

TOWNSHIP RENEWAL

MITCHELLS PLAIN CASE STUDY





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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URBAN MANAGEMENT: THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE MITCHELLS PLAIN TOWN CENTRE

BACKGROUND

Mitchells Plain is about 20km from the Cape Town city centre. It was built in the 1970s as a township for people classified as 'Coloured', who were forcibly removed from areas that had been declared 'whites only' under the Group Areas Act.

Mitchells Plain is a typical example of apartheid spatial planning, which relegated the residents of townships to the margins of economic activity. The area is effectively a dormitory town with a great deal of vacant, unsafe space. Along with a number of adjacent townships established for Africans, Mitchells Plain is isolated from the rest of the city. It is surrounded by geographical barriers and distant from amenities and economic opportunities.

It suffers from high levels of poverty, crime and gang violence.

At the time of the 2001 census, 305 343 people were reported to live in Mitchells Plain in 67 746 households. Most lived in houses (65 per cent), 20 per cent lived in town/cluster houses, and about 6 per cent lived in shacks in informal settlements. Afrikaans was the most common home language (50 per cent of households) followed by English (37 per cent) and Xhosa (12 per cent).

Thirty per cent of the economically active population was recorded as unemployed according to the official definition, which excludes 'discouraged' work seekers. Of those employed, 42 per cent earned less than R1 600 per month, with significant

differences by gender: 49 per cent of women earned less than R1 600 per month compared with 38 per cent of men. Nearly 30 per cent of employed people worked in sales, service and clerical posts, and nearly 20 per cent were in elementary (relatively unskilled) occupations. About 75 per cent of adults (people aged 20 years and older) had not completed matric.

ORIGINS OF THE MITCHELLS PLAIN TOWN CENTRE PROJECT

Various attempts were made to upgrade the Mitchells Plain Town Centre (MPTC) after the advent of democracy in 1994, but these were disjointed and lacked a champion to drive the process. In 2001, national government launched the Urban Renewal Programme (URP) to address

infrastructure deficiencies and declining economies in areas characterised by widespread poverty and neglect. Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha were two of the eight targeted 'poverty nodes' selected in six metropolitan municipalities.¹ The URP is scheduled to run for 10 years, after which support for township renewal is expected to have been fully integrated into government work.²

The MPTC project, which was initially conceived as a public transport interchange upgrade, began in 2003, even before the URP got under way in Cape Town. MPTC was then the busiest taxi terminal in the Western Cape, and the third-busiest nodal interchange for rail, buses and taxis in the metropolitan area. About 75 000 people moved through the interchange during the morning and evening peaks.

¹ The eight nodes are: Alexandra (Johannesburg), Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha (Cape Town), Inanda/Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (eThekweni Municipality, Durban), Mdantsane (Buffalo City Municipality, East London), Motherwell (Port Elizabeth) and Galeshewe (Kimberley).

² The URP aims to attract, prioritise and integrate investment/effort in these areas; mobilise local partnerships; deepen democratic participation in the life of the city; and develop or test new approaches for wider application.

The MPTC team realised that public transport activity was effectively the 'anchor tenant', and that an integrated upgrade of the 70ha town centre could be achieved by leveraging from the public transport upgrade. The first works contract was signed in 2003.

The City of Cape Town project team was composed of a project manager, the Mitchells Plain urban renewal area manager, the city's public transport and contract managers, and an engineering and construction manager.

The upgrading of the Mitchells Plain public transport interchange and redevelopment of the central business district has subsequently become an anchor project of the URP, bringing together investment from national, provincial and local government.

