

POTENTIAL OF THE NORTHERN GROWTH CORRIDOR, CAPE TOWN

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ABSTRACT

The Northern Growth Corridor (NGC) is significant because it represents a physical area that has been historically underdeveloped. This changed with the demarcation of the urban edge which lead to renewed interest in the NGC. Previously, development initiatives were focussed on the two mature corridors namely Voortrekker Road and Main Road, with full capacity for development being reached. Therefore development opportunities are being sought elsewhere.

It is argued that the NGC has the potential to develop into a mature activity corridor. In order for this to happen certain elements were identified as critical components to enhance development opportunities.

The following were identified to contribute to the significance of the area and pose a challenge for development:

- **Tourism,**
- **Economic Issues,**
- **Natural Environment,**
- **Movement, and**
- **Nuclear facility.**

Public transport can be seen as the catalyst for development that is needed along the NGC. The Northern Growth Corridor can provide an example of integrated land use and transport planning. Transport, especially public transport, is seen as an important precondition for upliftment and socio-economic development along the Northern Growth Corridor.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Statutory Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (City of Cape Town, Department of Urban Planning, 1999a), only a limited number of activity corridors exist. They are significant or have the potential to be, with regards to their scale, character and location in the metropolitan area of Cape Town as a whole. Chapman, Pratt, Larkham and Dickens refer to the activity corridor as a “dynamic space” (Chapman *et al*, 2003) and conflict may arise between the various functions of such corridors. The conflict that is referred to may come to pass because of the divergent functions attributed to a corridor such as the fact that activity corridors can manage high population densities because of its high intensity of land uses and high levels of access, the important role the activity corridor play in economic development and integration, and the activity corridor as a movement channel.

“It is believed that the predominance of car movement has negatively affected the sustainability of corridors because it is reliant on a single mode of transport.” (Jordaan, 2003: 3) This statement clearly motivates how public transport can be beneficial to corridor development by means of transportation. Public transport not only addresses demands and needs, but can also enhance the economic opportunities that exist and create job opportunities.

With reference to the above, it is apparent that the Northern Growth Corridor can be seen as a means to address development pressures, which confront Cape Town.



The Northern Growth Corridor (NGC) is a physical area that extends from the Cape Town CBD northwards towards the urban edge and includes the towns of Atlantis, Mamre, Melkbosstrand and Table View. This area, especially Atlantis, is well known for its politically motivated establishment. The towns of Melkbosstrand and Table View are northern suburbs of Cape Town and are considered to be part of Cape Town. The towns of Atlantis and Mamre are situated further away from Cape Town and were seen as “separate” establishments. Therefore, this study will focus more on Atlantis and Mamre.

The development of Atlantis also fit in with the government's decentralisation policy at that time, and the impact of the political ideology is clearly visible. This as well as the housing shortage that the coloured community of the Cape experienced resulted in the establishment of Atlantis.

No other suitable land was available at the time, other than Atlantis. It was considered to be suitable for low-income housing for a number of reasons, such as its poor agricultural value, its low land value, and the fact that it is relatively close to Cape Town CBD but far enough to develop independently.

All these factors and more, lead to the current situation of Atlantis being seen as the “step-child” of the Cape.

Figure 1. The scope of the study area with relevant movement routes.

1.1 The Study Area

2. BACKGROUND

In August 2001 the urban edge of the City of Cape Town was demarcated (adopted as a City of Cape Town policy) and for the next 20 years expansion beyond it is not allowed. The function of the edge is to address one of the three main concerns of the City of Cape Town, namely urban sprawl.

The Blaauwberg Urban Development Strategy states “...although urban growth is a precondition for economic advancement, there are no guarantees of economic advancement unless the growth is managed and balanced with ecologically sustainable forms of development.” (Planning Partners, 2001: 1)

Therefore, for an urban edge to be sustainable, the area contained by the edge as well as the area beyond the edge, need to be managed effectively. This results in the area inside the urban edge needing to be densified to ensure less pressure from urbanisation. It is noted in the Blaauwberg Urban Development Strategy that the Blaauwberg Administration are faced with development pressures that increased because of rapid urban expansion, which is a major concern. (Planning Partners, 2001).

