

LA MERCY TAKES OFF

JANI MEYER

ITHAS been a bumpy ride and more than three decades coming, but construction of the airport at La Mercy is going full steam ahead.

Six construction sites have been set up for the earthworks, to prepare a 3.7km runway, taxiways and aircraft parking areas that will be the size of 100 soccer pitches.

Airports Company of South Africa (Acsa) spokesman Colin Naidoo said 100 000m³ of concrete, 4 700 tons of structural steel and 230 000 tons of asphalt – the equivalent of 35km of a four-lane highway – would be used during construction.

About 100 park homes and a temporary water reservoir have been constructed on site. The control tower shaft and offices around it are being built.

There are between 1 800 and 2 000 contractors and sub-contractors at the site.

A total of 187 earthmovers, including bulldozers, have so far moved 4 million tons of earth on the site.

The detail is already in focus. To “get things right” from the start, for instance, Acsa and the contractors have already met representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs to discuss the location of that department’s lounge where politicians and foreign dignitaries would be hosted on arrival and departure.

Naidoo said phase one of the project was well under way with compliance to the conditions of the Record of Decision (RoD), the official document giving the green light for a project, and Department of Environmental Affairs stipulations.

Some matters, such as moving the Mount

A PLAN is being devised to safeguard the population of barn swallows which migrate in the summer to the area near the airport



LEFT: Construction at La Mercy Airport is well under way, with the control tower clearly visible. **ABOVE:** A graphic of the landscaped gardens designed as a welcome sight for travellers using the new airport

ensure the safety of aircraft as well as the well-being of the birds.

During the scoping process a radar monitoring system was used to record the number of birds. It was also used at Durban International Airport, and it was found that a large number of swallows migrated there without any major safety risks.

Airspace

Environmental Affairs stipulated that a radar monitoring system had to be bought to monitor the birds in the summer months so they could share airspace with the airport.

Naidoo said Virginia Airport, which would also share airspace with La Mercy, would not be moved yet. It was not an Acsa concern but belonged to the city.

The impact that the new airport will have on the smaller, suburban airport was omitted

from the initial draft scoping report and eThekweni Municipality undertook to do a specialist study.

Head of the eThekweni Municipal Strategic Project Unit, Julie-May Ellingson, said last year that the airport would be moved, but no date has been set.

La Mercy is also preparing for hundreds of tons of aviation fuel. According to a specialist traffic assessment report, 1 000m³ of aviation fuel would be required on the site daily by 2015. This would require 20 trips a day by petrol tankers from the Sapref refinery next to Durban International Airport.

The report said it would cost R50 to R100 a kilometre or between R15 million and R30 million a year to transport the fuel, depending on world oil prices.

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Moreland community south of the runway, increased noise levels but plans were still in place to keep these acceptable.”

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These included that noise would be not dealt with properly in

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Acsa added that the restricted flying zone was not intended to prohibit crop spraying, but to allow these activities to take place under controlled conditions. The environmental

impact assessment recommended Acsa establish a task team to resolve the crop spraying and cane burning issues.

One of the main concerns about construction of the airport was the fate of three million barn swallows which migrate to the wetlands and reed-beds next to the site in Mount Moreland.

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the scoping report; high levels of noise could perhaps not be muffled and the proposed no-fly zone would prohibit crop spraying and cane burning.

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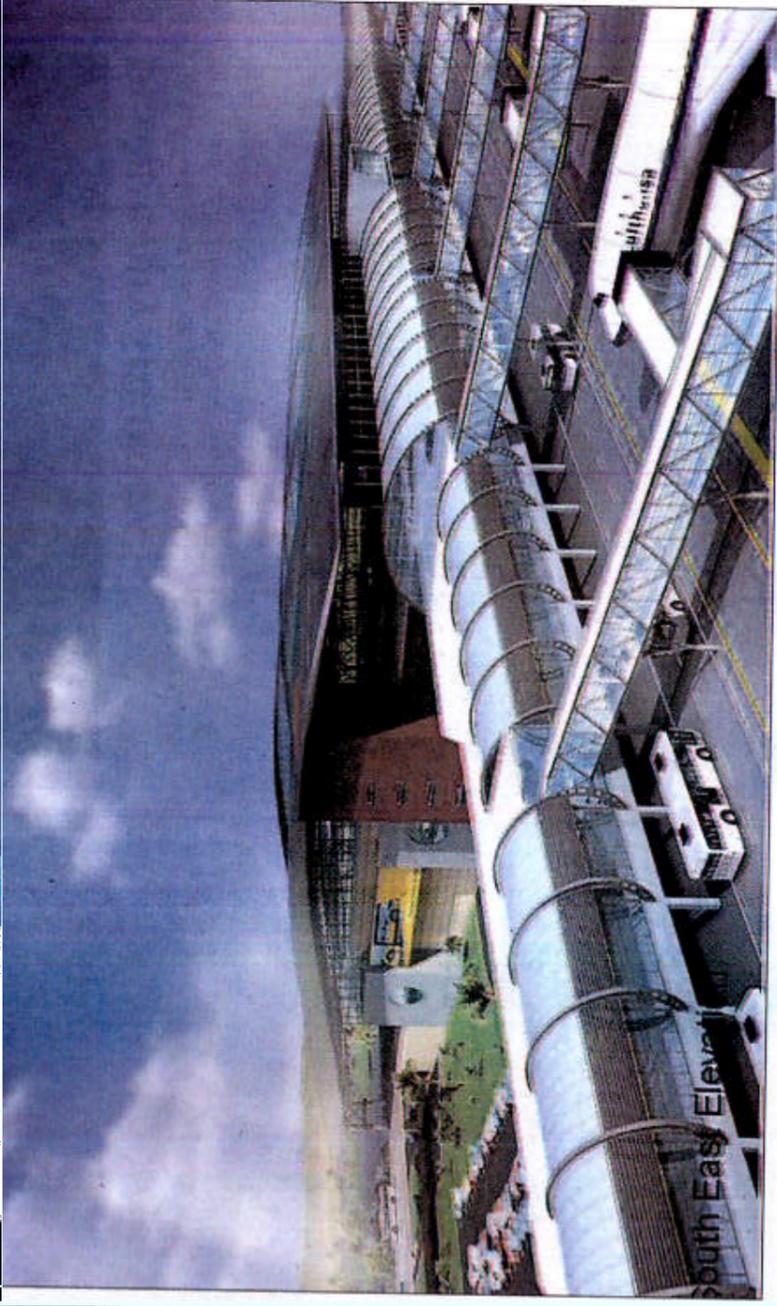
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from this . . .



□ The site for the new airport at La Mercy before construction began

. . . to that



□ An artist's impression of the modern terminals at the new airport

