



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MS SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA (MP)

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SIGNALLING CEREMONY OF THE SOUTHERN LINE & LAUNCH OF TRAIN SET 200

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TUESDAY, 24 APRIL 2024

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- **Programme Director**
- **Director General of The Department of Transport, Adv. James Mlawu**
- **Deputy Director General of the Department of Transport, Mr Ngwako Makaepa**
- **Chairperson of the PRASA Board, Ms Nosizwe Nokwe-Macamo and other members of the Board present**
- **Group CEO of PRASA, Mr Hishaam Emeran**
- **Members of the Media**

INTRODUCTION

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me thank not only those that have added their weight to make this a successful event through which we have come to experience the reopening of this rail line, but equally so it is a moment in which we must affirm and celebrate the effort that made this return of infrastructure and services possible, and this goes to all of PRASA and the Department of Transport

The reopening of this line represents a positive state in which as a nation, as communities and as commuters we must all feel our needs served by this line, because among us many have aspirations for affordable, safe and reliable public transport.

It is also a belief among so many of us that the sufficient provision of public transport will benefit our broader ideal of a nation that works, an idea which sits central to our plan to revive the economy, make a serious dent to unemployment, improving the standards of people's lives and placing the building blocks for the building of a better life for all.

Accelerating efforts towards a better life for all has become driven by urgent needs among our people to find ways to deal with their current and growing challenges, a part of which is the continuously rising costs of living, which include costs of getting to work, our children getting to schools, our neighbours getting to centres of business or health.

Reopening this line as timely represents the urgency in our step to heed these needs.

Today, we celebrate more achievements and milestones in the passenger rail sector in the three decades we have been in government. Last week Friday I was in Soweto following the successful reopening of the Nancefield to Johannesburg line. PRASA has reopened 31 of the 40 corridors it operates in, and the work to revitalize the passenger rail service continues.

In only three decades of our young democratic and free existence as a nation, we have worked to re-fashion public transport and have done so with our view to an integrated public transport system with an interconnectedness across all modes.

The gap in the supply of adequate and sufficient public transport opened up by the collapse of passenger rail transport development left a much wider chasm that remained wide and seemingly difficult to close, yet we have continued to wrestle with the odds thrown at us and continue to see pleasing progress.

These changes we have continued to bring to bear broadly within the public transport sphere have continued to reverse the decline in passenger rail services, which many are well aware have been a result of the decline in rail infrastructure investment and the neglect of passenger train coaches since the 1980s, leaving us with a rail network and rolling stock far past their prime.

This is combined with the recent serious losses to rail infrastructure we have experienced through vandalism and crime, all of which resulted in the drop-in reliable services and a significant drop in passenger numbers.

THE 30 YEARS LEGACY

Programme Director,

Post-1994 was marked by a period of waning train service reliability, a decline in passenger numbers which heightened between 2000 and 2009.

Irrespective of these immense historical challenges, we have remained committed to modernizing our passenger rail system and building it into a mode of sustainable choice for both passenger and freight transportation.

The situation at hand has necessitated a transformative response from the government and a swift turnaround plan by PRASA.

PRASA's turnaround plan included:

1. A Rolling-stock Fleet Renewal Programme: Procurement of 600 new modern high-tech trains along with a maintenance contract to ensure a consistent supply of spare parts, reigniting reliability and comfort.

2. Station Modernisation: PRASA identified 135 stations with high commuter traffic within modernization corridors of the rail network. These stations are slated for enhancements, aiming to elevate the customer experience.

3. Signaling Upgrade: PRASA has embarked on a process to replace all existing signaling interlocking, comprising mainly obsolete mechanical and electromechanical systems, with electronic interlocking as the technology of choice.

Today, we want to give you feedback on the work that has been done.

This morning I want to say that PRASA's turnaround and the new trains that we are running on the recovered corridors marks a pivotal chapter in South Africa's rail revitalization.