The URP nodes of Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha are seen as important components of the emergence of an urban core in the metro's southeast that is connected and integrated with the rest of the city (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Linking the urban renewal nodes into greater Cape Town

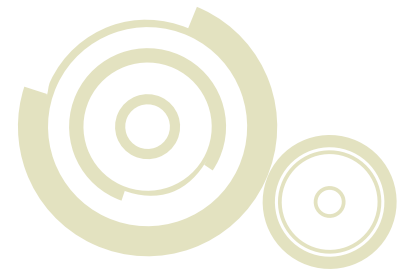
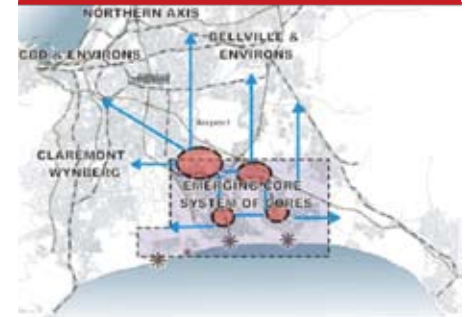


Figure 2: Urban renewal spatial development framework



PROJECT PROBLEM

When the project began in 2003, the area faced a host of problems.

Problems associated with buses

The old bus shelter, used by both buses and taxis, had become inadequate. Space was limited and inadequate turning circles restricted bus movements. The bus terminus was located on prime land in the middle of the town centre.

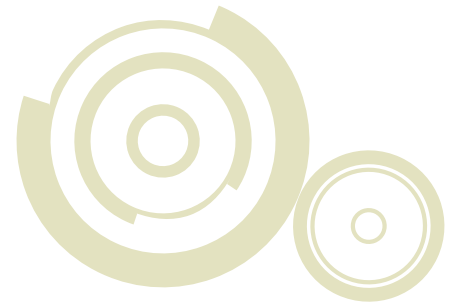
Problems associated with taxis

Twenty-four taxi associations operated

about 1 000 taxis – the largest concentration in the Western Cape. There were no formal facilities and taxi ranks sprouted in open fields surrounding the town centre. Some taxi operators used facilities intended for buses. Commuters had no shelter from the elements. There was a high level of violence in which people were injured, or even killed. Gangs collected daily protection money from taxi operators.

Problems associated with informal trading

Five trader associations represented about 1 000 informal traders in the MPTC. There was no management or regulation either by the city or the traders themselves. These associations were in constant conflict with one another. Traders congested the pedestrian walkways, traded on road medians and blocked shop windows, impeding the movement of pedestrians, law enforcement officials and emergency vehicles. The vacant land immediately adjacent to the town centre was an undesirable location for traders and an unsafe environment for shoppers, which contributed to overcrowding in the town centre.



Crime

Gangsterism, robberies and drug dealing were rife in the town centre.

Problems associated with formal businesses

Business was represented by a property owners' and merchants' association, and the retail sector was well developed. Trading densities, profits and rentals had been high for a long time and formal businesses prospered. With increasing encroachment of public space by informal traders and high crime rates, however, business was declining. Formal businesses threatened the city with a rates boycott.

Functional conflict

There was significant conflict between the movement of private vehicles, buses, taxis and pedestrians. This created social friction that led, in some cases, to violence.

MPTC's infrastructure was not designed to accommodate the number of people and the variety of activities that had developed in the town centre. Consequently, it was failing to meet the needs of commuters,



shoppers, taxi and bus operators, and formal business. This led to a high level of conflict between and within sectors, created unsafe conditions, and made law enforcement difficult. The various interest groups were not coherently organised by sector, and could not resolve their conflicts.

Problems with municipal service delivery were the result of:

- A legacy of inadequate capital expenditure.
- A historical pattern of inadequate operating expenditure to maintain existing assets.
- Lack of development facilitation to support integrated services.
- Poor urban management.
- An inability to effectively enforce the law.

Historically, the taxi industry and informal trading had been seen as problems to be kept out of sight, rather than recognised as sectors representing economic opportunity that should be provided with good working locations – and which were capable of managing themselves.

TARGETED OUTCOMES

What started out as a public transport interchange upgrade became a project to strategically use the investment made available by government and other sources to generate other spin-offs.

In addition to creating a safe, convenient, seamless environment for public transport users, the project team sought to create

a safe and pleasant environment for shoppers, to boost informal trading activity in a prime location, to provide opportunities for further retail development, and to generate opportunities for other economic development activities, such as training institutions.

