





READY, STEADY, GROW

Despite ongoing frustration at road refurbishment, airport rebuilds and stadium construction, not to mention a fragile economy, the 2010 Fifa World Cup preparations are taking shape. Kerry Dimmer wonders if we're ready to lift the pessimism and embrace the event?

Trains,

stadiums, roads, hotels,
and airports – SA is
in a building frenzy

in preparation for the 2010 Fifa World Cup.

Chief communications officer of the World Cup Local Organising Committee, Rich Mkhondo, says they are expecting 450 000 local and international visitors for the 2010 tournament. These kindred soccer souls are ultimately the reason why SA is spending R19.5 billion on building and improving some of its infrastructure in readiness for the biggest sporting event in the world.

'Getting ready for the 2010 Fifa World Cup means that we are actually preparing for 32 teams to take to the field,' says Mkhondo. 'The 10 stadiums that Fifa selected from SA's bid book are spread across eight of the nine provinces so that each will have an opportunity to feel and touch the World Cup.'

Six of the stadiums needed building from scratch while the remaining four required upgrades. The latter were completed in time for the 2009 Confederations Cup, largely considered a dry-run for 2010. These four stadiums – Loftus Versveld in Tshwane, Coca-Cola Park in Johannesburg, Free State Stadium in Bloemfontein and Royal Bafokeng in Rustenberg – were key in measuring the effectiveness of stadium operations including pitch, sound, media centres and operations, seating and overlay arrangements, security and other essential services.

Soccer City in Soweto is the flagship stadium and will host the opening and closing ceremonies. Although technically not a new stadium, it is undergoing such a major upgrade that it could be considered as one. The 2 600 people on site and hundreds of subcontractors countrywide have brought the unique calabash design to 85% completion. Developers are hoping to hand over the stadium by the end of September.

Although there is no official competition between the stadiums being built, there appears to be an unspoken rivalry of sentiment. The Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in Port Elizabeth came out tops in this game when it broke a World Cup record by being the first stadium ever completed 14 months before kick-off.

Marketing, communications and events management consultant at the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, 2010 directorate, Putco Mafani says this achievement was also accomplished within budget. 'Each stadium has to hold three test events prior to handing over to Fifa and we are proud that one of those was hosting a match during the British and Irish Lions rugby tour to SA.'

Rustenberg recently announced the completion of the Royal Bafokeng Sports Palace while the stadiums



Soccer City in Soweto is the flagship stadium and will host the opening and closing ceremonies

in Durban, Nelspruit and Polokwane are around 80% complete, and all on line to meet the final deadline of 31 October. Green Point stadium in Cape Town has had its fair share of controversy and despite a late start is already 70% on its way to hand over to the City of Cape Town on 14 December.

South Africans have had to learn to live with the inconvenience of diversions, particularly at international airports which, as Mkhondo points out, are vitally important considering they are the first steps into the African experience of the World Cup. 'There are three major entrances from both sides of our continent. Europeans will join us at OR Tambo, Asians will enter through the new King Shaka International airport in Durban. Those from the Americas will arrive via Cape Town,' he explains.

Airports Company South Africa spokesperson, Solomon Makgale, emphasises that although certain elements of the airport upgrades are in anticipation of the 2010 Fifa World Cup, the main driver is to build capacity to accommodate future traffic growth. 'The 2010 Fifa World Cup has simply fast-tracked some of the construction,' he says.

Aside from the new R7-billion international airport at La Mercy under construction in Durban, and the refurbishment at domestic airports in Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, East London, Kimberley and Upington, the most significant developments are those at OR Tambo in Johannesburg. 'The R105-million upgrade of the international departures terminal and R533-million international pier have been completed,' says Makgale. 'The central terminal building (CTB) is the most exciting development, scheduled for completion before the end of the year.'



