



OPINION

# Civils are "Sharp!"

A FEW DAYS BEFORE the World Cup kick-off, Rian Malan, writing in the British newspaper, *Daily Telegraph*, under the headline "Contrary to all the gloomy predictions, South Africa is well prepared for the World Cup", stated:

"When Fifa awarded South Africa the 2010 World Cup, there were groans of disbelief around the planet... given SA's allegedly manifest inability to host such a complicated event.

Before approving our bid, Fifa made us promise to jump through all hoops of its choosing, and our leaders eagerly complied. We agreed to refurbish freeways, upgrade airports and build elaborate new mass-transit systems. We agreed to build a high-speed train linking our largest international airport to surrounding cities, and most improbably, to erect 10 new world-class soccer stadia.

Many observers thought the task way beyond our capabilities. I agreed. ....[It] seemed foolhardy even to attempt a task of the magnitude Fifa had set us .....

South Africa has an extraordinary ability to make fools of those who attempt to predict its future. As I coasted into the airport's shiny new parking lot, I realised that I'd shot myself in the foot yet again. I whipped out my cellphone and sent out an all-points SMS conceding my error and announcing that our organising committee's slogan – "We're ready" – seemed against all odds to be coming true."

The chairman of that same organising committee – and many other prominent South Africans, particularly our political leaders – have justifiably crowed that, by being ready, South Africa has confounded the sceptics.

And so we have. But not one of these eminences has seen fit to pay tribute where the highest tribute is due.

Thanks to whose achievements has this readiness been achieved? Who has been mostly responsible for South Africa being "ready" – for having delivered on its contractual obligations to Fifa and its promises to followers of the Beautiful Game?

Malan gives us the clue, but, it would seem, without making the connection that ought to be obvious. He writes:

"Golden pleasure domes soared skywards. ....In mid-May, I made the run from my home to the airport in 28 minutes, a miracle made possible by extensive reworking of the city's freeway system."

Excuse me, but why are these people not seeing – or not willing to acknowledge – whose achievements these are?

The morning after the World Cup kick-off, the Afrikaans newspaper, *Beeld*, had a one-word banner headline on its front page: "Sharp!"

All credit to Bafana Bafana, yes, for starting so well in the series. But who do the politicians, the sports administrators, the general public et al think it is that has been *really* "Sharp"?

Against the hype about how South Africa has disappointed those who said we could not stage the World Cup, that we wouldn't be ready in time with the stadia, and so on and so on, all this infrastructure has been delivered. Where the sceptics have been most emphatically and most spectacularly disproved, has been in respect of the civil engineering.

That we are able to stage the World Cup is a triumph for South Africa, yes. But, much much more, it is actually a triumph of South African *civil engineering*. All the stadia and associated works were completed on time, despite extremely tight design and construction schedules. Ditto for the major roadworks, substantial upgrading of the three largest airports, and a lot of other infrastructure. Not to mention the Gautrain between the airport and Sandton having opened three weeks ahead of the originally contracted date of 27 June.

Hi, members of the civil engineering profession – it's us, together with the other built environment professionals, but with the civils in the lead, who have been so "Sharp!" □



► The Institution of Civil Engineers (London) is so impressed by South Africa's civil engineering preparations for the World Cup that it is featuring our stadia as the cover story in the July 2010 international edition of *New Civil Engineer*