



**Motivation for the building of a footbridge
to link Static Heights and Bridgetown, Cape Town.**

Introduction

This document summarises the main findings of preliminary research carried out by postgraduate students at the University of Cape Town. Information contained in students' research proposals was formed from overt participant observation and unstructured interviews with local residents that identified themselves as being part of The Women's Circle. These views are believed to represent the wider community including children, people with disabilities and adults currently living in Static Heights.

Key observations and findings from research reports submitted in May 2011.

1. Reasons why the Static Heights community frequently needs to cross the canal to travel to neighbouring Bridgetown:

- 1.1 Children cross the canal to travel to and from Cypress Primary School.
- 1.2 Youths cross the canal to travel to and from Peak View High School.
- 1.3 People with physical disabilities accessing Cripple Care Rehabilitation Centre in Bridgetown.
- 1.4 People of all ages using amenities in Bridgetown, Kewtown and Silvertown.
- 1.5 Adults access the polling station in Cypress Primary School during elections.
- 1.6 Residents wishing to walk to local shops and services.

2. Reasons why routes over the canal such as the existing bridge for cars and pedestrians are avoided:

- 2.1. The route is less direct and longer.
- 2.2. There is greater opportunity for crime to be committed against vulnerable pedestrians. Several robberies and muggings have been reported.
- 2.3. Parents have reported the presence of drug dealers along the current route using the existing bridge.
- 2.4. Residents have repeatedly witnessed the use of illegal drugs along this route.
- 2.5. Learners have reported street crime such as theft of money along this route.
- 2.6. Learners have reported being harassed along this route.
- 2.7. Parents cannot watch their children on their journey to school as they can from the alternative crossing point proposed by the community.

3. Reasons why the makeshift 'bridge' is not sufficient to provide an alternative route to current canal crossing points:

- 3.1. The crossing is built from unstable, unsuitable materials such as rocks and rubbish.
- 3.2. The crossing point poses a health and safety risk to users who may slip and fall injuring themselves.
- 3.3. During the winter months when the canal load peaks, the makeshift path poses an increased risk of injury, as surfaces are more slippery.

- 3.4. Pedestrians have been left with damaged shoes and clothing due to getting wet in the polluted water.

4. Additional benefits of building a bridge across the canal beyond provision of a safer route across the canal:

- 4.1. Contribution to **crime prevention** strategies in the area.
- 4.2. Evidence of progress towards public safety and security goals by the City of Cape Town (CoCT).
- 4.3. The building of a footbridge is more cost effective than other public safety and security measures such as CCTV, which is more susceptible to vandalism and requires regular maintenance.
- 4.4. The building of a footbridge may decrease the fear of crime in the community that currently has an adverse effect on residents' quality of life.
- 4.5. The community have expressed a desire to man the bridge when children walk to and from school; this act of community policing will take pressure off the Athlone police station, perceived by residents as being under resourced.
- 4.6. Contribution to the restoration of a **sense of pride** in the community that has been reported as currently lacking.
- 4.7. The bridge would act as a much needed morale boost for the community, that suffers psychologically from a lack of confidence in their ability to shape the future of their own community. Residents currently feel that their voices are being ignored.
- 4.8. Indication of **effective local democracy**, evidenced by local peoples petitioning bringing about action.
- 4.9. An opportunity for the community to take ownership of a space that they have played a fundamental role in creating.
- 4.10. Faith in the political process could be restored which could increase voter turnout and future political participation.
- 4.11. Building a bridge will encourage communities from neighbouring areas to mix, contributing to the breakdown of the restriction of movement that continues to exist, due to the legacy of Apartheid policies pre-1994.

5. Action taken so far by the community:

- 5.1. The Roads and Waterways have been contacted at the Transport Department.
- 5.2. Contact has been made with structural engineers in the Transport department.
- 5.3. Attempts to lobby the CoCT to build a footbridge.
- 5.4. The submission of an official proposal and a visit from a CoCT representative.

Data was collected during April 2011 by students in the Anthropology of Development Masters course: Reika Shucart, Katleho Shoro, Conor Smith and Karin Eriksson under the oversight of Prof Mugsy Spiegel.

The summary was compiled by Teresa Perez, masters student in Sociology, September 2011.