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IS THE GAUTRAIN A GOOD IDEA?

BRYANSTON – Synovate in South Africa has been testing the waters regarding the Gautrain.

Mention the Gautrain and you are likely to be met with a lot of strong opinions. Much commentary has been made on the proposed high speed train in Gauteng. Some media sources identify it as a financial disaster, while others believe it could be the saviour of Gauteng's motorists. Given the enormous investment that a project of this nature requires, it's unlikely that it will take the middle road between success and failure.

While admittedly a lot can change between now and the proposed completion in 2010, one must assume that the concept was thoroughly researched, particularly amongst the potential users of the service.

However, if such research has been conducted, little has reached the general public. In response to the lack of information on public perceptions, Synovate in South Africa had conducted the research.

The questions:

- What is the awareness and opinion of the general public to the Gautrain?
- Is it money well-spent?
- Will it be ready on time?

The respondents:

- A random selection of South Africans across nine provinces
- A total of 720 interviews were conducted by telephone – numbers randomly selected from current telephone directories.

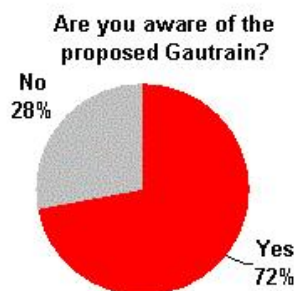
Are people aware of the proposed Gautrain?

The plan is not new, and as such, the fairly high level of awareness is not a surprise. In fact, the Western Cape’s reported awareness (at just below two-thirds of the sample) is remarkably high.

It was also interesting to see that the younger respondents were less likely to be aware of the Gautrain, as were those in the lower income groups.

White respondents showed far greater awareness levels (82%) than other population groups (61%).

According to Jon Salters, Managing Director of Synovate Sub-Saharan Africa, “although awareness is not critical at this stage, plans to build awareness among the potential users from other population groups should be considered”.



Source: Synovate's Gautrain Poll (n=720)

Do you think construction of the Gautrain is a good idea?

The Gautrain has attracted a great deal of criticism. This first broad look at acceptance amongst the general public sees over three-quarters of the sample (76.7%) agreeing that the construction of a high speed railway track is a good idea.

“It is important here to see which groups in society perceive it to be a good idea because the Gautrain is targeting a sector which has traditionally not used public transport systems” says Salters. “Immediate acceptance is unlikely, and the success of the Gautrain will be largely dependent on the trendsetters or early adopters, in the targeted groups taking the ‘risk’ of using the new system”.

Since early adopters tend to be younger users, and are also often drawn from the more economically able in the sector, it is positive to see that it is precisely amongst these groups that the highest level of acceptance is seen.

Do you think construction of the Gautrain is a good idea? (By age and monthly household income)									
	TOTAL		16-34 years	35-49 years	50+ years		<R5000	R5000 – R14 999	R15 000 +
Yes	77%		85%	84%	68%		74%	77%	85%
No	23%		15%	16%	32%		26%	23%	15%

Source: Synovate’s Gautrain Poll (n = 720)

Do you think people will use the Gautrain?

The financial viability of the Gautrain boils down to whether it will be used – to the point where it can support itself. Many factors will influence this – the transport infrastructure from the stations, the cost and the petrol price, amongst others. We must now rely on whether people anticipate that it will be used.

The answer to this is a very decided ‘Yes’ for most of the respondents interviewed in the Synovate survey. Only 17% did not believe it would be used. Again the younger respondents were more positive in their responses, although there was less discrepancy with regard to income.

Do you think people will use the Gautrain? (By age and monthly household income)									
	TOTAL		16-34 years	35-49 years	50+ years		<R5000	R5000 – R14 999	R15 000 +
Yes	83%		90%	93%	73%		82%	87%	86%
No	17%		10%	7%	27%		18%	13%	14%

Source: Synovate's Gautrain Poll (n = 720)

Do you think people will use the Gautrain? (By gender and population group)							
	TOTAL		Male	Female		Other population groups	White
Yes	83%		79%	86%		88%	81%
No	17%		21%	14%		12%	19%

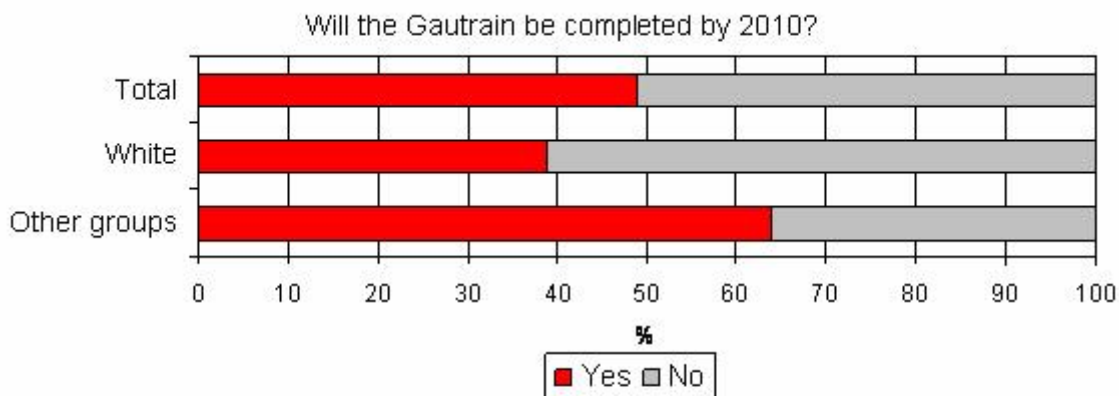
Source: Synovate's Gautrain Poll (n = 720)

Splitting the sample by population group showed substantial, but not extreme, differences in their thoughts on the usage of the Gautrain. Perhaps the lower level of usage of public transport gave the white respondents less confidence in the likelihood that it would be used. When looking at gender, females were more positive in their evaluation on the usage likelihood – perhaps unexpectedly so.

Will the Gautrain be ready to operate by 2010?

Confidence declined when the respondents were asked whether the Gautrain would be completed timeously – to coincide with the 2010 Soccer World Cup. “The lack of progress and budget creep since the inception of the plan is likely the cause for the doubt expressed by over half the respondents that it would be completed by this date” Salters reasons.

However, with the progress reported this month, perhaps the doubts will be dispelled. Respondents from Gauteng, who are the targeted users, showed more confidence than the average, with 57% believing that the project will be completed timeously. Overall, white respondents seem particularly negative in this regard – over sixty percent do not believe it will be ready by 2010.



Source: Synovate's Gautrain Poll (n = 720)

Should the money be spent on the Gautrain or elsewhere?

Even if the Gautrain proves to be a success, the investment it requires from the government may be resented by those in other provinces. Evidence of this already exists, with only 23% of Western Cape respondents considering it to be money well spent, while a far more substantial 48% of Gauteng respondents felt the money was best spent on the Gautrain.

Overall, the Gautrain elicited a fairly positive reaction, and is believed to be necessary. Clearly the concept is feasible – the success is likely to be dependent on the details.

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About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs almost 5,000 staff in 50 countries.

Synovate in South Africa was formerly known as Proactive Insight.

More information on Synovate can be found at www.synovate.com and www.synovate.co.za