



PROPOSED JOHANNESBURG COMMUTER RAILWAY ROUTE 1946

INTRODUCTION

Transport of passengers and freight whether by ox-wagon, stagecoach, railway or road plays an integral part in the economic growth of a country.

The railway line from Cape Town to Wellington was completed and opened to a full regular steam service in November 1863. There was then a hiatus with no further development.

This prompted the following extracted out of a letter written by the Colonial Railway Engineer Mr. John Fred Bourne to the Colonial Secretary in London dated 12th April 1865:” but it is with reason asked:” Why should we go to the expense to increase the production of the land, when we cannot get even what we do produce to market at paying rates: Further he wrote:” in every country in the world increased facilities for transport and communication have been attended with the most beneficial and economical results, both to the inhabitants and to the revenue, so much so, that the progress of the railway system can be taken as a measure of the civilization of a country.

This prompted further slow action by the Colonial Authorities and the extension of the line to Worcester was only completed in 1876 some 13 years later.

The same remarks can be applied to the metropolitan transport of the City of Johannesburg.

IT IS NOT A MATTER OF WHAT THE CITY CAN AFFORD BUT WHAT IT CANNOT AFFORD NOT TO PROVIDE.

Railways have rendered more services and received less gratitude than any other institution in the world

During the Second World War South African Engineers were involved in the building of the line from Palestine (Israel) to Syria, which involved a tunnel, to expedite the termination of the war and most importantly the lines in North Africa supplying the troops as they advanced. Further experience was gained in the restoration of the tunnels in Italy that had been blasted closed by the Germans.

PROPOSED RAIL COMMUTER SYSTEM FOR JOHANNESBURG

With this experience and tunneling and mining experience in South Africa and the post war boom.

In 1946 a joint railway and municipal group was formed to investigate the provision of a combined underground and surface metropolitan railway passenger service for Johannesburg. It is recognized worldwide that the most efficient and effective way of moving people within a densely populated metropolitan area is by means of a rail guided mass transport system.

The following extracts from the presidential addresses of the Presidents of the South African Institution of Civil Engineers.

Mr. William Marshall Clark President of the South African Institution of Civil Engineers in 1948 then General Manager of the South African Railways one of the investigating team of 1946 stated "I predict severe road congestion in Johannesburg and consideration must be given to an underground commuter system to serve Alexandra and other areas. Transportation is of vital interest in the world and was becoming more complex in a modern society."

Mr. Frederick Jackson President of the South African Institution of Civil Engineers in 1964 stated "in 1946 an investigation committee comprised of Municipal and Railway officials in analyzing the rapid transport system of various countries found it feasible and reasonably inexpensive to provide Johannesburg with an underground system as being the most efficient and advantageous yet admittedly the most expensive. It is essential to plan the routes and acquire the land at this stage"

Although a rough route was proposed at that stage no further action was taken. The minutes and other documents regarding these proposals must be available in the archives of the Johannesburg municipality.

The reason for this was that, by hearsay, it was not within the Railway Act to provide a metropolitan railway network. The Johannesburg Council was to provide the funds to build the line and it would be operated as a guaranteed line, by the South African Railways, as was the case of private sidings and the extensions of the main lines for the sole purpose of serving a private company.

With the change in Government and the proclamation of the Group Areas Act involving the development of the South Western Townships (SOWETO) a further commuter line from SOWETO to Johannesburg became a necessity in the early 1950's. The one end of the line to take off at New Canada Junction to Naledi and at the other end, Mr Fred Jackson then Resident Engineer Reef Construction proposed that the line take off at Crown Station and end at West Street which was on the earlier proposed route of the underground commuter system for Johannesburg.

The Crown Westgate line was built during 1955-1956 and the route plan indicated the proposed route of the M1 motorway in the vicinity of Westgate. Consideration had to be given to the siting of the station for the future extension of the line to link up with the extension of the Booyens- Faraday line.

At the time of the building of the Crown Westgate line further preliminary routes were investigated. The Crown- Westgate line was to be extended under Village Main Road to join the Booyens- Faraday line extension to be partially constructed cut and cover down Eloff Street and tunnel under the new Johannesburg Station, still under construction at the time, with an underground station and pedestrian connections to the mainline station.

The route in tunnel would then extend to exit in the vicinity of the now Harrow Road exit of the now M1 motorway extended further above ground virtually on the route of the present M1 to serve Alexandra Township turning sharply in a South Westerly direction to pick up Braamfontein Spruit tunnel under the Witwatersrand in the vicinity of Millpark and Braamfontein yard to exit and link up at Crown Station.

With the building of the Gautrain should an underground commuter railway system be contemplated the proposed route will have to be amended to accommodate the Goutrain Park Station

Compiled by P.H.Louw