

City steps up bus safety checks for annual exodus to Eastern Cape

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The City of Cape Town will, from 10 December until Christmas Eve, step up safety checks on buses departing to the Eastern Cape. But some bus drivers are annoyed by the inconvenience this causes at the busiest time of the year.



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The checks will take place at the "major public transport interchanges like Joe Gqabi in Philippi, Bellville, central Cape Town, and Mfuleni". There will also be "roaming vehicle checkpoints." About 45,000 people will leave from the Joe Gqabi bus facility to the Eastern Cape over the next few weeks, according to Brett Herron, Mayoral Committee Member of Transport for Cape Town.

Most of them are people who have moved to Cape Town's townships from the Eastern Cape, who are returning to family for the holidays. Herron says most are expected to travel between 10 and 23 December, amounting to over 3,000 people per day.

South Africa's road fatality statistics are confusing and out-of-date. Road deaths are estimated by the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), and the last year for which we can find data is 2011, when the RTMC estimated there were nearly 14,000 fatalities. At over 27 deaths per 100,000 people, South Africa had the worst road safety statistics of 37 countries reviewed in a 2013 road safety report published by the International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group.

Operators annoyed with extra checks

But the large number of additional checks annoys the chairperson of Bus Operators Committee in Joe Qabi, Nnodile Yekiwe.

Yekiwe says buses are legally required to have roadworthy tests twice a year. But the City checks buses more than twice a week at this time of the year and if a defect is found, the bus is forced to unload its passengers. Yekiwe says repair operations are often closed during the December holidays. Yekiwe says his organisation has appealed to the City to conduct its safety checks before the festive season.

Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security, JP Smith says the safety checks must be done during the festive season as these vehicles travel hundreds or thousands of kilometers per day at this time of year. Not only do these vehicles travel over long distances, they also carry loads which have an effect on the wear-and-tear of the vehicles, he says. Smith says drivers are asked to bring long-distance vehicles for a safety check before departure to identify possible mechanical defects.

"The bus operators must not view this negatively as a mechanism to curb their business, but rather as a safety precaution to prevent the loss of life or run the risk of receiving a fine or having their vehicles suspended or impounded," Smith says. To prevent delays along the journey, the bus is provided with a sticker showing that it has been checked, he says.

Thousands of people are travelling from Cape Town to the Eastern Cape at this time of the year.

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