However, the MPTC project team recognised that any steps to overcome the physical limitations of the town environment and exploit the inherent economic potential of the town centre would have to be preceded by the establishment of a stable platform for the articulation of community interests. The goals of such an institutional platform were to:

- Resolve conflicts within the community.
- Organise interested and affected parties so that each sector spoke with one voice through elected and accountable representatives.
- Put in place a mechanism that enabled joint planning and continuing consultation on projects.
- Move steadily away from centralised decision-making and control to localised decision-making and control.

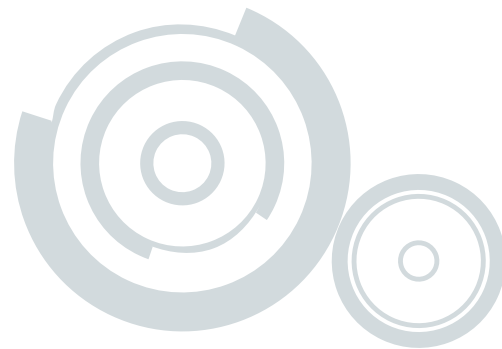
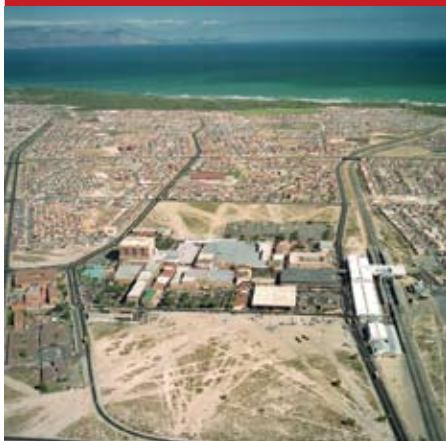


Figure 3: MPTC in 2000



- Create a community-based entity to manage and maintain MPTC assets.
- Capture locally-generated income streams from public assets for local benefit.
- Support local economic development and job creation.

Establishment of a community-based management and operating entity would enable the authorities to focus on law enforcement and providing a clearly defined set of services.

A plan steadily emerged. It included a bus terminus for 25 destinations; a taxi terminus for 20 destinations; converting the existing bus terminus to a central market square; closing off an existing road and restricting it to pedestrian use to provide seamless access between the station and the town centre; building new roads to link the interchange with arterial routes; building five signalised intersections and one signalised pedestrian crossing to ease traffic congestion; building administration buildings; improving public space through landscaping; improving security through closed circuit television cameras;

building a pedestrian bridge across the railway line; and reinforcing the existing pedestrian bridge.

The outcomes of the MPTC project are aligned with the following strategic objectives of the City of Cape Town:

- integrated human settlement
- economic growth and job creation
- access and mobility
- building strong communities
- equitable and effective service delivery
- sustainable development.

A direct spin-off of public-sector investment by national, provincial and local government in the town centre is the creation of an enabling environment that leverages private-sector investment, which in turn generates job opportunities and the reinvestment of disposable income.

INTERVENTION LOGIC

No upgrading is possible in an environment lacking a stable platform for the expression of community interests through accountable elected representatives. Similarly, effective enforcement of laws and regulations covering informal trading and taxis,

Figure 4: MPTC plan





has been created, it is possible to hold meaningful consultations on what an upgrading programme might look like. Regular, open-ended and flexible consultation with the community is necessary at every stage of the process, even after construction has begun.

Targeted investment in infrastructure that facilitates informal trading is one place where the public sector is able to directly invest in local economic development.

Crucially, the locus of decision making and control must move from a centralised authority to a locally autonomous system. This is needed to build a local sense of ownership, and to effectively manage, operate and maintain public assets.

for example, is impossible in an environment where the needs of those stakeholders have not been reasonably accommodated.

