit routes, creating car-free zones and greening the town. Part of this project is also the development of a non-motorized transportation system, financed by the World Bank with 471 million KES. A SJPT Working Group was engaged from the outset in the design phase. With the conceptual development of separate motorbike tracks, bicycle lanes, Matatu stations, and 22 km of walkways, the Just City principles and five pillars of SJPT have been operationalized and harnessed through World Bank funding. Given that socially disadvantaged groups were considered and consulted as key actors in the transport system, the project could optimize the social value, fostering public participation and inclusivity in Nakuru's urban mobility.

4.

Intangible Value and the Just City in Socially Just Public Transport: Urban Governance and Management

To achieve social value in a city, the intangible value of sustainable urbanization reflected in institutions which respect the rule of law, rights, responsibilities, and democratic governance is indispensable. To illustrate that SJPT can also domesticate the intangible value in Nakuru's urban mobility, this paper now turns to how SJPT can improve urban governance and management in the city.

The paper acknowledges mobility as one of the basic objects of good urban governance, which should aim to promote rights-based movement/accessibility, increase the quality of transport services, and strive for a healthy balance between social and economic returns in public transport (FES, 2020). Urban management on the other hand is "concerned with the policies, plans, programs, and practices that seek to ensure that population growth is matched by access to basic infrastructure, shelter, and employment" (Davey, 1993, p. 1). SJPT can help manage urban mobility in a growing city whilst accounting for unique local conditions in a democratic and responsible way. When public transport is socially just, it can improve urban governance and management as integral elements of the intangible value by:

- Making city decision- and policy-making processes on urban mobility more citizen- and less business-centered, particularly as it strengthens accountability and public participation in transport matters;
- Allocating public and private resources on urban mobility in a way which acknowledges the need of a growing city whilst promoting local community and participatory support;
- Managing sustainable and just economic development through an effective, affordable, and inclusive movement of people from one location to the other.

From a governance perspective, mobility is essential in advancing the rights of the populace to exercise their responsibilities in different spatial locations and jurisdictions across the city (FES, 2020; Haas, 2022). Urban mobility as part of urban governance in Nakuru reflects the involvement of a wide range of actors which have different interests, resources, and levels of power. According to UN-Habitat, the intangible value of sustainable urbanization can only be met if urban decision-making systems and structures are broken loose and made responsive and accountable to the broader section of civil society (UN-Habitat, 2020). To achieve this in Nakuru, new modes of participatory governance must be introduced alongside transport policy programs, for which SJPT, designed by and run for the majority and not the wealthy few, can be a key catalyst.

An effective SJPT is also capable to cultivate better urban management practices. As outlined already, many intermediary cities like Nakuru face challenges to provide new and adjust existing urban transport solutions to the needs of their sprawling population.

By prioritizing SJPT across all levels of policy-making, Nakuru can channel investment into sustainable and just mobility planning, design and infrastructure; in turn this gives citizens the opportunity to exercise their movement/accessibility rights freely and engage with their city through a more responsible, eye-to-eye interface. For Nakuru, it will be essential to combine such a policy-coherence on SJPT with a local approach that accounts for the city's unique conditions, e.g., the crucial role of its agriculture industry, its flourishing tourism

or its special ecology surrounding the city (FES, 2022). A successfully implemented SJPT which addresses the unique urban diversity can help build and manage local ownership and urban culture which Nakuru's citizens can identify with.

To domesticate the intangible value of the NUA and SDG 11, SJPT, as it levels up urban governance and management, is indispensable. It helps to accelerate the ability of Nakuru's government in meeting the diverse needs of urban residents whilst managing their rising numbers in an economically sensible way that accounts for local specifics. The following case study illustrates how a successful development of SJPT to domesticate the intangible value can look like.

In 2020, a SJPT Working Group was approached by Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS) to consult on the development of a terminus at Desai and Park Road in Ngara Area. As part of the project the five SJPT pillars were tested and implemented in the design phase. The working group did site visits, key informant interviews and analyzed terminus designs provided by NMS. They compiled this information in a report in 2020 and reevaluated the progress of the undertaking in 2022 with pertinent recommendations, e.g., regarding the provision of wider pedestrian paths, more cycling lanes, and waste management systems. The engagement informed NMS' urban governance and management practices from the outset to prioritize citizen-centered approaches which account for local peculiarities in Nairobi.

5.

