

Gauteng growth dependent on quality of road infrastructure

By [Chris Hlabisa](#)

15 May 2017

The successful delivery of mega housing projects and substantial investments in tourism as the engine room for growth in Gauteng will be largely dependent on the quality of the province's road infrastructure.



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Over the past three years, premier David Makhura has laid out his vision for a much more integrated Gauteng City Region where partnerships between the public sector, business, labour and civil society will determine both the direction and the pace of development. This was, again, a dominant theme in his recent State of the Province Address.

One of the consequential announcements he made concerns the envisaged development of 31 mega housing projects to be delivered within the medium-term framework. From earlier announcements on this plan, it is clear that each of these developments will yield no fewer than 15 000 units, either within an existing cluster or as a new nodal development project.

Impacts on all aspects of mobility in the province

Such projects will have inevitable impacts on all aspects of mobility in the province. At SANRAL we have to calculate this into our medium and long-term planning for the upgrading of the existing network and the planning and construction of new freeways.

Premier Makhura's multi-pronged approach in ensuring Gauteng mobility remains at the core of future planning processes is welcomed. It contains a combination of policy choices to curb urban sprawl, densification along transit nodes, initiatives to address the spatial legacies of apartheid and substantial investments in quality public transport both within the individual cities and between the urban metropolises.

Passenger rail, the Gautrain, bus rapid transit systems, commuter buses and taxis are all elements of this mix. But so is roads - especially the planning, construction, and funding model for expansions to the existing Gauteng freeway network.



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The province's own projections as contained in the Gauteng 2055 Vision show sustained population growth over the next decade from the current 13.2 million people to 15.5 million in 2020 and 18.7 million a decade later. Already 88% of the total freight tonnage in South Africa is transported on roads and 94% of daily motorised person trips are road-based.

Private vehicle ownership accelerates at an even-faster pace as more and more people move into the middle class.

Impact of trends on traffic patterns

The impact of these trends on traffic patterns should not be underestimated. And the importance of the national and provincial road network as the primary transport arteries should not be taken too lightly while longer term plans for densification, public transport and rapid rail systems are being implemented.

SANRAL does not see the construction of more freeways and additional roads as a panacea for urban mobility or a cure for congestion. The issues are much more complex to be reduced to single-faceted responses. Similarly, any solution that reduces the importance of well-managed roads – and a planned process of new freeway development – also does not take into account the realities of the regional economy.

The direct impact of modern freeways on a regional economy is well-illustrated by the developments that followed the construction of GFIP. The success of major recent residential developments such as Heritage Hill near Roohuiskraal, Waterfall City next to the Allandale Road off-ramp, and Serengeti Estate in Ekurhuleni can be directly attributed to the availability of an upgraded freeway while extensions to major retail centres such as Menlyn and Mall of Africa would not have been feasible without GFIP.

Johannesburg no longer most congested city

A global study based on the 2016 TomTom Traffic index recently found that Johannesburg is no longer the most-congested city in sub-Saharan Africa and that improvements in traffic movement can be directly attributed to the construction of GFIP, the introduction of open road tolling and the addition of intelligent transport systems linked to SANRAL's management of the network.

Some of the most exciting recent announcements made by premier Makhura to grow Gauteng's tourism potential and grow the province's role as a regional logistics hub are heavily dependent on the extension of the freeway network.

Plans for the extension of the GFIP network through the addition of 158km of new road and upgrades to 223km have been on the drawing board for some time. These roads will further reduce traffic pressures near O R Tambo airport and contribute to the growth of the West Rand District, identified as a priority corridor by the Gauteng government.

How these freeways are to be funded will be decided by the national government in consultation with the province. SANRAL

is an agency of government and implements policy decided on by cabinet including the “user pay” principle as defined in the National Development Plan.

Estimated five years for construction to start

Different opinions over funding should, however, not delay the planning and preparations for the construction of GFIP stages 2 and 3. It will take an estimated five years for construction to start once the green light for the programme has been given. Construction will have to be preceded by more rounds of public consultation, updated environmental impact assessments, land acquisitions, and procurement processes.

In the meantime, road congestion in parts of Gauteng that are vital to the implementation of the Gauteng Vision 2055 is building up. If this is not addressed a traffic situation can soon develop that is similar to what existed prior to the start of construction on the current GFIP network.

SANRAL is looking forward to work together with the Gauteng government to develop an infrastructure network that is, in the words of Premier Makhura, “the lifeblood of the province’s social and economic transformation agenda.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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