

Words of Wisdom on African Transport

You arrive at a transport terminal station and have a simple question: When does the next car/bus/minibus/taxi/ (or other local word for public transport) leave?

Here is a translation of the answers you may hear:

Now-Now	=	In the next hour
Now	=	In the next two to three hours
Soon-Soon	=	This afternoon
Soon	=	Tomorrow
Later	=	Next week
Sometime	=	“Transport timings no understanding”
Anytime	=	♪Que sera, sera whatever will be, will be The future is not ours to see Que sera, sera♪

The answer “Now-now” is the most dangerous as it is a common ploy to get you to buy a ticket even if the vehicle is mostly empty and won’t leave for hours yet.

The most honest answer is “When it is full”; it is most common public transport option. The definition of ‘full’ fluctuates in space and time.

Should the transport originate elsewhere the most correct answer is “When it arrives” assuming that it can’t leave before it arrives though there is no guarantee that is the answer you’ll receive, how many people you need to trample to get on the transport, or how long it will wait – as the time given is when it is supposed to arrive usually bears little relationship to when it actually arrives or might depart. That the engine is running only indicates the driver isn’t paying for the fuel.

Only drivers can fully comprehend the malleable elasticity of time and pliable bounciness of space in the abstruse formula (a proper formula compared to the over-simplistic wussy $e=mc^2$) that defines the real, virtual and potential relationships of SPACE (unit of a person with small packsack, child, chicken, goat, large basket with [semi]-liquid product, crate of smelly fish

and/or charcoal or other very heavy shapeless lumpy sack per transport space; the upper limit is measured the inconvenient necessity for people to have enough space to breathe, dead bodies are complicated), DISTANCE (modified by traffic density, driver lunacy, foolish livestock, seriousness of traffic crashes, type of road surface & if wet, density of road works [and if Chinese], density of potholes per km, pothole depth & if disguised under water, speed bumps, police and army checkpoints, on-the-road-repairs, seasonal rains and floods, road collapse or washed away, landslides, fallen rocks, earthquakes, bandits, guerrillas, volcanic eruptions, asteroid strikes, Armageddon), TIME and MONEY (profit = fares minus shares and deductions to mechanic, conductor, luggage boy, and legal & illegal expenses within the overarching paradigm: propensity to honesty cross-correlated with degrees of significance for the need for flight if driver unluckily kills a pedestrian, or more seriously, livestock or poultry).

In practice drivers specialize in one or the other depending on their country's legal/illegal tax and theoretical/actual maximum number regime and denoted in the formula as: $\sum \text{C}$; where power C^{C} = the politically trade-marked unreliable irregular imaginary incontinent variable bendy quantum purple polka dot constant.

In general, the more corrupt the country the more they are overloaded and the more they are inclined to try overcharging with 'special' foreigner price.

To keep and monitor maximum numbers in public transport requires a traffic force that is not corrupt and results in slightly cheaper fares and more vehicles with faster turnover. With less people, journey times are shorter and there is an incentive for drivers to maximize the number of journeys they make (by driving too fast) rather than the number of passengers that can be squeezed and squashed (unsafe and unhygienic) into a vehicle.

For shared taxis only when it is full can the luggage be finally loaded and packed as one never knows what the last person will bring. For long distances, this may take an hour combined with the allocation of the pre-collected fares divided between car owner, car agent, car park fees, taxi license fees, various labour and owners' organizations and protection to local criminals. In some countries the passenger pays local criminals directly for 'loading baggage'.

The driver gets the rest to cover all his expenses including illegal taxes to officials, legally dubious road taxes, and legal tax collection (legal according to the government who have their

own definitions to pay for jewellery for the wife, expensive education for the kids, apartments for mistresses, holidays in London, New York, Switzerland, Dubai, prosaic motorcades and all such necessary state expenses to uphold their divine right status).

The driver's one bonus is that he gets to keep the fares of anybody he picks up on the way as passengers reach their destinations. However, if the transport empties quicker than it fills than it can mean waiting around for it to fill up or worse transferred to another vehicle at some random junction and waiting even longer for it to fill up. You also have to ensure that your fare balance, if paid in advance, is transferred to the new driver.

If you are unwise enough to ask how long it takes?

Double what they say for a very rough estimate with a wide margin of error, alternatively halve it. One of the most useful of the many laws from the Traveller's Kit of Laws of Paranoia for Dummies says: Buy too much drink and food.

Even though you now know definitely when the bus leaves – because it has just left (though that may not be significant as it may spend the next hour or so wandering around in circles looking for passengers, or it may be just changing parking spaces, or both) – you can never predict when it will arrive. It's even a Malagasy proverb

As the Ugandan truck sign had it: **No Hurry in Africa**

Only be thankful it arrives with you still alive

As a road sign said: **Slow Down! It is better to be Dead Late than the Late Dead!**

That you also get your luggage back is an added bonus