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'GAME-CHANGER'

Manenberg gets test drive of new minibus taxi app

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MANENBERG commuters will be the test subjects of a new minibus taxi app that seeks to modernise the billion-rand industry.

For years the minibus taxis honked their horns while conductors hung out of the windows rattling off destinations to commuters. But now with Loop, taxi commuters will be able to use the app to hail, pay and rate their driver through a chat-bot.

The app, created by 28-year-old Imtiyaz Riley and his team at Loop, is currently in its pilot phase and will officially be launched next year to cater for commuters along the Cape Flats route.

Riley, who grew up surrounded by family members who were involved in the taxi industry, said his dream of helping the industry was solidified when he came up with the idea of introducing customers to the app.

"My granddad and father have been in the taxi association for decades, so I've been exposed to it from a very young age. I learnt to drive at the age of 13.

"Taxis are what got us through school and university, and I wanted to continue this legacy and also become involved in the industry, but my father said 'no' to my becoming a taxi driver."

Riley said the idea behind Loop came to him while he was thinking of ways to modernise an industry which millions of South Africans rely on.

"One day I just sat there thinking how the taxi industry is outdated and asked myself why technology was not incorporated to help with the experience from the passenger, driver, owner and managers.

"So I called up Jamie Wyngaardt, our chief experience officer, and said why don't we start a taxi app prioritising minibus taxis?"

The two then travelled around Mbekweni, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town to conceptualise and speak to future app users about their wants and needs.

"What we found was that there were 101 problems in the taxi industry. Commuters knew where to get the taxi, but didn't know when it was going to show up.

"The driver also didn't know whether there would be passengers available on the route he was travelling, so they often ended up not meeting their target.

"Then there was the issue of safety with cash dealings, and the big gap between the driver, passenger, association and the government. There was no line of communication," explained Riley.

Wyngaardt said they then agreed that there was a need to simplify the challenges facing the industry and brought together a team of nine to get the ball rolling.

With the backing of the Western Cape government, the pilot phase was



CREATOR of the Loop minibus taxi app, Imtiyaz Riley, grew up surrounded by family members who were involved in the taxi industry and says his dream of helping the industry came to life when he introduced customers to the platform. | Facebook

rolled out in collaboration with the Manenberg Taxi Association.

Wyngaardt said they would also introduce a panic button option on the app.

"This app lends a technological arm to the taxi industry. It will be a business-to-customer platform. In simple terms it will have a 'book a seat' concept. Passengers will, as with e-hailing services, be able to screen their driver and see the route."

Yusuf Kaunda, the chairperson of the Manenberg Taxi Association, said they were very excited about the app and were already receiving positive feedback from drivers and commuters.

"This is a game-changer for us. It can only get better for the taxi industry. Not only will it bring in extra income, but it will also be safer.

"For years we have been trying to get a cashless system and it's finally happening. Now our customers will also become more confident in our service, and that's the best part," said Kaunda.

Western Cape MEC for Transport and Public Works, Ricardo Mackenzie, said the app had great potential for the industry.

"We are happy that this app will contribute, once fully operational, to the elimination of illegal operators and allow the customer to see and decide on the taxi before they get on, knowing that the taxi has a verified driver, permit, and is on the government database," he said.

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YUSUF KAUNDA
Chairperson of the Manenberg
Taxi Association