

## **NPTR – The Problem**

### **What's the problem?**

The NPTR crisis goes back many years and has nothing to do with the COVID pandemic. Since the end of 2019 there has been no functioning board. Tour operators who have applied for new operating licences in July 2019 are still waiting.

Before 2019, when the NPTR still had a functioning board, the situation was not much better.

The National Land Transport Act (5) of 2009 and accompanying Transport Regulations specify the turnaround times for applications should be no longer than 60 days. Once accredited, operators are supposed to qualify automatically to get their vehicle permits – a process not supposed to take more than a day.

The NPTR never meets these turnaround times and even when there was a board, waiting between 6-12 months was the norm. Waiting longer than a year or even two years for a simple operating license is common.

By order of the incompetent individuals who oversee the NPTR and chair the board, the process of applying for and obtaining operating licenses for tourist vehicles has become far more complex than the law requires it to be.

Overstepping its mandate and stuck in a public transport paradigm because of their taxi industry roots, the NPTR make up their own rules and ask for dozens of irrelevant documents which are not required by the Act and have little to do with safety.

It takes many months to obtain a simple renewal, because contrary to what the Act requires, the NPTR insists on advertising every application in the government gazette, and adjudicating every single application (even renewal applications from accredited operators) at a board hearing which is only convened a few times a year.

Understaffed and poorly resourced, the NPTR adjudicates all the applications from tourist operators from every province through one dysfunctional national office, causing an immense bottle neck.

In addition, applications and documents routinely go missing. Several applications have had to be resent multiple times. Follow up is impossible because phones and emails routinely go unanswered.

At a recent meeting, an NPTR representative admitted that over 500 applications are currently outstanding. That's quite a backlog representing many potential job losses and millions of rand of lost tourism revenue. Indeed, at least five operators have already had to close down.

### **The impact to tourism**

The NPTR is sabotaging the recovery and growth of this crucial industry, which employs 1.5 million people and generates close to 10% of our GDP. The tourism industry has been devastated by the global pandemic, and operators like Bongani are unable to recover and bounce back once international tourists start to return, because the NPTR is completely unable to fulfil its mandate.

SATSA has also engaged multiple times with the NPTR (to no avail) and reached out to senior officials at the Depts of Tourism and Transport to resolve the matter amicably, through dialogue.

Practical, workable solutions have been proposed. All these efforts have fallen on deaf and unwilling ears. Some senior officials with the power to effect change have reacted with outright contempt, and failed miserably in their function as servant of the people.

The obvious solution to this would be to disband the entire NPTR and management with immediate effect, and to instruct the Minister of Transport to issue an immediate amnesty or moratorium on the requirement for tourist operators to be accredited or hold a valid operating license, until a new and better solution can be formulated and implemented, in collaboration with SATSA and other industry stakeholders.