

Cape Town's bursting trains

By [Mandla Mhyakama](#)

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According to the TomTom traffic index*, Cape Town is the most congested city in the country and 48th in the world, ahead of cities such as New York.

For rail commuters, the situation isn't much better, with trains overcrowded to the point of bursting and long delays. News agency, GroundUp, found people clinging from the outside to coaches and even locomotives. Some trains were only six coaches long.



Commuters climbing on a Khayelitsha-bound train. Photo: Mandla Mhyakama

Daphne Kayster, Western Cape PRASA (Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa) acting marketing and communication manager said the equivalent of 11 train sets were destroyed by arson between October 2015 and April 2017.

"Main reason for decrease in train performance"

"The main reason for the dramatic decrease in train performance is directly related to pressure on the fleet due to losses from train fires as well as vandalism to the infrastructure as a result of arson and community protests," she said.

"The demand for services far exceeds the available train supply as a result of decades of disinvestment in rail and unprecedented growth of informal settlements.

"The continuous theft or vandalism of assets, mainly cables and other metal bearing components has led to a situation where services have generally been unreliable and therefore not meeting customer expectations," said Kayster.

Commuters blame Metrorail

Commuters, however, blame Metrorail for the increasingly poor service, and reports of [corruption](#) and [mismanagement](#) in PRASA lend weight to their view.

GroundUp spoke to a number of commuters who said they arrived late for work and with winter arriving they returned home after dark making them vulnerable to criminals.

Mzwandile Cuba of Langa, 60 and a father of five, said it was often impossible for him to make it on time to work. "I usually caught a 7.17am Cape Town-bound-via-Pinelands train and changed at Maitland for my work at Elsies River."

But that train is now so overcrowded he has to wait for the next one. He says his employers do not understand his difficulty and have issued him with harsh warnings. He tried getting the earlier 7.20am train, but it was very often delayed.



Commuters climbing on a Khayelitsha-bound train. Photo by Mandla Mnyakama

Lucy Somtsewu, 41 of Gugulethu and a mother of two, travelled every weekday on a Cape Town-bound train for Mutual. She says the situation is now so bad that instead of her monthly R150 train ticket for Nyanga to Mutual Station she has to spend R32 a day on a taxi to get to work (R19 to Mutual and R13 for a return to Gugulethu).

Mavis Bhelesi, 58 and a mother of two, said it was usually only one day in a week that the trains were on time on her route of Nonkubela Station (Site B, Khayelitsha) to Bellville.

"I was normally supposed to catch a 6am train and start work at 8.30am, but I am compelled to catch an earlier train because of the serious delays," she said. "I have used trains for more than 30 years ... but the issue appears too appalling nowadays ... much worse since PRASA took over in the past few years."

"The company's personnel tell us to move to another transport mode every time we lodge complaints with them," she said.

*[Tom Tom traffic index](#).

Source: [GroundUp](#)

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