

Upgrades keep Metrorail on track

Gauteng Transport MEC Ismail Vadi claims Metrorail is well on its way to becoming the preferred public transport operator in high-volume corridors of the province.



An example of the new trains that will soon be used by Prasa to ferry commuters in Gauteng.
Image: Prasa

"Today, we have received information on the planned improvements of Metrorail in Gauteng. These augur well for the future. Essentially, they entail three key programmes: the modernisation of signalling and telecommunications systems; the acquisition of new rolling stock; the renovation of train stations along Prasa's modernisation corridor.

"These plans are consistent with the 25-year Integrated Transport Master Plan (ITMP25) for Gauteng and will contribute to the further development of an integrated transport system in our province," Vadi said.

The Gauteng ITMP25 seeks to make rail the backbone of public transport system.

Vadi said it was encouraging that both the current administration is committed to adequate funding for the modernisation and recapitalisation of the commuter rail system, particularly in Gauteng.

New trains

Meanwhile, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) announced that Siemens South Africa as its preferred bidder for the implementation of the new signalling system on its commuter rail network.

Phase 1 of this project - which actually started in January 2011 - will cost of over R1bn and will be completed by 2016. This will replace the outdated copper cable signalling system that is prone to cable thefts that halt rail services on affected lines.

A key aspect of this upgrade includes the construction of a Centralised Control Centre for Gauteng at a cost of R175m.

The construction of the control centre is due to start next month and it is scheduled to be fully operational by March next year. It will centralise 43 signal cabins into a single centre with a goal of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the operational control of trains.

The new system will replace the mechanical interlocking or the manual changing of signals.

In addition, Prasa has ordered - and is in the process of receiving - 3,000 new coaches to be used on its metropolitan service.

In Gauteng, the key corridor runs from Mabopane, north of Pretoria to Germiston, Johannesburg and Soweto corridor and includes loop via Tembisa and Kempton Park.

This upgraded and modernised corridor will be capable of moving over 50,000 passengers along the route in direction during peak times. Once the new trains are in use, they will travel at speeds of up to 120km/h on open track sections.

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