

BUSINESS REPORT - Monday 30 June 2008

Durban's new airport faces risk to power supply

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Durban - Disruptions at most 2010 World Cup projects around the country have emanated from labour disputes. But the construction site of the new King Shaka airport and a trade zone in Durban have been zapped by an incompetent electricity supplier.

The supplier appointed by the eThekweni municipality to build the La Mercy substation has been fired for not performing. Rohan Persard, the chief executive at Dube Tradeport, which is handling the project on behalf of the government, said on Friday that the substation was behind schedule by as much as four months.

Persard said the absence of the supplier was not a threat to the project, although it could be problematic when it was time to do the commissioning of the facilities next year.

"There is a temporary feed from Umdloti at the moment, which is fine," said Persard. "But when we start commissioning, we will need two. I am more concerned about whether it [the substation] would be ready on time, but this is really out of our hands because it is the city's responsibility to supply the power."

Sandile Maphumulo, the municipality's head of electricity, said a new contractor had been appointed to the project and would start working today.

Maphumulo could not say if the new supplier would be able to make up the lost time.

"The new contractor is doing evaluation on work done by the old one," said Maphumulo. "He has been given a schedule and timelines, but for details on whether he accepts those timelines and if he will meet them, only our architectural services can answer that."

Attempts on Friday to get comment from the architectural services and the names of the contractors were unsuccessful.

More than R2 billion of the R7.2 billion budgeted has been spent already on the road and concrete works.

Duncan Barry, the project manager from the Ilembe consortium, which is building the airport, said it had introduced an acceleration programme to make up for days lost when it was waiting on a decision from the department of environmental affairs and tourism.

Barry said: "We have increased resources, the plant [and] changed methods of construction in certain areas."

If the delay was not addressed, it would mean that the airport, which is supposed to be operational for the 2010 soccer World Cup, would be completed by July 2010 instead of March that year.