

What it takes to build a subsea cable

 By [Craig Wilson](#)

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The multibillion-rand Wacs cable has just gone live along Africa's west coast. But just what does it take to make a project of this magnitude happen, besides boatloads of money?

The West African Cable System (Wacs), the highest-capacity undersea telecommunications cable to land in SA to date, will eventually offer countries along its route, including SA, up to 5,1Tbit/s of capacity into Europe.

With 14 entities involved in the consortium that made the US\$650m, 14 500km-long cable a reality, the biggest challenges have been red tape, regional variables and the technical challenges of laying the physical cable.

The cable weighs as much as 20 Airbus A380 aircraft and at its deepest point it lies 5,1km below the surface of the Atlantic Ocean. And were one to attach all of the fibre pairs end-to-end, they'd circle the globe three times.

But there's another important aspect to the cable: powering it. This is done via 10,5kV direct-current to drive the repeaters. The cable is powered from every landing station and every branch along its route from London to its final destination at Yzerfontein, north of Cape Town.

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