

Gautrain's 48 new coaches to ease rush-hour squeeze

By [Andiswa Maqutu](#)

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The winner of the bid to provide 48 new coaches for the Gautrain would be named in November, Gauteng MEC for roads and transport Ismail Vadi said on Thursday. The new rolling stock, part of an estimated R3.5bn procurement deal, is expected to boost the Gautrain's capacity to meet growing ridership demand over the next 10 years, particularly during the rush hour.



The Gautrain has already reached passenger levels predicted for 2020 on rising peak-hour demand. The rapid rail system has had growth of 26% year on year.

The provincial transport department had set aside R1.8bn for the Gautrain this fiscal year, said Vadi. The department pays a subsidy to the Bombela Concession Company, which operates the Gautrain. Revenue generated from the new coaches could lower the subsidy paid. Gauteng paid Bombela R1.1bn in 2015. In 2013 and 2014 the province paid R800m and R1.035bn, respectively.

In January Vadi said Bombela had invited bids for the design, manufacture, supply and maintenance of 12 electrical trains (four coaches each). It has 96 coaches. The deal includes the design and construction of Gautrain depot infrastructure.

Seven companies were shortlisted, two of which are local. The foreign companies are Alstom, China South Rail, Siemens,

DCD Rolling Stock as well as Bombardier, the current supplier. The local bidders are Transnet Engineering and Mizana.

"The planned expansion shows that Gautrain enjoys high levels of confidence by rail commuters and that the passenger demand is growing steadily," Vadi said.

Funding for the new coaches was secured from the Development Bank of Southern Africa in the form of a R3.5bn loan to the Gautrain Management Agency, a unit of the provincial transport department that oversees the Gautrain.

Transport analyst Paul Browning said the new coaches were a good investment as they would increase the current eight-car train sets operated during peak periods to 12-car sets, a 50% capacity increase. "When you have invested all that money in a fixed-track system you should use it to capacity. It may make things only marginally better because the additional capacity will be taken up," said Browning. However, he said the additional revenue from the new coaches was unlikely to decrease the subsidy that the provincial government paid to the concessionaire because of the additional operating costs.

Source: Business Day

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