Reimagining Nakuru's Urban Mobility: The Way Forward

Nakuru's commitment to NUA and SDG 11, envisioning a city that fosters the quality of life of its residents and economic prosperity, is gaining momentum. This paper illustrated the transformative value SJPT can bring to accelerate Nakuru's ambitions in the urban mobility context. While current progress in the city suggests that achieving sustainable and just urbanization will require tremendous efforts. An injection of the Just City principles into the governance, management, and planning practices of Nakuru presents an opportunity to be tackled. The intersection between the social value [quality of life (dignity), inclusivity and equity (equity and diversity)], intangible value [governance systems, urban culture (rights and responsibilities) and urban policy coherence (democracy)] and the Just City model of SJTP can be a key catalyst for greater progress towards domesticating sustainable and just urbanization in Nakuru.

This paper argues that SJPT must become a priority area for Nakuru. While a functioning SJPT will come along with costs, the social returns and positive externalities preponderate, because SJPT enhances public participation, inclusivity, urban governance, and inclusive/efficient urban management. This paper proposes six policy recommendations that can allow Nakuru to reimagine and transform urban mobility.

Proposals on how Nakuru can domesticate the social value of sustainable urbanization through SJPT:

- 1. Make Sure Public Transport is Public:** To alter power relations and promote equity in Nakuru's urban mobility, the government should be directly involved in public transport ownership. Nakuru must provide more means of public transport, especially BRTs. A BRT is a high-capacity bus-based transit system which operates on a dedicated road lane (Haas, 2022). BRTs come with high construction costs and may pose a threat to existing paratransit solutions in the city, yet they are relatively cheap to run and easy to adjust to the needs of a growing urban area. BRTs in Nakuru must ensure not to replace paratransit solutions since these constitute an important source of employment and transport option for last mile routes of citizens.
- 2. Build an Urban Mobility System that is Sustainable:** To increase quality of life and city resilience, Nakuru should design an urban mobility system which is environmentally sustainable. Nakuru must adopt measures to reduce air and noise pollution caused by motorized transport. This includes economically incentivizing citizens to use non-motorized and public transport (e.g., toll roads), increasing greenery, reducing travel hours and distance through adoption of mixed land-use approaches in urban planning or introducing electric buses as part of a BRT system.
- 3. Leave No One Behind in Urban Mobility:** To strengthen inclusivity and public participation, public transport in Nakuru should take the needs of "urban invisibles" into consideration. For instance, Nakuru must install streetlights at bus and train stops, ramps, tactile guides, warning strips, protected passenger areas, emergency hotlines or other forms of reporting mechanisms to identify incidents of gender-based violence. Further, as urban mobility is a significant provider of employment in Nakuru, decent work is key

to uplifting livelihoods across the city's population. This requires Nakuru to make the sector respect the principles and rights to work, such as stipulated in ILO's Recommendation No. 204 of 2015.

Proposals on how Nakuru can domesticate the intangible value of sustainable urbanization through SJPT:

- 4. Position the Government as Central Public Transport Regulator:** Nakuru's government must provide transparent governance systems, regulations and proper enforcement mechanisms that ensure compliance by transport providers, operators, and users in line with the socially just pillars of public transport. One such regulation must focus on standardized, non-discriminatory fare charges that cushion "urban invisibles". Nakuru's government must pay attention to the fact that transport under public ownership is an investment which cannot only be measured in economic returns, but social ones. Thus, it is the citizen and not profitability which should be at the core of governing and managing urban mobility in Nakuru.
- 5. Pay Heed to Local Context:** To build urban culture, local ownership, and participatory support among Nakuru's community, city representatives must consider the local context during conceptualization, planning and implementation of public transport. Specifically, city-wide issues such as drug and alcohol abuse among the youth and competing interests between communities, but also the vital role of agriculture, tourism and the ecology surrounding Nakuru, should be reflected in the city's urban mobility design.
- 6. Ensure a Multifaceted, Multi-Actor Approach in the Urban Mobility Policy Cycle:** To foster urban policy-coherence across levels, Nakuru should adopt a multifaceted, multi-actor approach to public transport policy formulation, planning and implementation that is informed by the input of "urban invisibles" and interest groups. Key stakeholders that should be included in all stages of the urban mobility policy cycle are user associations and civil society organizations, private transport providers, transport operators, national and international donor agencies and users. Specifically, civil society representatives should act as watchdogs to ensure public and private resources and investment are allocated in line with the pillars of SJPT.

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