Once a stable platform for the expression and exercise of community interests

SOLUTION

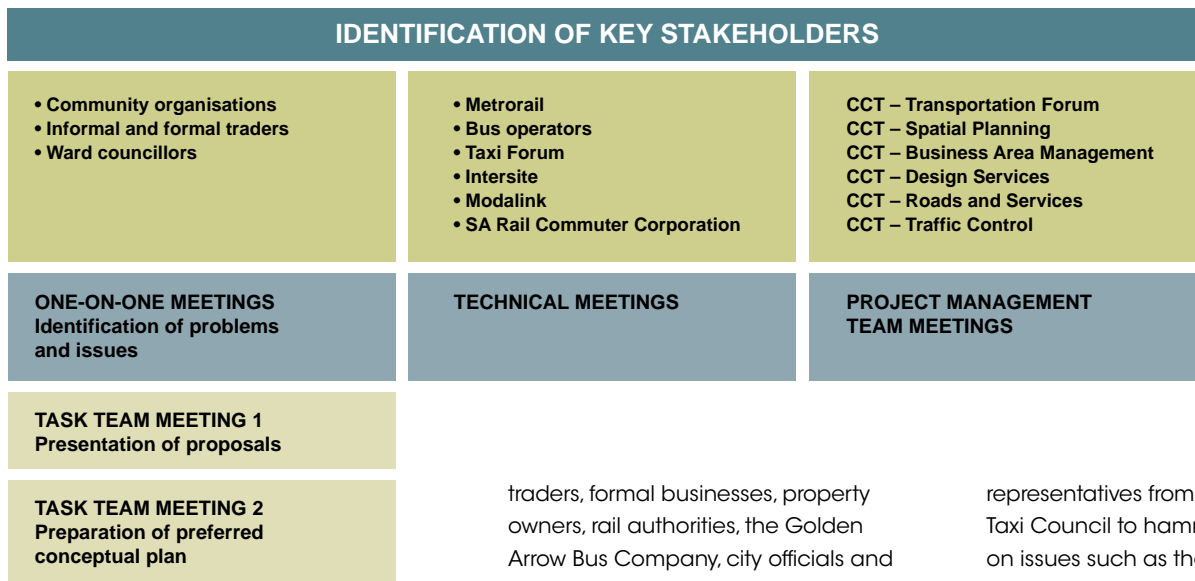
A stable entity to ensure stakeholder participation

The management partnership model developed to support urban management in the MPTC grew out of an extensive consultation process.

- A steering committee was established with representatives of taxis, informal



Figure 5: Consultation process outline



traders, formal businesses, property owners, rail authorities, the Golden Arrow Bus Company, city officials and councillors. This committee was the main structure through which the entire MPTC project was coordinated.

- An informal traders’ task team was established to build unity among various traders’ associations and agree on such issues as the design of trader infrastructure, the positioning of bays, and future management and operations.
- A taxi task team was established with

representatives from the Mitchells Plain Taxi Council to hammer out consensus on issues such as the design of taxi infrastructure and the future block management system (see Figure 7 on page 13).

- Ad hoc committees met to disseminate information about the project.
- Monthly update reports were submitted to the Mitchells Plain sub council.

The stakeholder approach is evident in the make-up of the steering committee.



The chairperson of the current committee (mid-2009) is an informal trader, the vice-chairperson is from the taxi industry, the treasurer is from the merchants' association and the secretary is from the property owners' association.

A proposed non-profit management and operations company

The establishment of a management and operations entity has been proposed by the MPTC project team to ensure the effective management of the MPTC, including the maintenance of public infrastructure. The benefits of the proposed entity would include:

- Maximising the benefit of the capital investment and ensuring its sustainability.
- Improved attention to management and maintenance in the city's operating budget.
- Better safety and security for shoppers, public transport users, informal traders and entrepreneurs.
- Increased turnover, trading density and rentals. This should lead to more commercial investment and the creation of permanent employment opportunities.



The MPTC steering committee agreed to the establishment of something similar to the city improvement district (CID) concept used successfully in other parts of Cape Town, but with a crucial difference. The CID model allows for a rates top-up levy for higher levels of council-delivered services in areas where 50 per cent plus one of ratepayers agree. Because the application of the CID model favours the interests of property owners, however, it is proposed that the 'targeted improvement district' in the envisaged Mitchells Plain management entity include representatives of all interested parties: commercial property owners/merchants; taxi operators; informal traders; the Golden Arrow Bus Company; Intersite/Metrorail/the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa; and community representatives.

The proposed company, which is intended to be run on a non-profit basis under the direction of a decision-making board (currently the MPTC steering committee), will take charge of management, maintenance and operations. A notable feature of the proposal is the requirement that the management company ensures

local economic development and employment of local people in its operations.

