Gautrain Rapid Rail Reduces Carbon Footprints, Commuter Agonies; Connects Johannesburg–Pretoria Corridor

Context
The province of Gauteng occupies 2 percent of South Africa’s landmass yet generates nearly 40 percent of its gross domestic product and houses two major cities and a major airport. Historically, the province and its public transport developed unevenly, ushering a culture of private cars and unsafe, unreliable rail transit. Road congestion leads to limited economic productivity, living standards, and tourism.

The juxtaposition of Gautrain’s multibillion-dollar budget with less well-supported essential social services and poverty reduction measures evoked public anger and media criticism. Of 700 community meetings in 2002, all were volatile and precipitated strong local political opposition and negative media. Residential pressure groups filed five court cases and pressure was exerted on South Africa’s parliament (Jensen 2014). Economic mobility and efforts to combat urban sprawl were lost in the fury of the moment.

Development Challenge
The challenge for Gauteng was introducing transit-oriented development around a new rapid rail system.

Intervention

The Gautrain is a public-private partnership that uses state-of-the-art rapid rail to connect Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Johannesburg International Airport, with a feeder system of metropolitan and dedicated buses. Trains travel 160–180 kilometers per hour on the 80-kilometer network. Departing from past rail practices, Gautrain runs on electricity and international standard gauge tracks, which safely and reliably accommodate high speeds (Bohlweki Environmental 2002a, 2002b).

Gautrain trains take 35 minutes between the central business districts of Pretoria and Johannesburg and 15 minutes between Johannesburg International Airport and Sandton Station. The services offered are “Premium” for commuters and “Premium Plus” for international travelers (with luggage space on trains and anticipated flight check-in at the Sandton Station).

As one of 10 Spatial Development Initiatives of the Gauteng government, the project reinforces the national transport infrastructure and stimulates economic growth, development, and jobs. At the local level, it attracts private motorists to rail travel and alleviates congestion, promotes tourism, and contributes to urban revitalization and sustainability.

Delivery Challenges
This delivery note analyzes key implementation challenges and examines how they were overcome.

PROJECT DATA

SECTOR: City/urban, governance, infrastructure, public-private partnerships, transport
DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE: Introducing transit-oriented development around a new rapid rail system
DELIVERY CHALLENGES: Awareness and communications strategy, stakeholder engagement
COUNTRY: South Africa
PROJECT DURATION: 2000–12
PROJECT AMOUNT: SAR 26 billion
REGION: Africa

This note was produced by Darcy Gallucio at the World Bank Group, from an original case study published by the Centre for Public Impact. The original case study is available here.
Awareness and communication strategy. Accustomed to unsafe and unreliable public transport, the public and local politicians initially expressed deep distrust of high-speed trains. Media coverage reinforced local reactions, omitting international experience with similar trains.

Stakeholder engagement. In the minds of the Gautengs, using rapid rail to link economic, political, and air transport centers did not initially add up to individual or community socioeconomic gains.

Addressing Delivery Challenges

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenge related to awareness and communication strategy:

- Designed a narrow, well-scoped media campaign to break a self-reinforcing cycle of negativity among local politicians, the public, and the media.
- Crafted a few clear takeaways: Gautrain introduces world-class safety and reliability; reduces severe road congestion; stimulates economic growth, development, and job creation; contributes to and helps sustain urban revitalization; and benefits individual Gautengs.
  - Gautrain ridership has replaced an estimated 21,300 daily car trips, reducing the carbon footprint of travelers by 52 percent per trip (Gautrain Management Agency 2015).
  - Gautrain sustained 121,800 local jobs between 2006 and 2012 and increased government revenue by an estimated SAR 5 billion (Gautrain Management Agency 2015).
- Pinpointed interested and affected parties and potential passengers: Included were economically active commuters; car owners unwilling to use public transport; younger, more affluent households; airline passengers; interested and construction-affected parties; and government and private sector decision makers.
- Created a granular stakeholder map, linking strategic issues, affected stakeholders, and media contacts.
  - Allocated substantial resources: for example, SAR 250,000 was dedicated to media research and monitoring and SAR 100,000 to media interventions when railway construction began.
- Identified the media: community, provincial, national, international; trade, technical, consumer, business.
  - Built initial relationships by taking 19 print journalists on a 10-day tour of Paris and London to experience those cities’ public transit maintenance yards, manufacturing sites, control rooms, and public transit–revitalized neighborhoods (London's Canary Wharf and Docklands).
- Conducted ongoing formative and evaluative research, as well as monthly adjusted media tactics and messaging.
  - Two construction site visits by 60 journalists produced immediate positive coverage equivalent to SAR 12 million.
  - Electronic construction updates were sent to journalists, and journalists were provided access to, and download capacity for, a database of high-resolution construction photographs and artists’ impressions of the project.
  - Small groups of media were briefed on specific issues; the project’s leader, the marketing and communications director, and—when needed—a lawyer and a master executive council member attended the briefs and answered questions.

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenge related to stakeholder engagement:

- An environmental impact assessment proved an ideal mechanism to explain development gains accrued to the community and to learn from the community how to better design the project for their needs.
- Extensive preparatory activities were undertaken:
  - Consulted the Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Environment, and Land Affairs as well as the authorizing department for regulations, specialists, and stakeholders.
  - Conducted site surveys and inspections, consultations, and information and literature reviews; synthesized information and ranked its significance.
  - Retained Bohlweki Environmental (Pty) Ltd, a predominantly black-owned Gauteng consulting company for the environmental impact assessment.
- The public participation process, which is mandatory under South African law, was well modeled and well executed—cultivating a paradigm shift in the rail transit sector.
Website (http://www.gautrain.co.za/about/eia-emp/eia/) provided background information on the environmental impact assessment process and allowed parties to register their interest in the project, ask questions, and provide comments.

Background information document (briefing paper). Distributed to all parties and made available at all Open Days (public hearings) throughout the assessment period, the briefing paper had information on the assessment process, the proposed project, and the consultants. It also had a sign-up sheet for parties to register their interest and receive future project communications.

Formal meetings. Conducted with specific groups of key stakeholders, the meetings started after the Open Days and continued for the duration of the environmental impact assessment. Stakeholders were grouped by formal associations and by specific interests in the project. This platform gave stakeholders the means to join to raise specific issues and concerns and to obtain more information.

References


