

DEVELOPMENT OF A PUBLIC TRANSPORT RESEARCH COMPENDIUM PORTAL

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ABSTRACT

The Research and Development Directorate of the national Department of Transport and CSIR have developed a research compendium portal. This project is in line with the main aim of this directorate which is to effectively manage a national innovative research and development programme. The research compendium portal is a database providing access to information pertaining to public transport projects in the Republic of South Africa from 2003. The specific projects include regulatory, policy, implementation work and the documents range from research, courses, workshops, reports, thesis and dissertations and technical projects done by consultants. The main aim of setting up this portal is to provide free, quick and efficient access to information, for the purpose of knowledge sharing within the Public Transport domain to the extent that confidentiality allows. The portal will contribute to knowledge sharing, improve skills and reduce duplication of work that has already been done. It is also intended as a working tool for external and internal use. It contains a search engine to allow for documents to be searched by geographical location, source of the work and theme.

INTRODUCTION

The passenger transport domain, particularly in South Africa, has over the recent years received attention in the light of the momentum generated since the adoption of the White Paper on National Transport Policy (RSA, 1996). The subsequent formulation of transport plans in the local sphere of government, for example, as envisaged in the National Land Transport Transition Act (NLTTA) (RSA, 2000) has created a backbone from which to implement transport proposals. The implementation of these proposals has, however, been faced with practical problems ranging from technical to governance related problems. One of the major problems has been the assumption of the existence of a reservoir of technical solutions that could readily be incorporated into the implementation of the plans. Such a reservoir could only exist under the environment where active research continuously creates a knowledge base. In the absence of such a reservoir, authorities had no choice but to resort to trial and error tactics amidst the pressing political delivery mandate of government (Mokonyama & Schnackenberg, 2006).

Furthermore, Mokonyama & Schnackenberg (2006) stated that a number of transport researchers and practitioners have recently identified research opportunities and gaps that exist in passenger transport domain in South Africa and continent wide, some of which include:

- Beaven and Martini (2004) illustrate how improving data availability in Africa can improve policy formulation, mobilise and strengthen civil society and political accountability as well as to attract much needed investment.
- Behrens (2003) argues that in South Africa although child and scholar travel is of significance, little data is available for planning services for this market segment.
- Mashiri et al. (2005) argues for the need to establish a gender sensitive passenger transport research agenda in South Africa.
- Cameron (2005) recommends research to be undertaken to assess the potential of new technology for efficient data collection based on scientific reasoning.
- In conclusion, Mokonyama and Schnackenberg (2006) propose that appropriate institutional and funding models for these data sharing collaborative networks need to be established in Africa.

RESEARCH PORTAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Background

The research and development directorate is involved in the implementation of research for the Department of Transport (DoT) and also for the implementation of innovative research links for the transport sector. The Research & Development Directorate of National Department of Transport and CSIR have developed a research compendium portal. The development of this portal is in line with the main aim of this directorate which is to effectively manage a national innovative research and development programme. The main aim of setting up this portal is to provide free, quick and efficient access to information, for the purpose of knowledge sharing within the Public Transport domain to the extent that confidentiality allows.

Aim of the portal

The portal contains a comprehensive compilation of information and knowledge management that can be used by various stakeholders. This Compendium is a first effort to gather information about the research undertaken organization-wide, and will be updated regularly. It highlights the important role that public transport research plays in providing evidence-based policy and technical guidance to governments. This portal is aimed at:

- Expediting research in the Public Transport domain. Users will have a central database for easy access.
- Gather evidence of the work that has been done in the public transport sector from the various stakeholders.
- Allowing remote access to share key information needed for public transport projects.
- Bridging gaps in both skills and knowledge transfer for various stakeholders.
- Setting up a platform for routine information, media briefings, tender proposals, seminars and courses available, etc.

Scope of the portal

The information was sourced from various stakeholders including national departments, provincial and local government authorities, development agencies, research councils, academic institutions, etc (refer to table below). The research information ranges from research reports, project reports, policy documents, conference papers, minutes, speeches, thesis and dissertations and other related documents

