

# Traffic is a fact of life, but we can plan smarter

 By Cari Van Wyk

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TomTom recently released the results from the [TomTom Traffic Index 2016](#) which took a closer look at traffic congestion in cities around the world. The results saw Cape Town at the top of the list of most congested cities in South Africa. We asked TomTom traffic analyst, Jaap Schaapherder to shed some extra light on their findings.



The TomTom Team

■ ***The fact that Cape Town is the most traffic congested city in SA is surprising, especially since Johannesburg is notorious for its traffic. What contributes to Cape Town's traffic congestion and what did Johannesburg do right in alleviating theirs?***

**Jaap Schaapherder:** By looking at the TomTom Traffic Index figures we see that Cape Town passed Johannesburg as South Africa's most congested city in 2012. Before 2012, the additional time wasted in traffic was considerably higher in Johannesburg compared to Cape Town.

The arrival of the Gautrain services and the completion of the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project (GFIP) have considerably added to the reduction in congestion levels. Gauteng has seen a major growth in population over the last 10 years and while significant projects have been developed to control the congestions, we still see the traffic index growing which means that further projects need to be implemented.

■ ***TomTom said that this year you have done something different with the TomTom Traffic Index by giving cities the right to reply. Elaborate.***

**Schaapherder:** We've asked a select group of cities to provide an overview of what they are doing to improve mobility. We're very grateful to be able to include their input in this year's report and look forward to offering more cities an opportunity to provide their perspective in future years.

■ ***What effect does heavy traffic congestion in our cities have on the roads and the commuters?***

**Schaapherder:** The congestion level percentages represent the measured amount of extra travel time experienced by drivers across the entire year. This is in comparison to measured travel times during uncongested conditions. We calculate and report the overall congestion level (all day) and the morning and evening peak hour congestion levels for each city. To illustrate, an overall congestion level of 36% means that an average trip made takes 36% longer than it would under

uncongested conditions.

We take into account local roads, arterials, and highways. The sample size for each city is expressed in terms of total vehicle distance driven for the period. All data is based on actual GPS measurements from TomTom's historical traffic database.

All these drivers wasting time in traffic has an impact on GDP (Gross Domestic Product): more time on the road means less time spent creating value and goods are exchanged at a slower rate. It also means more fuel consumed hence more cost. More CO2 emissions. Congestion can also lead to more accidents and more road fatalities. Heavy congestion also contributes to poorer road conditions resulting in damaged surfaces and potholes.

▀ ***What can businesses do to free up travel time for their employees?***

**Schaapherder:** The TomTom Traffic Index is published to provide drivers, industry and policy makers with unbiased information about congestion levels in urban areas. We can help businesses plan smarter working hours to help their employees avoid travelling during rush hour. And we give drivers the real-time traffic information and smart routing they need to avoid congested roads and get to where they want to be, faster.

▀ ***How can we beat traffic congestion?***

**Schaapherder:** Traffic congestion is a fact of life for every driver. And as we reveal the latest Traffic Index results this year, we can see that the problem is not going away. We should not expect our transport authorities to simply 'build away' congestion. Studies have shown over the years that building new motorways or freeways does not eliminate congestion.

At TomTom, we're excited about the paradigm shift that we're seeing reflected by many governments' attitudes to transforming our cities globally. They're managing congestion with clever, sustainable policies – such as better public transport infrastructure, investment in cycling and walking initiatives, and ambitious policies pointing to the future of automated driving.

But, in the meantime, what can you do to avoid congestion? How can you avoid the jams on your daily commute?

Here are my five top tips for beating congestion, and getting to where you want to be, faster.

1. Use real-time traffic and dynamic navigation while driving.
2. Dare to follow a new route suggested by your navigation system.
3. Look at the traffic situation before you depart.
4. Consider a different departure time to avoid typical peaks
5. Consider other modes of travel – maybe the fastest way to get to work is by bike, on public transport, or even by foot.

■ ***What kind of information do the “Profile Cities” section provide and to whom is the information most relevant. Who do you see using it and who should be using it?***

**Schaapherder:** The [Profile Cities](#) offer commuters and businesses relevant details of projects and upgrades happening on their road network. We encourage every road user in and around a Profile City to regularly visit this site and familiarise themselves with the relevant road works and improvements.

## ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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