

Media Release

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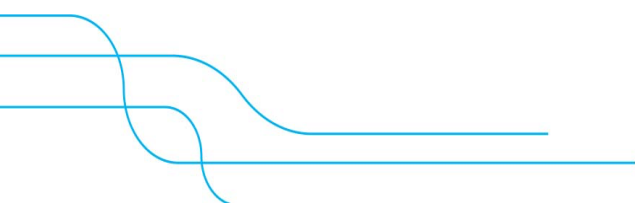
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Caption: PRASA GCEO Hishaam Emeran addressing delegates at the Africa Rail Conference 2024 in Sandton, Johannesburg

PRASA trains back on track as investment in passenger rail infrastructure booms



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Johannesburg, 27 June 2024 – The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) is making steady and significant progress in getting passenger trains back on track, with some 40 million passengers in 2023/24 using PRASA’s services on 31 of the 40 PRASA rail corridors now operational.

This is according to Hishaam Emeran, Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) of PRASA. Emeran said passenger numbers had climbed by almost 25 million from a year ago. Commuters were now accessing PRASA’s services at 263 refurbished stations, with many more in line to be restored.

Addressing the Africa Rail 2024 Conference taking place at the Sandton Convention Centre, Emeran said PRASA had recovered almost 80% of passenger rail corridors after widespread theft and vandalism destroyed the country’s passenger rail system during the COVID-19 lockdown. This forced hundreds of thousands of passengers to seek alternative transport.

“The resuscitation of the 31 corridors translates into the steady return of rail passengers. We are not where we need to be yet, but we are seeing significant progress. A year back we had 15 million passengers and by the end of March this year (2024), we reached 40million passengers. That’s nearly a 200% increase,” Emeran told delegates.

PRASA had invested more than R12 billion in capital projects, creating some 4 500 jobs, he said.

“Over the past 24 months, PRASA has achieved major milestones and we can see a significant improvement; you can see a turnaround within the rail space in South Africa,” said Emeran.

“That has been possible, in large part, to PRASA’s ability to execute on our capital programme. Over the last two years, PRASA has made a significant injection into the economy of our country. It has invested more than R30-billion over the last two years in projects, rolling stock manufacturing and other organisation elements within the rail space,” he explained.

“That is a direct injection into the economy, which does not even take into account the knock-on effect of our investment.”

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Emeran said PRASA's turnaround strategy – which has focused on corridor rebuilding, modernisation and safety – has yielded positive results for rail passengers and the country's economy.

The modernisation of the rail system is reaping rewards. It is creating jobs and revitalising an essential commuter artery. It is also boosting the manufacturing sector with the building of the new 'people's train' taking place in Gauteng's East Rand.

"Those trains are manufactured by Gibela and built here in South Africa by young men and women who are engineers, technicians, welders and so on. We have ensured that about 65% of the parts that go into that train are local content," Emeran said.

With the production of 600 trains for PRASA at the Gibela factory, the agency is spearheading efforts to establish South Africa as the train manufacturing hub for the entire African continent, fully supporting the African Union's vision for South Africa to lead in this critical industry.

"Together with our sister company, Transnet, and our manufacturing company, Gibela, we are spearheading these opportunities for rail as part of the country's broader economic recovery programme," he said.

Speaking as newly elected SARA President

As the newly elected President of the Southern African Railways Association (SARA), Emeran said rail had a critical role to play on the African continent.

"We must harness rail's potential on the continent and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) by embarking on ambitious programmes that will expand the role of both passenger and freight rail. These systems have the potential to contribute to our continent's socio-economic prosperity," he said.

If we invest in modern rail infrastructure, said Emeran, South Africa could radically improve efficiencies in the sphere of moving of goods and people.

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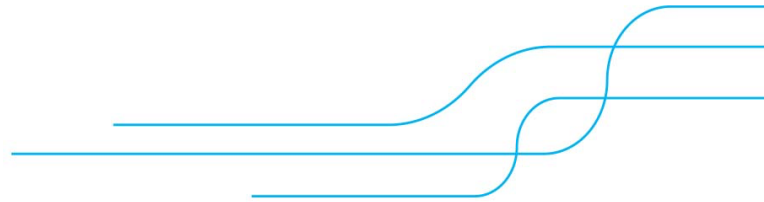
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Fixing and upgrading rail is an important goal, given the burden that Africa’s roads carry. There is excellent work being done in the logistics space, driven in South Africa by the Presidency, Emeran said.

And he added, “Our transport networks must receive this level of priority because the economic and social costs of a failing rail system, and that of the congested roads we see across the continent, far outweighs the costs of improving and modernising our railway network. Also given the high levels of unemployment across much of the continent, affordable, safe and reliable public transport, with rail as the backbone, is critical.”

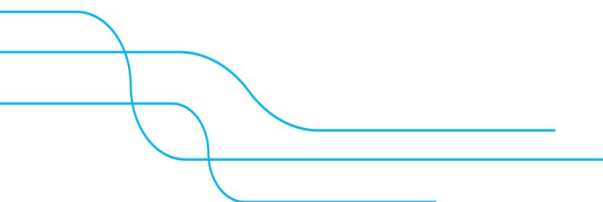
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Note to editors: The Africa Rail Conference is one of Africa’s largest and most established rail gathering, attracting hundreds of rail operators, investors, service providers, government representatives from the continent and abroad.

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