



transport

Department:
Transport
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: Wednesday, 05 June 2019

TO: All Media

ATTENTION: News Editors/ Transport Reporters

For immediate use

STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MR FIKILE MBALULA, ON THE RELEASE OF THE PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION REPORT INTO THE EERSTE FABRIEKE STATION COLLISION

05 June 2019

On 1 June 2019, we learnt with alarm of an incident involving one of the new PRASA trains and a Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) temping machine at Eerste fabriek station in Tshwane. This resulted in 64 commuters and 2 crew members on the temping machine suffering minor to moderate injuries. They were treated at various hospitals and subsequently discharged.

Our railway safety laws impose obligations both on the part of the operators, being PRASA and Transnet Freight Rail in this instance, as well as the Railway Safety Regulator (RSR). Indeed, as required by law, the RSR has concluded a preliminary investigation to establish the root cause of the incident.

The report concludes that the Transnet temping machine failed at the Greenview Station and lost its brakes causing it to accelerate on the track towards the Eerste fabriek Station, where it collided with the stationary PRASA train. Communication between the crew of the temping machine and the Centralised Train Control (CTC) centre failed.

The report further notes that the signaling system between the Eerstefabriek and Pienaarspoort stations has not been functional for approximately two years. This is a matter of serious concern due to the heightened risk of manual authorization.

It is clear from the report that the train crew performed their duties with diligence, calm and professionalism and averted many more potential injuries.

I am particularly concerned at a finding that commuters interfered with the safety operation of the train by activating the Passenger Emergency Alarm when the driver attempted to move the train backwards to avoid collision. It is equally alarming to learn that passengers ignored the driver's instruction to evacuate the train, resulting in injuries that could have been avoided. This should not be construed as apportioning any blame

to those who were injured in the incident. We wish them speedy recovery and will do everything in our power to ensure that safety in our commuter rail environment improves in a sustainable way.

It is time we inculcate a culture where we all understand that safety is a collective responsibility. It is only when we work together and respect safety protocols in our railways that we can save life and limb. Safety in our railways is paramount and conduct that places the lives and safety of others at risk cannot be tolerated.

Similarly, operators have a responsibility to ensure that the infrastructure and rolling stock are adequately maintained and are kept in an acceptable state of repair. We urge the commuting public to respect all safety protocols within the railway environment. As part of modernizing our commuter rail system, we must equally raise the bar in enforcing compliance with safety protocols and ensure that the same standards are applicable across our commuter rail system, be it on the Gautrain or PRASA environment.

We urge PRASA to expedite the Board of Inquiry on this incident and we will ensure that decisive action is taken to ensure that there is no repeat of such an occurrence. It is our collective responsibility both as the commuting public and organs of state to protect and safeguard public assets.

We have to ensure that a culture of consequences management becomes a norm and incidents that could have been avoided do not go unpunished. This is equally true for those who sleep on the job and allow infrastructure to fall into a state of disrepair that exposes the public to unsafe conditions.

We further call on the Railway Safety Regulator to ensure strict adherence to safety protocols and hold operators accountable for conduct that undermines these protocols and standards. Where appropriate, the RSR must not hesitate to impose penalties on operators who continuously flout railway safety standards. We will not tolerate any conduct that places the lives of our people at risk.

Safety is critical in enabling efficiency in railway operations and ensuring that the nation remains productive. When millions of our people who rely on rail to get to work are unable to do so because of unsafe conditions, the economy suffers. We must remain cognizant of our role in enabling economic growth by enabling mobility in our railways, both for freight and passengers.

The last State of Railway Safety Report published by the RSR paints an unflattering picture of safety performance in our railways. In 2017/2018 a total number of 1027 incidents of collisions during movement of rolling stock were reported by the RSR. This represented a 2% increase from the previous year. This is cause for alarm and must spur us into action to arrest this situation.

In the coming weeks, we will be engaging with all the entities of the Department with a view to ensure that they are all focused on accelerating service delivery and making a difference on the lives of our people.

We will be announcing an action plan that will speed up change and transformation, particularly in untransformed industries in the transport sector for our first 400 days in office.

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