

# Berg cable car is just not viable

BHEKO Madlala's letter "Cable car will bring exciting way to see Berg" (The Mercury, January 27) was in response to an earlier article "Draft cableway plan shot down" which drew its information from a report by Newman Accounting and Tax services.

In this report the draft cable car business plan is analysed from an economic viability perspective, which raises valid concerns over the assumptions on which both the feasibility study and business plan are based; the two most significant are the number of passengers a year (300 000) and the price (R350 per adult).

It is on these two assumptions, together with capital and operating costs, that its financial viability can be assessed. Instead of responding to the financial viability concerns raised, the project team, through Department of Economic Development and Tourism spokesman Madlala, chooses to hide behind claims that the community supports the project and trots out the same old platitudes that all processes such as environmental impact assessment (EIA) will be followed.

If the project is not economically viable and this cannot be sustained over a long period, it neither matters if the community supports it nor that an EIA shows that damage to the environment is kept within acceptable levels.

We simply cannot afford to build infrastructure of this nature that does not pay for itself. If we do, the result drains future resources from providing basic needs of the population, the very opposite of what the project hopes to achieve.

Drawing a comparison to the Moses Mabhida SkyCar at its start-up, between December 1, 2009 and May 23, 2010 (nearly six months) the SkyCar carried 97 920 passengers.

In the same period from statistics published by Tourism KwaZulu-Natal, Durban would have hosted 1.43 million visitors.

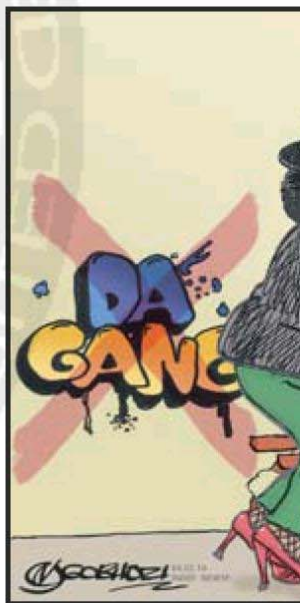
If we assume no residents of Durban rode the SkyCar then only 6.8 percent of the tourists did so. If Durban residents are included the figure drops to 2.1 percent.

The ticket only costs R55 this year. Despite the novelty on its opening, affordable price and the magnificent views, this is the level of support from a tourist base of close to 2.3 million a year and all within 40km of an international airport and in "South Africa's playground".

In 2012 Durban received 2.287 million visits and the whole Drakensberg region 732 000. If we assume 65 percent go to the Northern berg then the cableway would have to attract 63 percent of all

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Northern Drakensberg visitors to achieve 300 000 passengers a year.

It must be noted that the Drakensberg visitor numbers record two repeat visits a year. The likelihood of riding the cable car twice a year is very small, especially given the cost.

Taking this into account we need to more than double the number of tourists to the Northern Drakensberg in the first year of operation and then double it again over the next two years and continue with a similar acceleration to maintain passenger volumes.

It will have to be a very brave or foolish investor who believes this can be achieved, especially since domestic visitor numbers to KZN have declined from 8.8 million in 2009 to 6.2 million in 2012 and foreign visitor numbers from 1.21 million to 898 000 over the same period.

If it goes ahead, the cable car will be a "game changer"; unfortunately the game is Russian roulette and no one in the project team or the department has realistically checked the numbers to see how many rounds are in the cylinder.

Regrettably the casualty will be our wilderness and all this will achieve long term is a derelict messy scar in an environmentally sensitive area.

STEVE COOKE  
Durban North

## Listening pleasure for music lovers

MUSIC lovers among your readers need to know about the outstanding concerts that Christopher Duigan is bringing to us, under his Music Revival series.

Last week, at the St Agnes church hall in Kloof he performed with Joanna Frankel, who is a world-acclaimed violinist.

After Mozart, Elgar and the Brahms Sonata they introduced us to music by Arvo Part, an Estonian composer.

The piece was called *Spiegel im spiegel*, and seemed to lift you away