Research Compendium Document Sources		
Sources Descriptors	Examples of Descriptor Details	Possible Sources
Provinces and municipalities	Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga	www.sabinet.co.za, Government gazette sources, Tender bulletins, Government gazettes, List of government projects, Municipality annual reports/budget lists
National departments	DOT, Statistics South Africa	Client, Statistics South Africa Website
Consultants	Africon, Vela VKE, Ninham Shand, Stewart Scott, ITS, etc	Libraries available, Websites, Project reports (Site visits)
Businesses/Private organisations	Survey organisations i.e. Synnovate, Transport forums, SA cities Network, UITP, PRASA, Transnet, Gautrain	Company websites, Web searches, Internet searches using key words
Research councils	CSIR, HSRC	Client reports, Libraries
General information	Workshops (public transport related), Conferences (public transport related), Courses (PT	Internet, Conference organisers (terrapiin, etc), CE @UP, Wits short courses, UJ, News paper search

	related), News paper searches	engines
Universities	Pretoria, Wits, Cape Town, Northwest, UJ, Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela	Library searches Inter-library requests e-thesis and dissertations platforms
Development agencies	World bank, SIDA, DFID, DBSA	Publications from websites and libraries
General information	Environmental impact studies, ITP guidelines, PTAP guidelines, SPTN guidelines, Operator contracts	National, provincial and municipality web searches Published and downloadable information

The portal provides a searchable resource which can be used to address specific needs. It is also intended as a working tool for external and internal use, whereby users can find references organized by geographical location, source of the work and by key themes. The research areas will be focused on:

- Public transport and planning
- Transport infrastructure
- Policy research issues
- Rural transportation
- Sustainable transport
- Cross cutting issues (such as women in transport, employment in the transport sector and an overview of the economy)

Shortcomings of the data collection process

The following were shortcomings in the data collection process:

- Some of the documents that are confidential or housed in libraries have been listed, providing the portal with the title, key words and where possible the abstract and the location where the document is housed.
- Consolidating project lists and reports between consultants and government at all three spheres of government proved a daunting task, which further demonstrated the lack of knowledge sharing that exists within the transport research domain
- The portal was limited to public transport projects and could be a useful tool to expand to all transport related fields within South Africa.
- The documents in the portal were received from various sources and have not been checked for quality. Materials from technical journal articles to speeches were accepted in their original format.

Overview of the portal development

The research compendium has the following attributes:

- The Research Compendium website has been designed with content management system (CMS) and Document Management System (DMS) functionality as well as a discussion forum system where registered users can interact with each other on a personal and project base.
- The site is hosted and administered by the National Department of Transport and updated regularly with news and documents.
- The administrator can manage the entire website with regards to content, members, queries and statistics.
- The website provides links for sites that provide relevant information but need registration of users.
- All orders are to be done via links to sites which sell the documents and not via this system.
- The website has been built on an open source platform (php, MySQL) that would allow for rapid development and future expansion of the application.

Content of the portal

The portal contains hyperlinks to the following portals or database systems that can be accessed by user registration on the specific websites as follows:

- CSIR Research Space: This database provides access to some of the research outputs generated by CSIR scientists. The CSIR in South Africa is one of the leading scientific and technology research, development and implementation organisations in Africa. It undertakes directed research and development for socio-economic growth. <http://researchspace.csir.co.za/dspace/>
- Rural Accessibility Planning Portal: the Rural Infrastructure and Services research team of which some of the individuals mentioned in the proposal are members, is involved in an endeavour of developing a database system on issues of rural accessibility
- Knowledge Management Services Portal: this portal is a joint initiative between the CSIR and other government departments and organisations active in the built environment field and contains scientific journal articles in the built environment area. The link for this portal is www.csirkms.co.za
- Parliamentary Monitoring group (PMG, 2009): The PMG website aims to promote access, participatory democracy & accountability. Some of the information accessed on this website includes; Committee meeting reports & briefing documents, Requests for public comment on Bills & policy, Sound recordings of meetings posted same day, Media briefings & speeches by Ministers, Up-to-date Bills & Bills Status chart, Committee & plenary programmes, membership lists, Searchable MP's Questions & Replies by Ministers. The link for the website is www.pmg.org.za/
- Transport Forum: This Transport Forum hosts discussion groups based on real and relevant work in the transport sector in South Africa. The forum presents a discussion platform for transport representatives from industry, government and academia. The link to the website is <http://www.transportsig.com/>

CONCLUSION

The research compendium portal was developed as a database providing access to information pertaining to public transport projects in the Republic of South Africa from 2003. The main aim of setting up this portal is to provide free, quick and efficient access to information, for the purpose of knowledge sharing within the Public Transport domain to the extent that confidentiality allows. This Compendium is a first effort to gather information on an organization-wide basis, and will be updated regularly. It highlights the important role that public transport research plays in providing policy and technical guidance to governments based on sound evidence.

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