Though vandalism and theft of the rail infrastructure threatened to reverse our gains and efforts, I am pleased by the progress made by PRASA in recovering the infrastructure and restoring a reliable passenger rail service that we can all be proud of.

PRASA is making significant strides in restoring passenger rail services. To date, 31 of the lines it operates in have been partially recovered. The region has 14 lines across 5 municipalities, not just in the City of Cape Town. To date, PRASA has partially recovered 12 of the 14 lines.

Ladies & Gentlemen, the Southern Line, which we visited this morning, re-opened post-Covid on the 7th July 2020. Of the 39 stations on the

corridor, only 13 stations were operational, Cape Town to Retreat. To date, all the 39 stations are operational, with a full train service.

To date, PRASA has transported over **13 million commuters**, with more than half (57%) transported on the Southern Line.

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Progress is being made to recover the Central Line from Phillippi to Nolungile and trains are expected to run by the May this year, adding to the services already running from Cape Town to Nyanga on the Central Line. At that time, trains will be running from Cape Town to Nyanga and all the way to Nolungile.

RE-SIGNALING

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The signaling of our railway infrastructure is one of the cornerstones of an efficient and safe movement of trains. In 2008, PRASA embarked on a journey to upgrade its near obsolete and outdated signaling system that was installed in the 1950s.

When PRASA suffered massive theft and vandalism of the rail infrastructure, the newly installed state-of-the-art electronic interlocking and signaling equipment was not left unscathed.

In rebuilding the rail infrastructure, PRASA is re-installing the stolen and vandalized signaling equipment. Through a project that would take seven years to complete, PRASA is re-signaling the network in phases. Nationally, PRASA has re-signaling six of the lines recovered.

PRASA is installing a state-of-the-art signaling system, including PRASA train control systems in line with the European Rail Traffic Management System. This will ensure that PRASA runs trains more efficiently, improving service frequency and enhancing the safe passage of trains on the rail network.

We observed this morning how signaling improves efficiency and frequency on the Southern Line. PRASA has re-signaled **24 of the 39 stations** from Cape Town to Simonstown. This means the train speed has been increased from 30km/hr to 75km/hr, commuters getting to their destination much faster. When there was no signaling on the line, trains were running every 90 minutes and the trip to Cape Town station was one hour and ten minutes. PRASA has reduced the journey time to 45 minutes and trains run every 20 minutes.

The impact in real terms is PRASA has now increased the number of trains it runs during peak from three (3) to nine (9) trains. This demonstrates our commitment to listen to South African commuters, who have told me in the past that: “Minister, we love the trains. But can PRASA increase the frequency.”

No more will a commuter who missed a train, have to wait for one-hour and ten minutes to catch the next train, because another train will be available within 20 minutes. We are improving efficiency and making sure that PRASA delivers a reliable and punctual commuter rail service that commuters can depend on, improve on-time performance and minimize disruptions.

Nationally, PRASA has re-signalled six (6) of the lines it operates. These lines are:

1. Mabopane - Pretoria
2. Saulsville – Pretoria
3. Pretoria – De Wildt
4. Cape Town - Simonstown
5. Mutual - Langa
6. Umlazi – Reunion

Work is under to upgrade signaling in KwaZulu Natal. The installed signaling nationally is the latest state of the art compatible with automatic train protection (ATP) systems, GSM-R/FRMCS Digital Radio Network Communication.

The organization is also working on installing its own PRASA Train Control System (PTCS) for the KwaZulu Natal Region. This system will bring the operations of the Region in line with the modern urban Railways around the World.

When we embarked on the Rollingstock Fleet Renewal Project in 2011, we were embarking on a transformative journey, ushering in a new passenger rail renaissance. PRASA entered into a 10-year contract with the Gibela consortium for the manufacture of 600 X'trapolis Mega Electric Multiple Units, that we have called **Isitimela Sabantu**.