The intention is that the City of Cape Town will grant the proposed entity a head lease over the public elements of the town centre, which include the informal trading areas, the bus terminal, the taxi rank, parking areas and the administration buildings. The entity would be able to sublet these facilities to generate an income that can be used to fund improved operations and management.

A parallel process will be the conventional top-up on rates, as provided for under the current city provisions for a CID. Decisions on the disbursement of funds will be balanced among the different members according to contributions and income streams.

RESULTS

As of mid-2009, the MPTC project is 75 per cent complete. This has resulted in a tremendous improvement of physical infrastructure in the town centre. Yet the most important element in overcoming



urban management problems in Mitchells Plain has been the establishment of a stable representative entity, in which competing interests can resolve their differences and hold one another accountable.

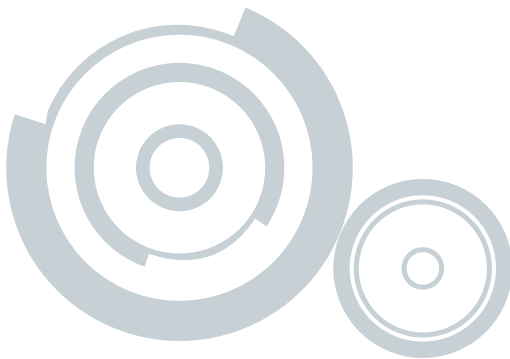


Figure 6: MPTC transport interchange



Although the establishment of a community-based entity to manage and operate the town centre was not planned at the outset, it has been the most important result of the project. A stakeholder management platform has been created, which in time will enable the community to run the town centre on its own. The members of this structure understand what is required to get the project completed and to meet the needs of their constituents.

Among other things, the forum has set up safety and security structures, and holds weekly meetings with the police. This shows the community is steadily taking control of its own interests. The stakeholder management concept took some years to sell, but is now widely supported.

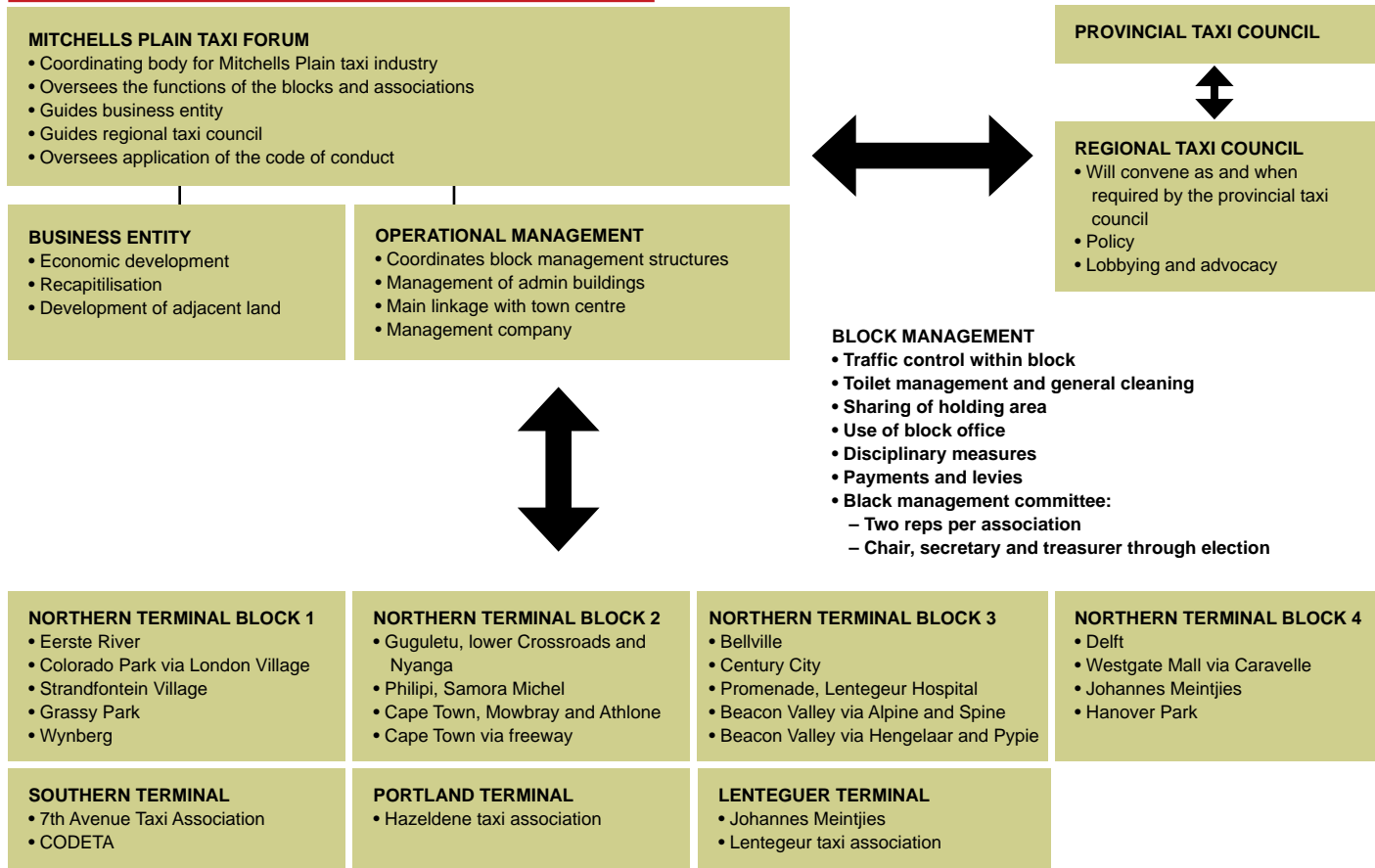
A key part of the MPTC plan was to move the public transport interchange (Figure 6) to adjacent vacant land (Figure 3) to make the prime trading area in the middle of the town centre available to traders. The management and control of the various taxi ranks is managed by the taxi associations themselves