Development in the City of Cape Town (CCT) is focused along the two mature corridors, namely Voortrekker Road and Main Road. These two corridors have reached their full development capacity. This results in merely functional changes occurring within their boundaries. Spatial constraints on the two existing corridors are leading development towards the NGC

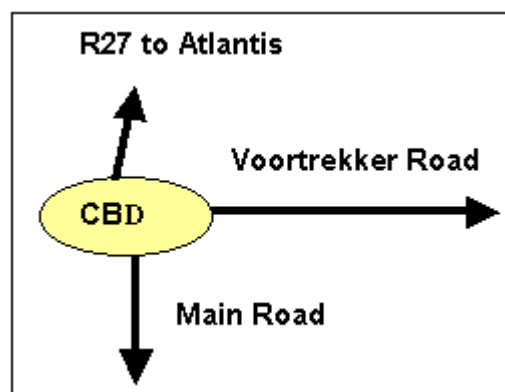


Figure 2. Direction of movement routes from Cape Town CBD.

The Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve (CWCBR) is another constraint directing future development along the NGC. The importance of the NGC is further emphasised in the Blaauwberg Spatial Development Plan where it states that the NGC and Atlantis are “highlighted as challenges to the provision of integrated economic infrastructure”. (City of Cape Town, Planning and Development Directorate, 2002: 7)

With reference to the above, it is apparent that the Northern Growth Corridor can be seen as a means to address development pressures which faces Cape Town.

3. CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE NORTHERN GROWTH CORRIDOR

The NGC has the potential to develop into a mature activity corridor. In order for this to happen certain elements were identified as critical components to enhance development opportunities that exists.

The following were identified to contribute to the significance of the area and pose a challenge for development:

- Tourism
- Economic Issues
- Natural Environment
- Movement
- Nuclear Facility
- Social Issues

3.1 Tourism

There are quite a number of places of historical and cultural interest that attract tourists and add to the unique character of the area.

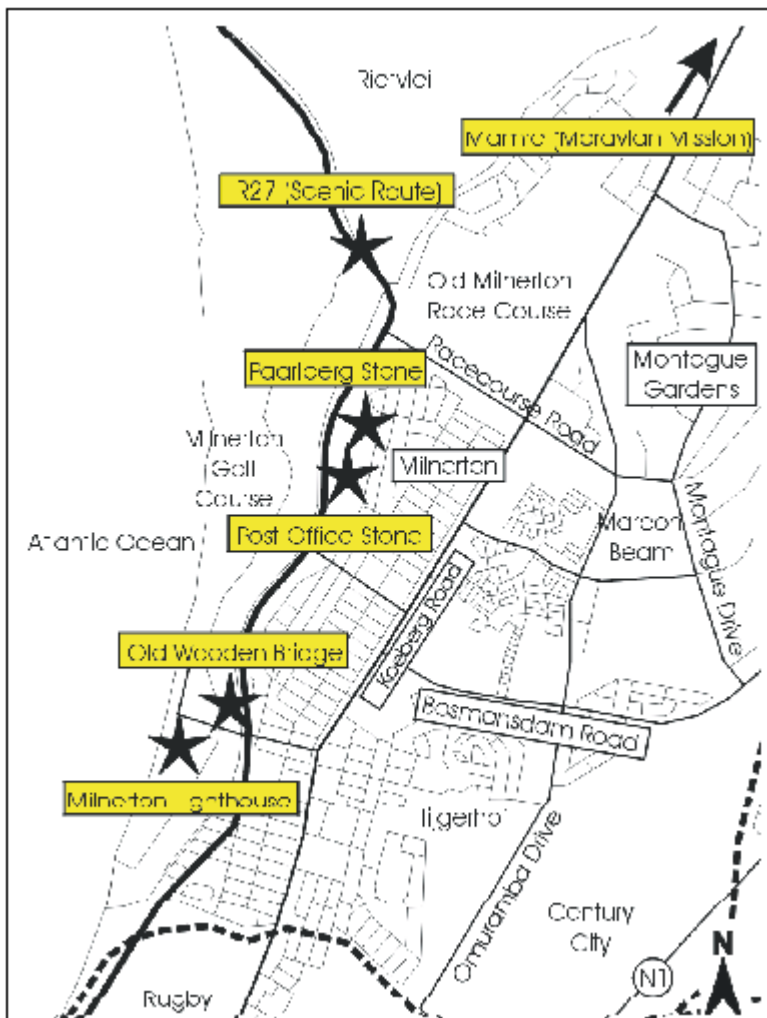


Figure 3. Locality map of tourist attractions.

The **Mamre Moravian Mission** was declared a National Monument in 1967 and the buildings date back from the 1800's and it has rich cultural historical heritage.

The **Old Wooden Bridge** at Milnerton served as a military access road across to Lagoon Island and was built during the Anglo Boer war in 1899. Today it is still used as a footbridge.

The **Post Office Stone** in Table View is the oldest relic of Portugese origin known in South Africa. The original is in the South African Museum and a replica at the Blaauwberg Tourism Office.

