

WORLD CUP SPURS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY KATE SHIRLEY

When South Africa was chosen over six years ago as the host for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the biggest sporting event after the Olympics, the country immediately set to work. Preparing and upgrading its infrastructure would be critical to handle the 325,000 visitors expected to flood into the country for the month-long event. Altogether, more than US \$7 billion has been spent preparing the country for the Cup. In addition to constructing five new soccer stadiums and refurbishing five others, dramatic improvements have been made to the public transportation infrastructure in the country, including upgrading and constructing highway systems, rail links, and airports and train stations to accommodate the influx of traffic.

All this preparation has been met with its fair share of controversy. Critics insist that this poverty stricken nation would be better served spending money on its citizens and aid programs, rather than on soccer stadiums that may end up largely unused following the Cup. On the other hand, supporters point out that these investments have already created roughly 400,000 jobs due to the staffing needs of the construction and refurbishing projects. Some estimates indicate that the proceeds from Cup-related tourism will create over 150,000 additional jobs in the area, which would help stimulate this economically depressed nation.

With an elevation of 1500 meters above sea level, far away from the closest body of water, the City of Johannesburg is heavily reliant on its highway system for public and commercial transportation. As a result, the highways can quickly become overloaded, even under normal circumstances. Without any upgrades, an influx of hundreds of thousands of spectators into this travel hub would surely cripple the system. The South African National Roads Agency Limited (SAMRAL) undertook a comprehensive



The visually stunning Soccer City Stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa will be host to the starting and closing matches of the World Cup.

highway improvement project in Guateng province, which houses Johannesburg and Pretoria, to widen existing roads and add new ramps, bridges and dedicated turning lanes.

Perhaps the most impressive transportation improvement recently undertaken in South Africa has been the construction of the 80 kilometer Guatrain Mass Rapid Transit Railway, which will eventually connect Johannesburg, Pretoria and the OR Tambo International Airport. The Guatrain came about as a result of the largest public-private partnership in Africa. As the first rapid mass transit railway in the area, it is expected to significantly relieve highway traffic congestion. The first phase of the project was opened to the public on June 8, 2010, just three days before the World Cup Opening Ceremony. The train is expected to cut traffic congestion by as much as 20% and cost around US \$3 billion when completed, and will add more than 3,000 jobs per year when fully operational, in addition to the 93,000 created during construction.

OR Tambo International Airport, located near Johannesburg, is the main hub for both domestic and international air travel to and from South Africa. With airport traffic expected to increase to 28 million travelers in 2010, terminal upgrades include the construction of a new central terminal building, an expansion of the main international terminal, the addition of a new pier to increase flight capacity and the development of a multi-story parking structure directly across from the main terminal building.

When all is said and done, it is estimated that hosting the World Cup will pump US \$2 billion into the South African economy. With the massive investment in infrastructure, it remains an open question whether this short term boost in prosperity can jump start South Africa's frail economy. The crucial question is, will the final impression of the World Cup in South Africa be an inspiring lasting legacy that encourages future investment and travel, or a reminder of the misuse of a struggling nation's limited resources?