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Behind the scenes of the ground-breaking Gautrain

On Tuesday 08 June, just three days before 2010 World Cup kick-off, the first Gautrain to transport paying customers pulled out of Sandton Station *en route* to OR Tambo International Airport. Integral to this accomplishment was the completion of the Gautrain Sandton Station, which was achieved in time for the World Cup due to tremendous effort made by all parties involved.

“This is a ground-breaking achievement and a landmark date for this impressive, public transport, rapid rail link project, a project that will benefit South Africans and international visitors to our country for decades to come,” says Bradley Hemphill, Managing Director of Electrical Engineering Solutions (EES).

EES, a leader in project and programme managing the provision of special systems to the built environment, was appointed by Murray & Roberts Construction to assist in the co-ordination and integration of these special systems into the civil and building works for the Gautrain Sandton Station.

While the entire Gautrain project is still in progress, it was of course hoped and much anticipated that the Gautrain link between the underground Sandton Station, Sandton being the heart of South African business, and OR Tambo, South Africa's international airport situated on the East Rand of Gauteng, would be ready in time for the World Cup. Phase 1 of the cutting-edge Gautrain rapid rail link project is now in fully-fledged operation. It is ‘all systems go’ at the Sandton Station and trains have been running regularly since 08 June throughout the course of World Cup.

EES managed this challenging assignment by implementing a simple but effective and proven strategy it has developed over the past nine years.

“It is an honour to be a cog in the wheel of Phase 1 of such a prestigious project, an engineering feat which will undoubtedly benefit people the world over far into the future,” states Hemphill.

The Bombela Consortium is responsible for building and operating the Gautrain rapid rail link, reportedly at a cost of R25.5 billion. While the link between Sandton and OR Tambo constitutes Phase One of the system, it is expected that the second phase, linking Johannesburg and Pretoria, will be operational in 2011. In addition to the three anchor stations on these two links, it

is reported that seven other stations will be linked by approximately 80 kilometres of rail along the route.

The rapid rail link project will also offer seamless door-to-door transfers between the Gautrain and other modes of transport such as taxis, municipal buses, the Rea Vaya bus service and car rental services.

The project offers a cost effective, efficient, environmentally friendly and safe solution to the transport challenges of the most densely developed area in Gauteng and indeed in South Africa.

The Gautrain concept has apparently been modeled after operations at a select group of global cities that successfully offer rapid rail links to international airports. It is part of a longer-term vision, which will include a commitment towards creating and sustaining a new culture of public transport usage.

The Gautrain has to date been received with tremendous enthusiasm and has been inundated with passengers, both members of the public and tourists. It has also obtained much attention from the international media.

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