

Impact of the Gautrain on Properties around its Stop Stations

by Mokuoane Motsoanakaba

The objective of the Gautrain project was to provide an alternative transport mode to ease the traffic congestion between the Pretoria and Johannesburg, and also between Sandton and OR Tambo International Airport, in Gauteng. This project was complimented by enhancing the N1 and N3 from three-lane highways to a minimum of four lanes with improved and more fluid on-and off-ramps.

The perspective

International studies show that without regional planning policies which encourage and facilitate certain developments around the stations, the impact of rail transit is minimal on economic development.

These studies clearly distinguish between Transport Orientated Developments (TODs) versus Transport Adjacent Developments (TADs).

TADs are developments which just happen to be close or adjacent to a transport system and specifically designed with integration objectives to the transport system.

TODs or Transport Orientated Developments are integrated with a transport system, undertaken specifically for the creation of compact, walkable communities centred around high quality transport systems with the following as main ingredients:

- Focused on high density immediately around the station to help curb urban sprawl and encourage high usage.
- Incorporation of mixed uses within the development to help reduce transportation costs and encourage self sustaining developments.

The success of TODs is driven by a number of factors which include;

- Favourable market conditions in which there exist a good investment climate;
- Availability of land or locating stations near attractive sites which are ripe for development;
- Supportive land use policies; and
- Some active participation from the public sector, i.e. city councils and municipalities.

The Reality:

The Gautrain Urban Development Framework (GUDF) was commissioned by the Cities of Johannesburg and Tshwane in 2008 with the objective to develop specific strategy for management and implementation of development around the Gautrain stations.

The commissioning of this specific development framework can be perceived as the cities' recognition of the Gautrain Stations to be catalysts not only for local development but for implementation of the cities broader Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

The guiding principles of the GUDF can be summarised as follows;

- Encourage developments which allow for residential, places of employment, as well as other essential amenities to be close and integrated with each other.
- Promote densification and integration in order to optimise the use of existing infrastructure.
- Support and prioritise viable and sustainable public transportation systems

- Ensure viable communities which have convenient access to economic opportunities, infrastructure and social services.
- Ensure that development occurs in a sustainable manner.

A contentious omission is some active involvement of the Public Sector or prescriptive manner in which to facilitate adoption of TODs and Joint Developments.

In conclusion

It seems that the Gautrain project certainly possesses all the ingredients to not only stimulate some considerable property development around its stop stations, but also aid Johannesburg and Pretoria to achieve their higher objectives in terms of the Integrated Development Plans.

This conclusion is reached because;

- South Africa certainly has a fair investment climate;
- Gautrain Stations have been located in strategic locations where there exist ripe development and re-development potential;
- and finally the cities' commissioning of the Gautrain Development Framework demonstrate the recognition of the need to streamline development activity and award supportive land use policies, for optimisation of Gautrain's impact on property development.

This said, it remains interesting to see to what degree the Public Sector participation will be extended in these developments.

In my view, the test will be in the extent to which the resultant developments can be classified as Transport Orientated as opposed to merely Transport Adjacent Developments.

"Mokuoane is with FNB Wealth Valuations department. His thesis for MSc (Building) Property Development & Management was based on "The Effect of Rail Transit on Land Use around Stop Stations." He can be reached on mmotsoanakaba@fnbwealth.co.za or 011 303 5449."