

Vilakazi Street Precinct Upgrading



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Vilakazi Street in Soweto, Johannesburg, is home to *two* Nobel Prize winners – former President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Both the Tutu and Mandela residences have been declared official museums by the ANC government.

From a business generation and job opportunity perspective, the area is an economic hub visited profusely by local and international tourists, heads of state, and local day-trippers – all eager to understand the history, and particularly to learn more about South Africa's iconic Madiba.

The Tutus still use their home as a residence and therefore do not open it to the public, but it nonetheless attracts a great deal of curiosity and external viewing, lending considerable weight to the vicinity as a premier tourist attraction.

The popularity of Vilakazi Street has created significant business opportunities for residents of this area. Many restaurants and informal eateries have been established to cater for tourists and local visitors' needs. Local artists have also taken advantage of the showcasing power of the precinct and offer their work for sale as memorabilia.

The Soweto Tourism Association considers Vilakazi Street an important

VILAKAZI STREET PRECINCT UPGRADING

Community-based Projects category Submitted by the SAICE Johannesburg Branch

KEY PLAYERS

Client Johannesburg Development Agency

Professional Team Goba Consulting Engineers and Project Managers

Main Contractors Bophelong Construction (Pty) Ltd

Major Subcontractors and Suppliers JAC Road Surfacing, Bosun Brick, AfriSam, Drift Super Sand



1 Vilakazi Street realignment near Sakumzi's Restaurant

2 Entrance to Vilakazi Street with hands spelling "Vilakazi"

3 Vilakazi Street near Mandela House museum; note street furniture and neat paving

gateway to tourism-related business opportunities. The precinct is also important for the preservation of the heritage of Soweto, and by extension of the diverse peoples of South Africa as a whole.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The scope of the project included the physical realignment and construction of Vilakazi Street and several adjoining streets over a radius of 1.8 km, as well as the provision of integrated pedestrian and traffic movement to enable easy access to each attraction, with adequate parking and improved lighting. Wherever feasible the project included improvements to existing stormwater systems and other basic infrastructure in the precinct. Generally speaking, a "sense of place" had to be retained throughout. Part of the client's brief included maximum use of local labour, and of local SMMEs and business enterprises.

The project design was influenced by the existing road alignment, access to the existing sites, the location of existing restaurants, and architectural requirements to promote pedestrian movement.

The potential environmental impact of the street upgrade was determined by environmental consultants, Eco Africa, who then guided the route of the project.



In order to ensure fair and equitable distribution of benefits within the targeted communities, Project Liaison Committees were formed to provide a point of contact between the project team and the communities. Community Liaison Officers and an employment desk were utilised to ensure that local labour, SMMEs and local business enterprises were given access to employment opportunities. Emerging contractors were employed in pipe laying, concrete operations, transport of material, layer-works construction, kerb-laying, brick-paving, etc.

On average throughout the project, 112 local workers (of whom 19 were ladies) were employed and trained on a rolling basis, while nine local emerging

contractors participated, valued at R1 669 437.

The project also included upgrades to two existing schools, established in the mid-fifties and situated in Vilakazi Street, namely Orlando West and Phefeni Secondary Schools, both of which played critical roles in the 1976 Soweto uprisings that ushered in a new era in South African history.

CONCLUSION

The upgrading offered the opportunity, through engineering, to strike an appropriate balance between providing globally benchmarked infrastructure, while still maintaining the history and heritage that is inherent to the Vilakazi Street precinct. □