

Transport plans 'too little too late'

System is too event-specific, say experts

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TRAFFIC defines Gauteng. It's a critical facet of life in the province – the continent's economic hub. And in just under three months, Gauteng will kick off the nation's staging of the World Cup.

There are three World Cup stadiums in Gauteng – two in Joburg and one in Pretoria. More than 20 of the 64 World Cup matches will be played here, including the opening game and the final.

The stadiums look fantastic, Fifa is happy, but the fly in the ointment is whether the transport infrastructure will play its part in helping the province make the World Cup a success, as both the president and Fifa have promised.

"Gauteng sees itself as a global city region," says urban economist Francois Viruly. "Therefore it is critical that a good public transport system that connects these areas is in place. Transport simply makes it possible for people to get the best out of what the cities have to offer."

Viruly says a critical part of the World Cup public transport plans is that they are not seen to be event-driven but rather as urban interventions. "What is important now is to ensure that the bus rapid transit (BRT), Gautrain and other services in place get used in an optimal way," he says.

Taxis are the dominant provider of public transport services in Gauteng. More than a million people in the province use taxis as their mode of transport, according to provincial statistics.



At least 536 000 commuters use buses or trains.

A survey conducted in 2002 found that there were approximately 35 000 short distance taxis operating in Gauteng.

Yet demand for public transport in the past 10 years has risen sharply, putting pressure on the already overcrowded trains, inadequate buses and risky taxis.

Paul Browning, an independent transport consultant, said a great weakness in the province had been lack of direction to link the cities. This he said, was despite efforts by individual municipalities to introduce new transport plans.

"Our public transport system has not developed to deal with our economic growth needs," he said. "Although attention is being placed on the World Cup to get people to and from the stadiums, hotels and airports, those people are just not going to sit in hotel rooms waiting

for match days. They will be shocked that it is extremely difficult to get around."

Browning said this was because attention had been placed purely on meeting commitments in the bid book by creating an event-specific transport system.

Vaughan Mostert, a transport academic at the University of Johannesburg, said Gauteng had dealt only with "a few Chiefs and Sundowns supporters" who needed to move from Soweto to town or Mamelodi to Pretoria by train.

"But in June we will have Spaniards, Portuguese and English fans all wanting to jump on to trains, buses and taxis to reach the stadium. The BRT will definitely play a major role in ensuring they access the tournament venues, but it is simply not enough," he said.

Most of the residents of Gauteng believe that despite the introduction of the BRT, Gautrain and other transport services, the roads are likely to be severely congested in June. A Human Sciences Research Council survey found that 80 per cent of people were concerned about traffic jams.

In the next few weeks, the Gauteng Department of Transport and the cities of Joburg and Tshwane will unveil their 2010 public transport plan. The key elements will be a greater reliance on trains, BRT, additional buses and taxis.

The BRT and Gautrain feeder services will provide a special service for football spectators between Joburg suburbs, stations and matches. The plan will seek to fill the gap in linking key commercial



Scenes like this seem inevitable during the World Cup. 'If we haven't got a basic public transport network for our people, how can we move thousands?' asks one expert. Overseas visitors are going to be shocked at how difficult it is to get around, says another.

PICTURE: CARA VIERECKL

centres in the province and the cities with high-density areas and the rest of the public transport hubs.

"After the Confederations Cup, the Gauteng Department of Transport evaluated the lessons learnt and also conducted bilateral meetings with host cities to define the role of the province in 2010 transport," said provincial roads and transport spokesman Philemon Motshwaedi.

He said the provincial department had developed a 2010 transport master plan based on a 2006 travel demand estimate.

The province was issuing special events permits to transport opera-

tors, including taxis, to be used during the World Cup.

"The province will brand the fleet 'Gautransie' with the aim of ensuring that the public is able to identify them," Motshwaedi added.

"We will distribute travel guides in different languages, including French, Spanish, Zulu and English."

Increasing connections between all modes of public transport will also be vital.

Rea Vaya, as the BRT is referred to in Joburg, is expected to carry about 20 000 spectators to Soccer City and Ellis Park. There will be special services during the tournament: Park 'n' Ride, which will shuttle football fans to the games, inter-

city buses, taxis and provincial services such as Gautransie. In addition, extra buses will operate on match days, and others will link Gauteng with other host cities such as Bloemfontein, Polokwane, Rustenburg and Nelspruit.

Metrorail will also run additional services. Gautrain will operate its first line between OR Tambo and Sandton plus feeder services.

But Mostert said: "These are just ad hoc schemes that will not fix the problems of the existing poor public transport system."

"Of course, you'd always need special transport services, even if you were in London if you hosted an event of the magnitude of the World

Cup. But if we haven't even got a basic network to cater for our people, how could we move thousands?"

Mostert proposed short-term solutions which included increasing the capacity of trains, introducing new bus routes and eliminating bottlenecks in public transport routes.

"Instead of having BRT feeder and complementary buses running on back streets we could be using the buses to reach more areas," he explained.

"Unless the reach of the BRT is extended, Joburg or Gauteng will be doomed to a future under which more than half of the urban area will not be serviced by working public transport."