(Figure 7). There are a wide variety of business opportunities for taxi associations in the town centre beyond the ferrying of passengers – e.g. fuel, spare parts and repair services.

The public space has been landscaped and pedestrian pathways are lined with trees, benches, bins and street lighting. A competition was held among schoolchildren to design street furniture, and the winning designs were actually built. This is the kind of initiative that supports the development of ownership and buy-in so that the community can start to see the town centre as its own. Informal traders have been part of the planning and allocation of 1 200 demarcated trading spaces in prime locations, some of which are covered. Storage space is being built.

Dynamics in the town centre are changing. Some national retail chains have moved out, making space for local tenants. There is the potential to subdivide large retail premises into smaller ones more suitable for the needs of local businesses.

Figure 7: Mitchells Plain Taxi Forum management structure





Tenders are subject to requirements for the use of local labour and enterprise. Because construction contracts are usually split between plant, material and labour, the maximum achievable local content for most tenders is about 30 per cent. Local involvement is specifically targeted and some contracts are close to the 30 per cent mark. Over the long term, this will help to create jobs and build up local skills.

LESSONS LEARNT

Build community consensus: The MPTC project underlines the importance of a stable platform for the expression of community interests through accountable elected representatives. This has required interaction with a wide variety of people in Mitchells Plain. Community dynamics constantly shift, and maintaining regular contact is essential to stay current with



developments. Building consensus with community groups enables the negotiation of what an upgrading programme might look like in broad terms. If this process is successful, community groups will provide township practitioners with the leverage they need to implement projects.

Stick with the process: Regardless of how good the relationships have been between communities and the MPTC team, there have been times when stakeholders played public officials off against one another, or spread rumours, or accused officials of corruption. Part of consensus-building is knowing when to ignore unfair community pressure. Public officials who are able to stick with the process despite difficulties gain the respect and trust of stakeholders.

Be solution-oriented: Where serious conflicts arose between key stakeholders, the MPTC team took extraordinary steps to resolve them.

Get high-level political buy-in: One critical success factor in the MPTC case was that

the project team reported directly to the Mitchells Plain sub council.

