

Sandton's gridlock carries major economic impact

If you are an average person living in a big city, you can spend up to four months of your life sitting, waiting and wishing in traffic. This is becoming more and more true in downtown Johannesburg and the surround metropolitan business hubs, Sandton in particular. Over the past few years, the dark and looming shadow of traffic has grown exponentially with the influx of people into the big city.



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Growing traffic congestion has serious economic consequences for fast growing cities, but the most concerning effects of gridlock is on the individual. Imagine you could get back all the time you spent sitting in traffic - an extra hour in the evening with your son or daughter or half an hour more in bed every morning - the pressing question is 'how many moments are you missing while you're stuck behind the wheel of a car?'

According to the latest [traffic index report](#) - released annually by TomTom, a global leader in satellite navigation technology - more than 40 percent of South African employees are late for work due to traffic congestion. Johannesburg is currently ranked as the 77th most congested city in the world, and climbing steadily. "There are many factors that contribute to traffic congestion in South Africa, a poor public transport is one of them," said Etienne Louw, General Manager of TomTom Africa.

Sandton's gridlock carries a heavy cost

This was solemnly acknowledged by Johannesburg mayor, Parks Tau, at the Ecomobility Festival in October this year. For the month of October, roads in the commercial hub of Sandton were closed off to private vehicles, for the purpose of promoting the use of public transport and getting the public to experience a version of Sandton without all of the congestion, noise and smog.

The soaring number of cars moving in and out of Sandton every day contributes enormously to the city's CO2 emissions, and the gridlock experienced during rush hour is costing the country a huge amount of money each year, as noted by mayor Tau during the festival: "As it stands, the economic impact that results from congestion in the whole of South Africa is over one billion rand (each year), and Johannesburg accounts for the highest loss with more than 1.5 million vehicles registered across the metropolitan."

Those numbers aren't looking to drop anytime soon; commuters in Sandton are rising by 3,4% annually. Currently, the picture of traffic in the precinct is a very gloomy one. On a daily basis between 7.30am and 8.30am - almost 150,000 people move in and out of Sandton. The scary part is that 70% of the vehicles coming in and out are private.

A global problem

Gridlock is a global problem affecting every major metropole in the world. The obvious long term solution is the development of a fully integrated public transport system, but as this will take time the motor industry is looking to technological development to help alleviate the rising surge of global traffic.

This topic was covered extensively at the TED conference in March 2011, by Bill Ford, in his talk titled *A Future Beyond Global Traffic Gridlock*. In his talk, Ford reveals some shocking figures about the rate at which the numbers of cars are increasing in cities around the world, and the cost of Gridlock to the economy and the individual.

"Today, there are about 800 million cars on the road worldwide. But with more people and greater prosperity around the world, that number is going to grow to between two and four billion cars by mid-century. And this is going to create the kind of global gridlock that the world has never seen before."

Developing smart ways to get around

When considering how to navigate around the problem facing us, Ford notes that more of the same will not do and that we are going to have to, very quickly, begin developing technology to help us manage traffic flow in big cities. "We are going to build smart cars, but we also need to build smart roads, smart parking, smart public transportation systems and more. We don't want to waste our time sitting in traffic, sitting at tollbooths or looking for parking spots. We need an integrated system that uses real-time data to optimise personal mobility on a massive scale without hassle or compromises for travellers."

For South Africans, particularly those living in the buzzing metropolis' of Johannesburg and Cape Town, a smart move toward alleviating traffic congestion - minimising time wasted behind the wheel - is to make use of dedicated sat-nav technology like TomTom. The TomTom GO5000 and GO5100 have independent, unlimited access to TomTom maps.

A device like this receives over 700'000 data points each second, allowing deadly accuracy, up to 2cm, updating traffic information in real time. This appears to be an intelligent short term solution to minimising your commute time, dodging speed cameras, and getting where you need to be, faster. The only difference between the two being the GO5100 comes with World Maps as well.

With traffic congestion reaching all-time highs, TomTom aims to provide the general public, industry and policy makers with unique and unbiased information about congestion levels in urban areas, making your trip a little more bearable.

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