

## Acsa launches R16m solar power plant at George Air



**Transport Minister Dipuo Peters**

Airports Company South Africa (Acsa) on Friday launched the first phase of its R16-million solar power plant at George Airport, in the Western Cape, making it Africa's first, and currently the only regional airport to be powered through solar energy.

Construction of the plant, which boasts 740 MW of installed capacity at peak production, started in March last year and was completed in October, two months ahead of schedule. The first phase would supply 41% of the airport's current energy demand, while the balance would be drawn from the national grid, with supply capacity steadily being increased according to demand factors.

Once complete, the 200 m<sup>2</sup> plant would comprise 3 000 solar panels on 1.3 ha of land, with one substation. The plant's expected life span was between 25 and 30 years.

Speaking at the launch, transport Minister **Dipuo Peters** said that South Africa was aiming to meet a target of generating 42% of its power needs through renewable energy by 2030.

"This plant generated 120 000 kWh in the first month of operation and it is estimated that it will save 1.2-million litres of water a year. Acsa is contributing to the country's energy situation and water challenges, which is commendable, especially because South Africa is grappling with one of the worst droughts in decades."

She added that, with new technology, Acsa could consider adding wind-generated power to airports in the Western Cape.

Acsa group executive **Andre Vermeulen** said that the activation of the power plant represented the first phase of the group's plans to generate independent power for George Airport, adding that Acsa planned to generate 14 000 kWh a year of electricity from the solar plant.

Vermeulen further noted that the airport's average power consumption each month was 247.713 kWh, with expected growth in the future subsequently leading to increased consumption.

Acsa's implementation of renewable energy at George Airport was in line with the company's sustainability goals. The development of the plant was also aligned with the its aspirations to reduce its reliance on the national power grid.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Vermeulen told *Engineering News Online* that the second phase of the project would include similar projects being set up at the other five regional airports in the country.

"We will also consider alternative methods for storing the energy in cases where the solar panels cannot produce efficient energy [owing to limited sunlight]. The third phase will entail rolling the project out to the country's three major airports," he said, adding that surplus energy generated by the solar panel installation would be put back into the grid.

Vermeulen noted that Acsa's 2025 vision included reducing its carbon footprint in the immediate future to eventually achieve carbon neutrality.

He added that Acsa would focus on unpacking the ways of reducing its carbon footprint within the next three years using detailed interventions.

Acsa chairperson **Skhumbuzo Macozoma** pointed out the company's eventual goal was to run green airports to achieve a Green Building Council of South Africa six-star rating.

"As an airports management company running nine airports nationally, part of our strategic objective is to reduce our environmental impact. There are a number of key drivers Acsa needs to reach this objective and these include reducing energy and water consumption, the percentage of waste recycled, noise levels and energy efficient materials use," he noted.

Macozoma added that harnessing solar power was a viable cleaner-energy source that contributed towards diversifying the energy mix.

"This plant will ensure that the airport is self-sustaining in terms of its power needs and will eventually extend to the broader community within the George municipality."

Meanwhile, Acsa CEO **Bongani Maseko** said the interconnection between Acsa and the external environment was the core of its value creation.

"We are always on the lookout for opportunities to develop cleaner energy sources that also aid us in our cost-cutting efforts and lessen the pressure of power demand on the national grid," he concluded.

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