

Sandton street closures in October: SAE4D expresses concern

South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D) has expressed concern about the impact the transformation of key sections of the Sandton CBD into a car-free district will have on people with disabilities who live, work, shop and socialise in the area during the month-long EcoMobility World Festival in October.

SAE4D is a non-profit employer organisation established to promote and address issues around the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace.

The EcoMobility World Festival which coincides with Transport Month will see parts of Sandton around Sandton City being turned into an EcoMobile neighbourhood, with roads closed off for private cars.

According to the EcoMobility World Festival [website](#), one of the aims of the festival is to “give people a preview of a future transport system where public transport, walking and cycling become the modes of choice. The Sandton CBD, one of the busiest districts in South Africa, will be decongested and its streets turned into public spaces where people will be able to move from point to point using public transport, walking, cycling and eco-mobile vehicles.”

Dr Jerry Gule, Chairman of SAE4D, says that while the aims of the Festival are laudable, many people with disabilities – particularly those who use wheelchairs or walking aids; or are blind or visually impaired – could be severely prejudiced by the project.

“As noted in the SAE4D Statement of Principle on transportation, the public transportation system in South Africa as a whole as well as in Johannesburg and Sandton, either does not adequately cater for the needs of people with disabilities or is prohibitively more expensive to use compared to what able-bodied individuals face,” he said.

Dr Gule pointed out that able-bodied people can, with little thought, walk to a bus stop or the Gautrain station, or use a metered or mini-bus taxi, or a combination of these. But what about people with disabilities?

How does a blind person walk a hundred metres or more to access the transport? What about a person in a wheelchair or one who uses a walking aid such as crutches? Are all the pavements in Sandton level and unobstructed, with on and off-ramps on either side of the road?

What if, as is so often the case, the minibus taxi is not wheelchair friendly or will not permit a wheelchair into the vehicle or will charge double for the extra space taken? What if there is a step-up to get on to the bus or train? And once a person with a disability gets dropped off using a mode of public transport, how will he or she manage the final distance to the workplace or the shopping centres?

“Given these difficulties, SAE4D calls on the City of Johannesburg and the organisers of the EcoMobility World Festival to give consideration to the additional transportation challenges and costs that will face people with disabilities during the Festival, and to find ways to ameliorate these,” Dr Gule concluded.

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About SAE4D

South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D) is a body constituted by employers who are committed to addressing issues confronting the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace. The organisation was set up to share experience, develop best practices, confront and tackle prejudices that act as barriers to the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace, and form a common understanding of the challenges and solutions required to fully develop the potential of people with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to society and business.

SAE4D members are South African companies who are signatories to the Constitution of the SAE4D, its principles and values.

Current SAE4D members include: ABB; ABSA; AccelorMittal, AngloAmerican; AON, Barloworld; Bowman Gilfillan; Edcon; EY; Eskom; KPMG; Lorimar; Nedbank; PPC; SABMiller, Standard Bank, and Total.

For more information, please view the [SAE4D video](#), visit the [SAE4D Facebook page](#); or go to the SAE4D website at www.sae4d.co.za

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