Forget about the 'perfect' plan: In a complex project such as the MPTC, it is not possible to come up with a perfect plan. At a certain point it is necessary to simply start, knowing that mistakes will be made, and that the team will have to change things in consultation with the community. The MPTC continues to evolve, and the project will only be complete once the final brick has been laid and local stakeholder management is 100 per cent established.

Be flexible enough to accommodate community needs: After construction began, the community identified needs that were not accommodated on the MPTC plan. Where these were warranted, the project team issued new instructions to the contractor. Where changes could not be accommodated within the contingency provision of the contract budget, additional money was found elsewhere. Finance officials and council committees do not mind changes to project plans, provided they are not asked



to make up any financial shortfall.

Begin legal preparation early: If an environmental impact assessment (EIA) or rezoning is required, get it done as soon as possible by walking the application through all the necessary steps. In the MPTC case, there were eight objections to the proposed redevelopment of vacant land. The project manager met with each objector and established that, in every case, the objections were based on misinformation and rumours. Once the objectors knew the facts, they withdrew their objections. Because the development could be advertised without objections, the project approval was delegated to a mandated official rather than submitted to full council for approval.

Keep evidence of changes: The MPTC team has kept a collection of photographs to demonstrate how things have changed since the project started. People tend to have short memories concerning improvements, but long memories when it comes to problems.

Remind stakeholders of agreements: In the MPTC project some traders thought

every market square would be completely covered (even though this was never in the plan) and taxi operators thought the taxi terminal would be a multi-storey building with structured parking and offices (again, this was never in the plan).

Scrupulously minute every meeting: This is crucial. The MPTC project manager personally takes minutes in steering committee meetings to avoid later disputes.

Be willing to provide answers: One critical success factor in the MPTC case is that officials have been willing to provide answers on behalf of the municipality or government department based on fairness, honesty and logical thinking.

Be willing to offer assistance: Where there are no guarantees that something can be done, the project team has offered to assist communities to write a business plan and suggest possible sources of finance.





Take great care when appointing a community liaison officer: The community liaison officer is employed by the contractor to act as the link with the local community, and is responsible for procuring local resources. Because this person is in a position to influence the employment and business opportunities associated with a council contract, community groups may try to influence the appointment. The MPTC team took the decision to advertise these positions publicly in the face of community opposition. This was necessary to avoid or reduce any perception of favouritism, which would undermine the social cohesion achieved over a long period.

Build good relationships with key officials: Getting things done depends on the quality of relationships with key officials. An official under political pressure is unlikely to be supportive. Sometimes officials who lack technical competence in a particular area cover up for their lack of knowledge by putting the wrong official under pressure, making their own jobs more difficult in the long term. A key success factor in the MPTC case has been

excellent working relationships with key city officials. Another has been the willingness of officials to acknowledge when they have made mistakes rather than trying to place blame elsewhere.

Emphasise teamwork: Each member of a team should be allowed to perform to his or her strengths. Any team member may have a good idea; someone else, perhaps a community member, may have a better one. The success of the MPTC project is largely due to the teamwork approach. The project team included various officials, engineers, transport engineers, planners and an urban renewal manager. The technical expertise in the team helped team members to know when they were being criticised fairly, and when not.

Develop a wide variety of general expertise: The project manager needs to have an idea of engineering, even though he or she may not be an engineer; should know about informal trading laws; have an inkling of how urban designers think; and be willing to draft an outline for a memorandum of understanding to communicate clearly what is needed.

Constantly revisit budgets: Budgets need to be revised regularly, perhaps once a month, to cope with funding changes and cash-flow problems. Different funding streams have different dates by which the money has to be spent. The MPTC team established a three-year medium-term expenditure framework and divided the work into 12 contracts, with different sources of funding that could be used flexibly to ensure that money was available when it was needed. The presence of a contracts manager in the team to monitor funding requirements was key to success. Cash-flow problems that hinder implementation can seriously reduce project momentum.

Do not reduce the scope of work: It is essential not to reduce the scope of work under any circumstances. If necessary, more money must be found to implement the project at the original specifications. The quality of public infrastructure delivered in townships such as Mitchells Plain must be on a par with the best in the city. In fact, the quality of public infrastructure in poor neighbourhoods should be better than anywhere else, because it is used more.

