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Project will be ready for 2010, say officials

New airport development on track

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CONSTRUCTION on KwaZulu-Natal's new R8 billion Dube TradePort and international airport development at La Mercy is on track, despite the mammoth project starting almost 70 days late because of the delay in its environmental approval last year.

The complex is on target to be opened in May 2010 - before the Fifa World Cup - with construction on the sprawling site streaking ahead, having already reached the roof stage.

This is the word from Airports Company of South Africa (Acsa) and Dube TradePort bosses Terence Delomoney and Rohan Persad respectively.

Workshop

More than 200 tourism and hospitality leaders at a combined industry workshop in Durban last week were wowed by Delomoney's presentation and progress update on the landmark development north of the city.

"People are still asking if this new airport at La Mercy is on the cards or if construction is happening. The answer is an overwhelming yes. It's bigger, it's better and it is happening. This new facility is rapidly taking shape and is on track to open in May 2010," said Delomoney.

"While Acsa signed the construction contract with the Ilembe Consortium in June 2007, we only got a positive EIA (environmental impact assessment) record of decision on August 23 (2007) and physical works commenced at the La Mercy site on August 31.

"Although there was a delay in EIA approval, which caused a bit of pain, the project is on track for completion in April 2010.

"We are looking at commissioning the new airport on May 1 2010 as ideally planned, but regardless of that target being achieved, the airport will open in that month . . . We have sectional handover dates. The contractual completion date with Ilembe is inclusive of testing and a commissioning period of four months," said Delomoney.

"There are appeals that still need to be dealt with by the department of environmental affairs and tourism, but in terms of the record of decision we are within our rights to continue construction as long as we conform to its strict conditions," he said.

Persad was happy with the "great construction progress on the development".

"The fact that the roof structure and covering is already going up on a number of the buildings on site ahead of our rainy season means that construction can continue at this excellent pace," he said.

"What has been achieved so far is especially impressive in light of the project having to wait some 70 days as a result of the delay in the EIA approval. By our accounts, the contractor has already made up this time through a subsequent expediting agreement having been signed between Acsa and the Ilembe Consortium," he said.

Delomoney said the control tower was the most visible aspect of the development from the N2 and the cap was expected to be lifted to the top of the structure in November.

"We have already reached the milestone of putting the trusses for the roof of the main terminal building, while the roof coverings are almost complete for the trade port terminal and fire station buildings. Construction on the big interchange from the N2 for the new airport by is also well under way.

"Acsa is investing about R6.8 billion in the airport, which is the major component of the development, but overall the project is seeing government putting in more than R8 billion in fixed infrastructure. It will serve as a catalyst for economic growth and job creation in the region and South Africa," said Delomoney.