Today, PRASA has reached a production milestone with 214 X'trapolis Mega Trains manufactured at the state-of-the-art facility constructed in Dunnottar, a significant investment towards the country's industrialization programme.

The first train set hit our railway tracks in February 2017. Today, we celebrate this progress made towards the overarching goal of 600 trains.

Ladies & Gentlemen, in celebrating the 30 years of our democracy, let us not lose of the economic impact of this project and goals towards environmental sustainability. With these new trains we are contributing towards the reduction of carbon emissions and the promotion of sustainable transportation alternatives.

The Rolling Stock Fleet Renewal Programme is expected to create approximately **1500 direct and 8000 indirect** jobs over the 10-year period. As part of the first phase of the programme, **1631 direct jobs** have been created during the construction phase of the R1 billion factory, and Gibela has now employed over 1198 full time employees.

As this government we understand the need to create jobs that will benefit local communities. The workforce comes from local communities such as Duduza, Vosloorus, Katlehong, Kwa-Thema, Tsakane and Alfra-Park have benefitted from this project.

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In addition to the construction jobs, Gibela has employed a total of 1205 people for both manufacture and maintenance activities, 37% of those 1205 come from immediate communities.

Skills development and knowledge transfer is key for this government. **About 20 000 training programmes** have been established to enable the transfer of skills and development of employees from top management to unskilled employees.

In 2019 Gibela Rail in partnership with Small Enterprise Development Agency and City of Ekurhuleni established a multi-sector business incubator, the doors opened in 2020 in the Kwa-Thema Township.

- To date there are **140 SMMEs** Trained, Mentored & Coached
- **193 SMMEs** accessing Business Development Support
 - **100% are black owned businesses**
 - **46% are women owned businesses; and**
 - **68% are youth owned businesses**

Gibela provides bursaries for universities and TVETs, Internships, Learnerships, Apprenticeship, Railway Introduction Course, and other relevant programmes. Through these interventions, we are helping to nurture the next generation of skilled and capable individuals who will not only improve their own futures, but also the futures of their families, communities, and our larger society.

Since the inception of the programme, we have contracted **1665 bursars** and spent over **R127 million** towards their studies.

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Not only are we revitalising the railway and manufacturing industry through skills development that will reignite the industry at large, we are also changing the lives of the previously disadvantaged people and the livelihoods of communities. Our young people are now trained as Artisans, Engineering Technicians, Technologists and designers, just to name a few.

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The investment made includes **R135 million** invested in Enterprise and Supplier Development initiatives, developing SMMEs. **R743 million** invested in skills development to support inclusion in the rail sector. Over this 10-year period, Gibela has committed to train and develop **19500 individuals** in various skills such as engineers, artisans, technicians, and technologists.

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These were the contractual obligations that Gibela had to undertake as part of this 10-year project.

Right at the heart of the Cape Town station, is R1.2 billion co-invested project between PRASA's special purpose vehicle, **Intersite** and ERIS Property Group. More than 3 000 students, including NSFAS-eligible students now call this station home, right at the heart of the Cape Town CBD, giving them direct access to transport, and access to built-in state-of-the art facilities such as study rooms, gym facilities, a cinema, and free Wi-Fi among the amenities and services offered.

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The revitalization of the station included the development of the seven thousand meter-square of the retail space.

With this development and the Goodwood station development, demonstrate how PRASA is positioning its stations as investment destinations for mixed-use property development and property developers.

This development not only allows PRASA to be financially sustainable but unlocks the true value and potential of our mega stations, transforming our stations into places where people, especially, young people can live, work, shop and play.

Today, as we celebrate our progress and the milestones in the passenger rail sector, we reaffirm our commitment to building a future where passenger rail remains a cornerstone of our transportation infrastructure. Together, let us continue to invest in our communities, empower our citizens, and build a nation we can all be proud of.

We do it for you!

Thank you.

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