

The wheels come off as Sandton goes walkabout

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DESPITE all the uncertainty, criticism and fanfare, the EcoMobility World Festival in Sandton worked and showed how South Africa's economic hub could function with fewer cars.

A different Sandton CBD was on display yesterday, with limited lanes for private cars and more dedicated lanes for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport.

This was the future that Johannesburg mayor Parks Tau envisaged and received much criticism for.

When the EcoMobility World Festival was introduced, it was dubbed a Sandton lockdown.

This prompted the city to spend more effort communicating its vision to the residents and businesses of the area.

Yesterday executives in suits walked unfazed on the roads of Sandton or cycled to their offices.

Christine Walters, the mayoral committee member for transport, described the first day of the month-long event as "exceeding expectations".

"More than 284 cars used park-and-ride facilities and these excluded the observed extra numbers at Gautrain stations. More than 2 000 people were using Maude Street in the morning peak alone, a street that is usually clogged with cars.

"There were a few challenges, including signage, which the team is addressing," she said.

For October the city has arranged more than 10 000 park-and-ride spaces, most of which cost R10 a day.

These facilities are at Maponya

Mall, Orlando Stadium, Cresta shopping centre, Montecasino, Brightwater Commons, Melrose Arch, Westgate shopping centre, Randburg Square, Balfour Park shopping centre, George Lee Park-South, Innesfree Park, Marie Avenue City Power Servitude and the Sandton City roof.

Sandton is one of the most congested areas in the country. Between 7.30am and 8.30am on weekdays almost 150 000 people move in and out of Sandton. About 70% of the traffic on its roads at that time are private vehicles.

Motorists have been encouraged to use public transport or simply walk or cycle to work this month.

The city wants to use the festival to refine its strategies for removing congestion in Sandton.

Tau said: "The festival is set to demonstrate that it is possible to create a sustainable and liveable environment for all, and for a city the size of Johannesburg to move towards a low-carbon future.

"If we are to continue striving to become a competitive global city, the time is now to start implementing the idea of ecomobility in Johannesburg," he said.

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