The **Paarlberg Stone** in Milnerton was unveiled on 14 August 1975 in honour of the Afrikaanse Taal Monument and can be viewed at the municipal offices in Pienaar Road, Milnerton.

The **Milnerton Lighthouse** is situated at Milnerton Beach and was established in 1960 and its function was to serve as a beacon for ships entering the Cape Town harbour.

The **Regional Main Road 27**, better known as the R 27, is a tourist attraction in itself. Tourism publication refers to the R27 as the “West Coast experience”. People flock to the West Coast to participate in flowershows, wine tasting at the various cellars in the district, or just to view the scenery.

There are a number of scenic drives along the Northern Growth Corridor, especially in the Blaauwberg area.

This include the following:

- Otto du Plessis/Marine Drive (R27/R14,)
- Table View beachfront,
- Tree Lane (R14 & R304),
- The N7, and
- Old Darling Road (R304).

3.2 Economic Issues

The Northern Growth Corridor provides sufficient land for economic development (local to regional retail facilities).

The existing major road, namely the R27, contributes to economic growth. Because of the R27 scenic value many visitors to the area prefer to use this route and as a result are exposed to economic activities along its way.

The **Bayside shopping centre** is located just off the R27 in the Blaauwberg area. It can be seen as an economic hub, which attracts people on a local and regional scale. This is one of many shopping facilities, which have expanded rapidly over the last few years. (Blaauwberg Municipality, 1999)

On a regional scale, **Century City**, in close proximity to the study area, is a shopping centre as well as an entertainment facility. This shopping centre hosts 450 shops and is situated next to Ratanga Junction which is the first full scale theme park in Africa and is open during summer months (November – April).

Figure 4 indicates a vacant piece of land which has immense potential due to it’s views of Table Mountain and the Atlantic Ocean and the adjacent rail line. The existence of the Milnerton Flea Market, which has become a sort of institution over the years, indicates a demand for informal retailing.



Figure 4. Photograph taken next to Marine Drive indicating potential.

The above-mentioned factors add to the economic significance of the Northern Growth Corridor.

3.3 Natural Environment

The West Coast is home to many natural environments and it offers a variety of unique **natural vegetation** to its inhabitants. The fynbos biome is indigenous to the country and one of the six plant kingdoms in the world. It may be the smallest of the six, but it is the richest in species and diversity. (West Coast District Council, Date unknown).

To promote the area along the NGC with land and marine ecosystems, the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve was proposed. The primary function of a biosphere reserve includes conservation, development and support. **Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve** differs from other reserves in that it is not a fenced-in reserve and is internationally acknowledged. It was proclaimed in 2000 “to recognise the community’s sustainable approach to life and living.” (Author unknown 2003) There has been a tremendous loss of coastal vegetation from 1652 until 1982 (West Coast District Council, Date unknown), which emphasises the dire need for conservation.



Source: Blaauwberg Tourism, date unknown

Figure 5. Unique vegetation.

The Koeberg Nature Reserve is a private nature reserve that was opened on 18 October 2001. The reserve contains two major veld types, namely Dune veld and West Coast Strandveld. Only 0.74% of West Coast Strandveld is being preserved at present (Blaauwberg, date unknown). Therefore, the Koeberg Nature Reserve plays an important conservation role. The reserve also hosts a number of animal species.

The **Dune Management Project** at Table View was established to control the wind-blown sand. This is a multi-functional project seeing as it aims to prevent the sand from blowing onto houses and roads, and it will improve the potential that exists for development and recreational facilities. They are also protected from encroachment of people and vehicles by means of fencing, information boards and boardwalks for pedestrian access to the beach across the dunes.

Development initiatives in the area are constrained as well as enhanced by these natural components.

3.4 Movement

As indicated on the map of the study area, it is clearly visible that a wide variety of different movement channels exist. However, public transport is not the main choice of movement, and the bulk of movement are by means of private vehicles.

The **Proposed airport site** was identified during an investigation for possible airport sites. It is situated in close proximity to Atlantis and its surrounding environment. Initially, two sites were identified, however, the one was found unsuitable because it falls within the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve (CWCBR). The proposed airport site is situated to the south east of Atlantis.

According to Mr Bettesworth (2003), there are no “serious discussions at this point and it remains more of a conceptual idea”.

However, the site proposed development of an airport as a possible contributor as previously mentioned.

