The depth of governance structures attached to the Gautrain project, and the lessons learnt in the implementation of this flagship project, are of great value in the current South African context — where large transport projects are beginning to take off, not always with robust governance models in place.

The first phase of Gautrain, linking OR Tambo International Airport and Sandton, is set to be operational in time for the World Cup, with the balance of the system due to open in 2011. Travelling at 160km per hour, Gautrain will link 10 stations over an 80km route across Gauteng’s three metropolitan areas. Three of the 10 stations will be located underground, the deepest nearly 11 stories below street level.

The first phase of the system will include an express airport link that will whisk passengers between OR Tambo International Airport and Sandton in only 15 minutes, and the stations will be serviced by 125 dedicated buses — making Gautrain part of an integrated public transport offering.

The system’s rolling stock is made up of 96 rail cars that will be operated initially in four-car train sets, able to carry more than 100 000 passengers per day. Although manufactured in the United Kingdom, 81 of the rail cars are being assembled in South Africa.

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Since the Gautrain project was first initiated, there has been a high level of public interest, and from some quarters opposition to the project. Debate has centred around the cost-benefit, particularly when compared to other new initiatives in public transport (such as Bus Rapid Transit).

Nevertheless, there are some important features of the Gautrain project that set it apart from other transport interventions and provide examples of best practice.

**Strong intergovernmental co-operation**

Even though good relations between spheres of government are required by the Constitution, in many instances co-operation between public bodies is weak — or actively hostile. All too often this is not because different political parties are in government, but because of petty conflicts over turf, and an undeveloped culture of networking.

Gautrain’s progress has been underpinned by formal agreements between provincial and national government (the key government partners and funders of the project); in addition there is a third party agreement between all of the public partners, including the three metropolitan municipalities that the train will service, ACSA and the SA Rail Commuter Corporation (now called PRASA).

A new provincial law governs this infrastructure project and provides a transparent legal underpinning to the project. In many transport projects, even those that seem to involve only one public player, relationships with other spheres of government are important for success. In many cities, relations with the minibus taxi industry require a multi-sphere response, which might require co-operation with the South African Police Service and the South African Revenue Service.

Integrated transport services will also likely travel on roads managed by national, provincial, district and local municipalities; specialist government agencies such as the SA National Roads Agency are also likely partners, as are airports and other publicly owned destinations.

Better-oiled intergovernmental relations in the transport sector will certainly contribute to successful projects going forward.

**A robust public private partnership**

At the heart of the Gautrain partnership is a public private partnership structured with the winning bidder of a competitive tender. The relationship is a 20-year concession agreement for construction (54 months) and operating and maintenance (15 years). The public and private partners have signed a concession agreement that commits all parties to achieving the project objectives. This agreement...
preceded work on the construction phase, and has simplified the relationship with suppliers to one large contract with the Bombela Concession Company.

Bombela is made up of four specialist sponsors as well as two investor companies. They are the two construction companies, Murray and Roberts, and Bouygues; the rolling stock and other electrical and mechanical equipment suppliers, Bombardier; and the Black Empowerment Partner, SPG.

Given the limited resources and time that most public managers have at their disposal, there is merit in avoiding multiple tenders and thus multiple relations with suppliers.

**Governance**

Well-designed governance structures have no doubt contributed to the smooth running of this challenging project. The Gauteng provincial government is represented through the Gautrain Management Agency (GMA), established through an act of the provincial legislature. The GMA represents and acts on behalf of the Gauteng Provincial Government to oversee the concession agreement and the achievement of project objectives.

A number of independent bodies also play important governance roles.

The Independent Certifier certifies that milestones have been achieved, against which payment can be made to the concessionaire. Milestones are certified every month consolidated into a monthly payment certificate.

The Independent Environmental Control Person monitors and reports on compliance with the approved Environmental Management Plan, as well as statutory obligations pertaining to environmental performance during construction and subsequent operation of the project.

The Independent Socio-Economic Monitor validates the concessionaire’s compliance with its contracted socio-economic obligations during the design, construction and commissioning process.

There is also a Dispute Resolution Board, jointly appointed by the Gauteng Province and Bombela, to resolve disputes in the development phase of Gautrain.

In political environments where leaders come and go, the existence of structures that supersede personalities is also important. Gautrain has been associated with a number of strong leaders and managers, but is not dependent on them. So the departure of Mbhazima Shilowa from the ANC has not threatened Gautrain, for a time referred to as the Shilowa Express. There has also been a seemingly smooth transition over the recent election period, thanks to the binding legal agreements and structures that have been put in place to hold the project.