

Sandton aims for car-free eco-month

By Anna Cox



Non-motorised and public transport would ease the traffic congestion heading into the Sandton CBD. Picture: Steve Lawrence
Johannesburg - Imagine the Sandton CBD without a single vehicle for a whole month.

No, it's not a figment of your imagination – it's Johannesburg mayor Parks Tau's plan for October, Transport Month.

Tau announced last week the city would be hosting an international EcoMobility World Festival and Exhibition in Sandton this year. The previous event was hosted in 2013 by Suwon in South Korea.

Making the announcement, Tau said the key question was why Sandton had been chosen rather than Maboneng or Melville, which had been punted.

"The reality is that when Sandton City was built in 1973, the city did not expect the neighbouring area to become the economic epi-centre of Johannesburg.

"It has now become a nightmare to drive in and out of the area.

Kids, dogs and dancers take over Lower Main Road in Observatory, Cape Town during a recent Open Streets day. Picture: Leon Lestrade *INLSA*

"Sandton is still growing and it would be irresponsible for us not to intervene before it becomes worse - which is why we thought it appropriate to host the festival there," he said.

ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY BUSES

By October, the dedicated cycling, pedestrian and public transport lanes should be completed, as well as most of the Rea Vaya services.

In addition, the new fleet of 150 Metrobus buses - which operate on environmentally-friendly combustion systems - will be launched at the festival, and many of the existing Metrobus buses will be retrofitted with a dual fuel system - natural gas and diesel.

A range of activities will take place during the festival in conjunction with the private sector, universities, non-governmental organisations, cycle groups and Transnet.

Different cycle or freedom rides are being arranged.

Tau, an enthusiastic cyclist himself, said: "We want residents and workers in Sandton to be on the streets, not in office parking spaces, canteens and then back home. They should experience the city in the streets. We want to create excitement and we want to do it now.

"We can build a different city, but it requires a different mindset. We want to show residents that an eco-mobile future is possible and that public transport, walking and cycling can be accessible, safe and attractive."

Tau said public awareness campaigns would be launched to educate people about the use of dedicated lanes.

“We know they are being used as parking spaces and overtaking lanes, but we will have stringent enforcement on these lanes. We are also in talks with taxi leadership about the use of the lanes,” he said.

CREATING AN ECO-MOBILE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Large sections of the Sandton CBD will be turned into an EcoMobile neighbourhood with certain roads closed off for most private cars during the festival.

The city’s objectives during the month-long festival are to:

Encourage behavioural change by showing that car-free methods of transport – walking, cycling and public transport – are achievable and have many positive impacts on commuters and the environment.

Envisage the future by showing what the Sandton CBD and surrounding areas will look like once alternative transport infrastructure has been introduced.

Contribute to making Johannesburg a cycling-friendly city through profiling dedicated cycling lanes and leisure events such as the Freedom Ride between Sandton and Alexandra.

Create awareness about the positive contribution that sustainable transport can make to mitigate climate change and create a future for coming generations.

Showcase Johannesburg’s initiatives to promote clean, sustainable transport and reduce harmful carbon emissions.

Cycle rides and fun runs will take place, while pop-up parks, restaurants, food stalls and entertainment stands will be located on the roads that are being closed for normal traffic.

A section will be demarcated as a test track where members of the public can ride on EcoMobility vehicles that have been introduced in other cities in the world such as tuk-tuks, pedicabs and electric vehicles.

Businesses and organisations will be able to participate in corporate go-kart events on Fridays, and children will benefit from interactive road safety programmes over the weekends.

Activities to encourage healthy living such as daily walks, aerobics and leisure cycling will be hosted on the sealed-off streets while street artists, musicians and buskers will display their talent and entertain the large numbers of people who will walk or cycle in Sandton rather than use their private cars.

There will also be a number of international EcoMobility dialogues where professionals, members of the public and international organisations will discuss and debate what it takes to achieve an EcoMobile future and the role of transport in climate change.

The plans for the street closures and activities will be drawn up in close consultation with affected parties including residents, business owners and public transport operators.

A transport management plan for the festival will be implemented and alternative arrangements for private vehicles, deliveries and public transport introduced.

The City is calling on business organisations, NGOs and transport stakeholders to partner with the City to make this event a success. - The Star