

A HIGH SPEED RAIL MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICA – HOW IT CAN WORK

J H VENTER and M J F D BUKASA

Khuthele Projects

ABSTRACT

South Africa has a very extensive and valuable railway network. After many decades of insufficient investment in its upgrading and extension, many railway professionals and rail users feel despondent about the future of railways in South Africa. However, the successful Gautrain Rapid Rail investment, together with certain railway projects related to the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, brought a new focus on railway investment. The current signalling and rolling stock projects of PRASA are good examples of this.

Worldwide, the implementation of High Speed Rail systems is growing at an accelerated pace. Many transportation experts recognize that the best answer to transportation gridlock is efficient intercity rail travel as trains use much less energy than any other mode of transport. They are not adversely affected by weather and they are business-efficient and tourist-friendly. The positive multiplier effects on the economy are enormous.

During 2010, decision makers and officials of the Department of Transport increasingly started making pronouncements on a potential new High Speed Rail Link in South Africa. Recent visits by prominent people to countries such as China, Japan, France and Spain illustrates the emphasis that there has been on such investments.

Most commentators would shoot these plans down similar to the opposition that the Gautrain Project experienced in its early days, possibly due to the problems experienced mentioned above. However, strangely as it may seem, it appears that a High Speed Rail Model may be developed that will be feasible and viable in the South African context.

The Paper discusses some of the key success factors, with the lessons learned from the Gautrain, that will have to be incorporated into any new investment such as the High Speed Rail proposal, together with some of the technical challenges that will have to be addressed as part of the comprehensive feasibility study.