**GO!Durban moves ahead in 2015**

The eThekwini Municipality’s GO!Durban (IRPTN) Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network, possibly one of the largest service delivery projects in the transport sector ever undertaken in South Africa “will continue to progress at a rapid pace in 2015,” says Head of the eThekwini Transport Authority, Thami Manyathi.

GO!Durban began rolling out major milestones in 2014 which included the awarding of five major construction tenders, the signing of an MOA with the leadership of the mini-bus taxi industry, the unveiling of the project’s Empowerment Charter, the launch of the city’s NMT (Non-Motorised Transport Network), the consolidation of the cashless MUVO smartcard system, engagements with community stakeholders, businesses and the eThekwini citizens, as well as the launch of a mobile marketing bus and other key brand awareness events.

Construction of the dedicated lanes for buses commenced on the C3 corridor from Bridge City in KwaMashu to Pinetown, in various segments over the 24km stretch of road which comprises a large portion of the provincial MR577. Construction also began on an underpass that will extend under the M25 (Curnick Ndlovu Highway) connecting the Bridge City Precinct to the Phoenix Industrial Area. This year, work will be advanced on this route, and construction will commence on the Bridge City Depot and Terminal in KwaMashu.Construction will also begin on the stations with the first one being constructed in New Germany.

The signing of the Memorandum of Agreement with the minibus taxi leadership took place in February last year. Key taxi leadership agreed to the process and the manner in which the industry would be negotiating their participation in the new system.  “This was not a signing of how they would be participating but how a mutually beneficial negotiation process would take place.” explains Manyathi. “We appointed technical advisors in November last year, to support the taxi industry in the negotiations going forward.  As part of this process we have planned roadshows for industry stakeholders and these should begin soon. These roadshows will provide opportunities for them to engage with these advisors and give input into their participation in the process of how they will negotiate their involvement. Furthermore we hope to sign an MOA with the bus operators soon, so that a similar process can be mapped out for them.”

“Five major construction tenders were awarded in 2014, totalling R2.2 billion, R890 million of which was awarded to Black owned companies. A further R367 million of the total amount has been allocated to enterprise development” explains Manyathi. “Then in October we unveiled the unique GO!Durban Empowerment Charter, which is not a preferencing policy, nor an embellishment of the BEE regulations, but is a series of additional specifications added by the GO!Durban project to all contracts awarded on the project. This unveiling created an opportunity for various stakeholders to understand the empowerment of the project and how it is set up to support local communities and businesses through a share in the Equity, Skills Development, Enterprise Development and Corporate Social Investment or Socio-Economic Development. We also began a process of developing a skills database last year in each affected ward which will provide the city and the contractors with information pertaining to the skills available in the affected wards and employing from it.” The key success of this development made possible by execution of the Empowerment Charter is the employment of over 3700 local labourers from the affected wards along this first corridor to date, and the capacity building that is taking place with various local SMME’s that are being used in the construction."

The cashless MUVO SmartCard which has been introduced into the City’s current public transport was consolidated in 2014 and is now fully operational with over 115 000 cards registered and issued to date. “This means by the time we are operational in 2016, many commuters will be familiar with the idea and the benefits of a cashless system.” says Manyathi.

Another important milestone that was reached in 2014 was the launch of the Non-Motorised Transport Network in August. Here the Mayor, Cllr James Nxumalo, revealed the plans for sidewalks, off-road paths, safe crossings, pedestrian bridges and cycle areas that will enable and encourage people to walk and cycle through the City.

The temporary Traffic Management Centre (TMC) based at the ETA will be completed this year to support the C3 operations when it becomes operational in 2016, and a contract for the construction of the new TMC in the Centrum site will be awarded in 2015. The TMC is essential for the running of GO!Durban but the development will also facilitate the growth of an essential Civic Square which will include the main city bus terminal, the new Central Library and other municipal service departments. This Civic Square will then link to the ICC, the Durban Exhibition Centre, the CBD, beachfront through walkways, cycle lanes and pedestrianized parts of the inner city area.

In an endeavour to consolidate the project and assist the public in understanding the complexities of this new system, GO!Durban will open an information centre which will act as a central hub for the business of delivering the actual the project, attracting investors and partners and other developers to it.

“We would like to thank the public for their patience during the construction period of the project,” says Manyathi. “We understand the frustrations experienced due to the inconveniences caused by road deviations and closures to enable us to develop the dedicated bus lanes on the first corridor. Every effort is being made to minimise disruptions for commuters.”