



Urban rail finds favour in Algiers

Major investment is transforming public transport in the Algerian capital. **Keith Barrow** looks at how light rail, metro and heavy rail projects are helping to forge a modern and attractive network.

WITH a population of more than 3.3 million, Algiers is the largest city in the Maghreb region. The rapid growth of the city in recent decades has put great strain on the limited public transport network and, as a result, the municipal authorities have looked towards rail as a means of tackling congestion.

Plans for a metro line were first developed as long ago as the 1970s. The project originally envisaged a 64km network, and work officially started in 1982 with technical designs completed in 1985. Fifteen years later just four stations had been completed as the project faltered under the strain of rocketing oil prices, which severely impacted funding, and the financial and political crises of the 1990s.

In 2006 the Algerian government awarded a new contract that would see

the line completed by a Siemens-led consortium, including French construction company Vinci and Spanish rolling stock supplier CAF.

Phase 1 of Line 1 is 9km long and runs east from Tafourah-Grande Poste to Hai el Badr, running parallel with Mediterranean coast for approximately 8.5km. Most of the line is underground, including nine of the 10 stations. The only surface station is Hai el Badr, which will act as a temporary terminus pending the extension of the line east to El Harrach.

The train fleet comprises 14 six-car trains built by CAF, with 750V dc traction supplied via a third rail. Each 108m-long train has 208 seats and can accommodate up to 1216 passengers. The line is equipped with Siemens Trainguard MT communications-based train control, which gives a minimum

headway of 110 seconds, and will initially have capacity for 21,000 passengers per hour per direction.

Siemens has selected Thales to supply the fare collection system, which is based on a combination of magnetic strip and contactless ticketing. The contract includes access gates, dispensing systems for ticket offices, and self-service vending machines.

Ambitious plans

Despite the prolonged construction of Line 1, Algiers is only the second city in Africa after Cairo to complete a heavy metro line and there are ambitious plans to extend the network. In late 2009 Systra was awarded contracts to develop design and engineering plans for two extensions of Line 1. These include the 2km section from Place des

Martyrs to Bab el Oued (two or three stations) and a further 5km, five-station extension from Bab el Oued to Chevalley. Both of these extensions will be entirely underground. In the longer term, a three-line 60km network is envisaged with around 60 stations.