

## **New airport 'will not be a white elephant'**

MARGIE INGGIS – BUSINESS DAY 12/03/2009

DURBAN — The city's new R7,2bn international airport, which is due to open in May next year, would definitely not be a white elephant, Rohan Persad, MD of the Dube TradePort, said yesterday — even though most foreign airlines have said they would not use it.

Persad said the airport was a 30-year investment in infrastructure and that Air Emirates had already given its clear intention to use Durban International Airport for daily flights from October this year.

"The government has identified certain strategic routes, including Durban to the UK, Durban to Dubai and Durban to India, possibly Mumbai," Persad said. However, the UK, Europe and Dubai were traditional markets to which SA would give priority over new markets, he said. "However, we will be focusing on brand-new markets in Asia and the strategy around competitive issues will unfold once the airport has opened."

Calls to several international airlines in SA's traditional markets indicated a lack of interest in adding Durban to their flight routes.

British Airways (BA) said its domestic airlines, Comair and kulula.com, would continue to provide a seamless service to Durban for BA passengers disembarking in Johannesburg. Stephen Forbes, a BA spokesman, said the airline used to operate to Durban before the franchise arrangement was made with Comair, but there was not enough of a market to justify a nonstop flight from the UK to Durban.

"We are always re-evaluating our markets," he said.

A Lufthansa spokesman said the airline would not add the new airport to its schedule and that passengers caught connecting South African Airways flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Durban. Air France-KLM said it was not planning to add the new airport to its route.

TAP, the Portuguese national airline, said it had never run a flight to Cape Town or Durban and did not intend to start.

The new airport is expected to offer an international freight service as well as a passenger service, but Persad said the freight service would be targeted only once the Dube TradePort handled a threshold of 100000 tons a year. Meanwhile, trucking companies will continue to move goods by road to Johannesburg, where they will be transferred to global markets from OR Tambo International Airport.