

# Nation of complication

DELAYS in stadium construction and infrastructure must be causing Fifa and the World Cup local organising committee concern.

Repeated disruptions to construction at Green Point stadium, and similar interruptions to work on the Gautrain, have occasioned a flurry of activity trying to mitigate the impact.

In both instances, it was strike action that led to worker slowdowns. In the case of Green Point stadium a salary dispute, and concern on the part of construction workers about shuttle arrangements between the site and Cape Town station, led to the delay. In the case of the Gautrain it was specifically a salary-related dispute that led to strike action.

Not unpredictably, the committee bemoaned the strike action in Cape Town, with spokesman Tim Modise condemning its unprocedural nature. In the case of the Gautrain, the Bombela Civic Joint Venture — project managers of the rapid rail link — sought an urgent interdict ordering workers to return to work, arguing that the strike ignored various national-level agreements on which the workers' terms and conditions of agreement were based.

The Green Point situation must be particularly worrisome to Fifa, the committee and the government, not least because the contractors — including Murray & Roberts project director Andrew Fanton — have explicitly stated that these delays have affected preparations badly.

Of course, compounding matters in the Green Point case is the fact that this is not the first time workers have downed tools, nor is it the first delay on the project. Approval of the R2,7bn budget for the stadium, for example, took at least six months to finalise. Additionally, the Cape Town Environmental Protection Agency halted construction earlier this year on environmental grounds, and it now has a court interdict pending to stop all construction.

So the Green Point experience, where construction began only three months ago, has been riddled with problems and controversy, not boding particularly well for completion according to the very tight timeline.

The Gautrain matter is no less serious, although it is not crucial that the project — even if just the OR Tambo International Airport/Sandton leg — is completed on time for the World Cup. It would be nice if sectors crucial to the movement of spectators and service providers were ready, but transport plans are in place should the project not deliver on time, even though the transport department has been cagey about the details.



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The bigger point about all of this is that it is difficult to comprehend why the committee, in particular, did not factor in the impact of things like industrial disputes, and other politically and institutionally based and motivated developments, on the delivery schedule.

Ratification of tender agreements, finalisation of budgets, agreements on workers' terms and conditions of employment, consensus on locally based institutional arrangements to give effect to area-based development, and pending court rulings following disputes, come to mind here.

There are the additional concerns, outside the political

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domain, having to do primarily with the shortage of locally produced raw material, and locally bred specialists with appropriate construction and infrastructure skills, which should also have been anticipated. The impact of this on the construction schedule is also not inconsiderable.

All the scenarios sketched above, and hypotheses posed, are real. That the committee chose to assume a completely level play-

ing field in the delivery of 2010 targets unequivocally reflects naive thinking, for which the government must also share culpability. But, then again, Fifa would probably not have been too happy with a proper digest of local political reality at the start of the project, although with hindsight they probably wish they'd got one.

The bottom line is that this is SA, where everything is about negotiation and consensus, and where nothing is uncomplicated.

As a Japanese corporate executive recently reminded me on a trip to Tokyo, "You South Africans are masters at negotiation and developing policy instruments and plans to drive development. You consult widely, and make sure everyone is happy. Whether you are able to implement is another matter!"

It is a rather telling observation, which has a bearing not only on our ability to deliver 2010, but with respect to the state's wider development mandate.

Indeed, we should have factored all the "imponderables" into the equation, then planned accordingly. Who at the committee, for example, is asking what the likely impact on the 2010 delivery schedule is of new leadership and a potentially new ideological discourse on development and delivery that may emerge after the African National Congress national elective conference later this year?

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