

Next stop Durban

Murmurings of building a high-speed railway line to Durban have come under fire.



The old road-versus-rail debate has been revived again. This time, however, the focus is on the anticipated high-speed railway link from Johannesburg to Durban. The South African Road Federation is extremely outspoken about the plan; listing an array of reasons that any attempt at establishing this infrastructure should be disbanded. It suggests that government pursues a dedicated heavy-vehicle lane for passenger and freight transport instead – from the business hub to the busy port of Durban. The civil-construction sector will benefit from either proposal but is it in the best interests of the country for road to have the upper hand again? I believe that the inequality between road and rail transport in the country is problematic and should be prioritised. This important corridor should be serviced by two modes of transport – on the freight- and passenger-transport fronts. They should not be competing but rather complementing one another. There will always be a mode of transport that is superior in servicing a market segment. South Africa has not been in the fortunate position to enjoy this reality to date. Road has dominated overland transport, over the years, simply because of the terrible state of rail infrastructure in the country. Lack of competition has also been disastrous – as demonstrated by the recent accident involving an unroadworthy bus that tumbled down an embankment from the N1 in

Cape Town; killing 28 people and injuring dozens. Road, unfortunately, has become a force of its own at a major cost to the country.

Johannesburg to Durban

Challenges will abound in designing and constructing the high-speed railway line from Johannesburg to Durban. This very edition of *Civil Engineering Contractor* highlights yet another challenge overcome in bringing the Gautrain Rapid Rail Link to life in Gauteng. This is over and above an array of other hurdles that have been surmounted with unique solutions that have, at times, set the international standard. Here, I am referring specifically to the viaduct spanning dolomite-infested terrain in Centurion. The know-how achieved to date on this section of the Gautrain, alone, will be of value to the international civil-engineering sector for years to come. It makes sense to build upon this hard work to date: enhancing the overall efficiency of the system by expanding it to Durban and later to other destinations around the country. Rail needs to be prioritised before a heavy lane is added to the corridor.

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