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Transport to invest R55 billion on Gauteng freeways

The national Department of Transport is set to implement its groundbreaking R55 billion Gauteng Freeway Improvement Scheme. The scheme is part of government's innovative way of improving traffic flow in the Gauteng freeways, which carries more than 180 000 vehicles per day.

The scheme is to be implemented in phases and will expand the carrying capacity of existing roads, and further expansions of the freeway network. The environmental impact assessment has already begun on the various sections of the freeway network. The social and economic impact assessments are also underway and work has already begun from the Flying Saucer (R21) interchange up to the Atterbury interchange.

The department will invest more than R12 billion in the first phase of this project, due for completion by 2010. For the second phase, which is due for completion in 2015, the department will invest R20 billion and R23 billion for the final phase to be completed in 2018. This project will be financed through the 'user-pay' principle, and it will allow our roads to be funded, without resorting to the national fiscus for such projects. The scheme will also promote the concepts of ride sharing as well as the usage of public transport.

As part of this scheme, the department will also introduce the toll technologies which will allow for the free flow of traffic at tolling points, as an extension of our intelligent transport system. It must however be emphasised that the public consultation process will first be undertaken before the tolling system is introduced.

Electronic toll collection will allow motorists to travel unhindered. The tolling of the road system will begin in 2010/11, through the building of 47 gantries on existing roads, approximately 11km apart. It is estimated that contributions will accrue to the gross domestic product of R14.2 billion and R15.3 billion in 2008 and 2009 through our freeway scheme. The Gauteng GGP for the same years will benefit to R6.3 billion and R6.7 billion.

The scheme is to be done through the creation of an interconnected network of inner and outer ring roads, and will also provide a direct link to the historically neglected areas of the South Western townships of Johannesburg. The network will eventually comprise of 561 km.

The first phase of the project, up to 2010, will consist of an upgrade of the existing freeway network of 180km, which includes additional lanes and major interchange improvements. The plans include inter-modal transport hubs to surface and rail based public transport facilities.

The department is confident that this project will create more than 30 000 direct jobs, with a further 138 900 indirect opportunities. The total value of the

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2008-04-02

infrastructure will provide a R39,7 billion contribution to capital formation, on completion, and R60 billion over a 20 year period. This scheme will also be supported by other initiatives like the Gautrain, a National Rail Plan, and a Bus Rapid Transport system.

The department, through the South African National Roads Agency Ltd (SANRAL), is working with the Gauteng government as well as the metro authorities in Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni in bringing this scheme to fruition.

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