The **Atlantis Railway Line** runs from Cape Town CBD to Saldanha and is an existing single freight service line. This provides an opportunity for development in that public transport can be established on this line. The Atlantis railway line is part of the “major structuring components of the proposed Northern Growth Corridor” as stated in the Blaauwberg Spatial Development Plan. (City of Cape Town, Planning and Development Directorate, 2002: 89) This document also refers to the potential that the line presents for a passenger service, and that it will be dependent on a link between Atlantis and Metro South East because of strong demand for movement between the northern and southern parts of the city. (City of Cape Town, Planning and Development Directorate, 2002)

The existing **road infrastructure** in the NGC consists of the main routes, namely the R27, the N7, the R304 and Koeberg Road.

The three main **public transportation modes** that exist are bus and minibus-taxi. There is no existing passenger rail line along the Northern Growth Corridor. The Golden Arrow Bus Service is the bus operators that function in the area and has scheduled routes. The Minibus- taxi’s in the area operate on demand and do not follow a timetable even though they have designated routes.

3.5 Nuclear Facility

Koeberg Nuclear Power Station is the only nuclear power station in Africa and the largest one in the Southern Hemisphere. (Blaauwberg, date unknown) It boasts the largest power station turbines in Africa and the one unique feature, is the fact that the condensers are cooled by seawater.



Figure 6. Koeberg Nuclear Power Station.

The biggest threat that the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station poses for future development is that there is a population restriction of a 20km radius as a safety standard. This means that the design of future development needs to accommodate emergency evacuations if necessary.

3.6 Social Issues

A very controversial component along the NGC is the social circumstances. This sprouts from the town of Atlantis, which has a different social setting to the rest of the area. The general impression of areas such as Table View, Milnerton, Melkbosstrand and Blaauwberg is that of a middle- to high-income area, while the towns of Atlantis and Mamre is known to house low-income residence. The political history of Atlantis also plays great deal in these circumstances. These extreme social settings and –structures contribute to a characteristically aspect of the study area and add to its uniqueness.

As can be deduced from the aforementioned, the Northern Growth Corridor poses many challenges because of its position in close proximity to a variety of positive and negative and sometimes controversial issues.

4. POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF THE PROPOSED NORTHERN GROWTH CORRIDOR

Transportation is very importance in the development of cities as stated by Vuchic in his book, Urban Public Transportation: Systems and Technology. (Vuchic 1981: 1) Dr Louw further stresses the importance of transport as elementary in our daily lives. He said: “It brings people together and connects people with goods, services and information.” (Louw, 2003: 2)

Should the study area be proposed as a Corridor, there would be repercussions on the components of the area.

4.1 Tourism

The aforementioned tourist attractions are not main attractions in the Cape Metropolitan Area. The influx of people will have a direct positive influence on tourism should the study area be proposed as a corridor and will give the tourism industry in the area an economic injection.

4.2 Economic Issues

It speaks for itself that the various retail facilities that is sustained by the threshold of the area will flourish. This will strengthen the local economy. With a stronger local economy the residents can live and work along the proposed corridor and therefore will to some extent relieve rush hour traffic.

4.3 Natural Environment

The study area will be affected in more than one way in terms of the natural environment when corridor development should take place. The influence that the natural environment will have on the development itself, will include the limitation of available land that can be developed. The environment will also restrict certain development activities and on the contrary could also steer the development into less conventional development options along a corridor.

4.4 Movement

The proposed passenger rail line will be a very important element along the NGC. This could be an additional and economically viable mode of transport for commuters that travel to and from work. It can also be utilised as a tourist attraction/facility over weekends and holidays and offer train trips along the picturesque West Coast to various tour destinations. Therefore, the public transport is not only answering to demands and needs, but can also enhance the economic opportunities that exist and create job opportunities.

4.5 Nuclear Facility

The close proximity of a nuclear facility does not mean no development will be allowed.

4.6 Social Issues

Should corridor development be proposed in the study area, it will have an immense positive spin-off on the social settings of the area. One will no longer see Atlantis and Mamre as separate settlements from the Blaauwberg region.

Public transport along the Northern Growth Corridor is currently inefficient. At present, the public transport system does not comply with envisioned demands and needs. This should be a major concern for the City of Cape Town seeing as public transport can play an important role in the economic and social integration and upliftment all along the NGC and especially for the town of Atlantis.

5. CONCLUSION

Cape Town is clearly running out of expansion options. The Northern Growth Corridor seems to suggest a solution to the cities growth pressures in that it offers sufficient land and basic infrastructure to support future development.

Public transport can be seen as the catalyst for development that might develop along the NGC. The Northern Growth Corridor can provide an example of integrated land use and transport planning. Transport, especially public transport, is seen as an important precondition for upliftment and socio-economic development along the Northern Growth Corridor.

Having regard to the sensitive realm in which the Northern Growth Corridor is situated, a proper understanding of it's numerous opportunities and constraints is needed for the City of Cape Town to successfully pursue its sustainable growth policy.

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