Designed to provide passengers with a smooth and uninterrupted travel experience, the CTB will facilitate procedure through one central processing unit from which both domestic and international check-in will take place. There will be 120 check-in counters with 20 self-service check-in machines and a state-of-the-art baggage handling system. The previous arrival terminals 1 and 2 have already been combined into a single tier with carousels to accommodate passenger loads for the new Airbus A380.

OR Tambo will also connect to the Gautrain Rapid Rail Link. According to spokesperson Dr Barbara Jensen, however, 'Only the link to Sandton station will be open because this is where the majority of hotels are situated. All worldwide airport links have to have a central hub from where people move to where they want to be. Obviously we are working at full capacity as the airport link to Sandton is a priority.'

Fifa's worldwide exclusive rights holder for its hospitality programme is MATCH Hospitality AG. Peter Csanadi is its most enthusiastic head of Marketing and Public Relations, based in Zurich. MATCH Hospitality has put together three premium, and highly desirable, packages for the 2010 tournament and Csanadi says the response so far from SA has been very good and better than expected, with the organisation's Big Five Series almost sold out.

'This is a very good product that provides private suite hospitality for every match in the five biggest stadiums and the response from South Africans has been better than expected.'



'Internationally, we have a lot of pipelines but all the past World Cups have shown that international sales will only become serious from September to December, after the teams have qualified, so only then can we expect the big hospitality countries like England, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, to start buying into the services.'

Ticketing sales for the 2009 Confederations Cup were slow, proving to Csanadi that South Africans are also not early buyers by nature. But in the four weeks prior to the event, the numbers changed rapidly, probably due to an increase in marketing.

Csanadi, who has spent over three months in SA, says there was a distinct difference between the advertising he saw in March and what he witnessed in April. 'Suddenly Johannesburg became football land,' he explains. 'The visibility was everywhere. There were balls, posters, jerseys ... this was a dramatic improvement making us very confident for the future.'

It is this very confidence that is going to change the hospitality industry in SA for the World Cup. Csanadi explains that MATCH is aiming to create a world-class service with great SA appeal. 'You have to recognise the host country and be very respectful of its traditional hospitality, but Fifa has an altogether higher level of standards that demand innovative and state-of-the-art practices. Our job is to merge the flavour of SA with Fifa, and repackage it in a way that takes it to another dimension.'

Presenting our SA 'flavours' to the world at large is the responsibility of Fifa's TV service provider, HBS. Acting as host broadcaster it will ensure that all matches of both Fifa's 2009 Confederations Cup and the 2010 World Cup will be produced in high definition (HD) format and is providing 15 cameras per venue and 29 HD cameras for the final.

To ensure the delivery of a world-class global broadcast signal to more than 190 territories for the 2009 Fifa Confederations Cup, Fifa and HBS are working closely with various services partners, including Telkom SA, SABC, Deltatre, the European Broadcasting Union and Sentec. Media centres (of which there will be one

“

Fifa has an altogether higher level of standards that demand innovative and state-of-the-art practices ”

at every stadium) hosted 2 000 media representatives during the Confederations Cup and will accommodate 15 000 during the World Cup. Fifa manages all media operations and facilities hand-in-hand with the Local Organising Committee.

But the biggest impact of all on locals, has been the refurbishment of the roads. Rich Mkhondo agrees that this has been an inconvenience. 'The road enhancements however, are necessary for the free flow of transporting spectators and the increased load on our routes. We need to ensure that our roads are easily manoeuvrable, but overall this is not unlike having your house renovated – there is going to be dust and displeasure but there is always joy at the end.'

Mkhondo confirms that all the transport improvements are on track for the World Cup but reminds us that we are going to enjoy the benefit of these enhancements beyond 2010.

'SA is a construction site at the moment,' he says. 'We are confident that all infrastructure required for this event will be ready. Both tournaments will run smoothly and showcase SA – in fact Africa – as ready to host such big events. Nothing is going to go wrong short of a national disaster, which we don't expect. The fact is, we are going to stage the best World Cup ever, we have no doubt about that.'

JSE

