

Plan to extend Gautrain in Pretoria

The Gautrain could loop through Pretoria in its next phase, connecting suburbs around the central business district that are home to 400,000 people, two universities, 48 government departments, six hospitals and 30 schools, Gautrain Management Agency CEO Jack van der Merwe said on Tuesday, 29 May 2012.



The planned extensions are intended to integrate the high-speed train line into existing public transport networks, allowing it to serve a wider public.

The Gauteng provincial government was likely to announce new routes or extended services to the Gautrain rapid rail service as early as next April, Mr van der Merwe said.

Some of the expansion plans include the possibility of doubling the single tunnel between Rosebank and Sandton stations; boosting signalling headway to allow trains to run at three-minute intervals (currently the minimum is nine minutes); more rolling stock; and additional bus feeder and distribution routes.

The Gautrain is not yet fully operational. It provides a service to OR Tambo International Airport and a shortened service between Pretoria and Johannesburg. But the initial design envisioned a larger, integrative role and operational footprint.

A 25-year integrated transport master plan, drafted by a committee of transport planning specialists, would be handed to the Gauteng roads and transport department by the second quarter of next year, while a five-year plan would be presented in March, Mr Van der Merwe said.

"The golden thread that runs through all of this is that any expansion or extensions must be economically viable," he said.

"We have a model and the idea is to calibrate that with working numbers. That will take us about six months and then we will really try to say where or how we can extend the service."

Services on the link between Park Station and Rosebank have been delayed because of contractual disputes between the province and the Bombela Concession Company over the level of water that flows through the underground tunnel connecting the two stations.

The Railway Safety Regulator was monitoring empty trains that were running to the scheduled timetable as part of the regulator's process before allowing Bombela to commence with full services, Bombela spokesman Errol Braithwaite said yesterday.

Commencement of services between Rosebank and Park Station was "weeks away", Mr Van der Merwe said.

There was even more scope to integrate transport systems. Integrating the Gautrain network into the existing commuter rail system was not only a political pressure point but a pressing commercial challenge, he said

"Integration into the public transport system will 'stretch' the potential market through enhanced access," N van der Merwe said, and it would also enable the Gautrain to act as a catalyst for "the transformation and restructuring" of the transport systems.

One of the projects that held promise for increased integration of the Gautrain into public transport network was in Pretoria and could be exploited "without costing an arm and a leg".

The project is being developed in partnership with the Passenger Rail Agency of SA's (Prasa's) commuter train service, Metrorail. Known as the Tshwane Ring Rail Project, it would make use of an existing loop of track.

The Gautrain Management Agency and Prasa were working to find ways to improve integration between the two rail systems, Prasa CEO Lucky Montana said. A decision would be made in six months on how to proceed with the ring rail project, he said.

However, full consultation with the Tshwane municipality was crucial before any decision was made on how to proceed as it could affect the city's plans for bus rapid transit investment.

Contemplated route extensions include a link between Menlyn and Hatfield, a direct link between Pretoria and OR Tambo International, a loop between Menlyn and Centurion; a link between Rhodesfield and the East Rand Mall; and a link extending west from Sandton to Cresta, 14th Avenue and the Nasrec Stadium.

Source: Business Day

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