



transport

Department:  
Transport  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**TRANSPORT MINISTER, DR BLADE NZIMANDE, STATEMENT ON INTERVENTIONS AT THE PASSENGER RAIL AGENCY OF SOUTH AFRICA HELD AT GCIS TSHEDIMOSETSO HATFIELD IN PRETORIA**

11 April 2019

Deputy Minister, Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga;

Chairperson of the PRASA Board, Ms Khanyisile Kweyama;

Board Members;

Acting Director General, Mr Chris Hlabisa;

Acting Deputy Director General Rail, Mr Jan De Villiers;

Government Officials

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Government has been steadfast in developing an integrated, effective, reliable, safe and cost effective public transport system, which positions South Africa's rail transport as its backbone.

As government, we have committed ourselves to move both commuter and freight from road to rail. This will ensure that we preserve our road network and construct new roads where they are need the most, especially in rural areas.

Most of you might be knowing the South Africa rail story, the story which is charecterised by 40 years of disinvestment in the commuter rail services by the apartheid government.

Since the Democratic government took over in 1994, billions of rands have been spent to turnaround Metrorail to be a mass based transport carrier.

Our commitment has been demonstrated, by amongst others ensuring that our rail services remain the most affordable public transport.

However, more still needs to be done to turn around Metrorail to fully response to the transport needs of our people, particularly given the densification of our towns and Metros.

As you are aware, I held a meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa at Tuynhuys in Cape Town on Tuesday 19 March 2019 following the President's first-hand experience of the difficulties regularly experienced by commuters on our Metrorail Trains.

The President was on board a train from Mabopane to the Tshwane CBD when the train was delayed for about two hours.

On numerous occasions, I had had meetings with the Chairperson of the Board and the Department, led by the Acting Director General, had follow-up meetings with the Management of PRASA raising the same issue of improving PRASA's operations, including derailments and the concerns on the security of commuters and well as our rail infrastructure.

As a result of these bad experience by our commuters, the President directed me to urgently resolve the challenges plaguing PRASA.

Having consulted expensively with the officials of the Department and the Rail Branch, I therefore made a determination to adopt a two-stage structured intervention.

**The following is the component of this intervention:**

#### **PHASE- ONE**

I will be appointing a Team of Organisational or Performance Experts to undertake a 6-8 week organisational analysis of PRASA.

A Factual report will be presented to me addressing key factors that would have led to the failed implementation of PRASA's Turn-Around Strategies.

#### **PHASE-TWO**

On the basis of the outcome of the Phase one (1) contained in the Factual Report, PRASA will appoint of a Turn-Around Execution Team under the direction of the Department of Transport. This high-level Team will monitor and report progress to both the Board and the Minister.

Coupled with these two inter-related phases, the following Immediate Actions will be implemented to ensure stability and service delivery:

I will be extending the current PRASA Board term by six (6) months before its expiry on the 30th April 2019;

The Board will be expected to finalise the appointment of advertised executives' vacancies and ensure that recommended candidates undergo the State Security Agency vetting process;

The Department will assist in the identification of the necessary capacity required in the Acting Group CEO's office. These experts will be appointed on short-term contracts;

To immediately stabilise operations, the Board is directed to focus on the following key operational issues:

Improve reliability of trains and trains cancellations by 60% and 41% improvement in trains delays with revised train timetable as per train availability;

Secure trains, passengers and assets by deploying security personnel on trains, for asset protection, fencing or walling of corridors and depots in all regions. This must be completed during the 2019/20 financial year;

The Board must enhance and fund the PRASA Communication Strategy focussing on service delivery challenges and stakeholder engagement;

The Board must address the lack of consequence management, following the Mountainview crash and other similar crashes. This includes addressing immediate rail safety commitments made by the Board;

In addressing common challenges experienced in various corridors, the Board must adopt a priority corridor approach. Each region must have at-least one (1) priority corridor to modernise through the appointment of a dedicated corridor project manager;

The Board must ensure that Performance Agreements are concluded by all employees by the 30th June 2019.

The PRASA Board together with the Executive must continue to address the alleged low morale of the train drivers as a result of their safety concerns and related condition of their service and must continuously engage organised labour within the rail sector.

Whilst I raised concerns about performance of PRASA, particularly under this current Board, there are also pockets of excellence in various aspects of the PRASA mandate.

I welcome the placing on special leave and suspension of various PRASA executive on allegations of improper, irregular, and corrupt behaviour. This also includes the termination of fourteen (14) security employees who committed attempted robbery and various other offenses at PRASA.

PRASA has also ensured the successful launch of the ground-breaking, innovative, state of the art Gibela Train Manufacturing Plant by President Ramaphosa.

PRASA is also working progressively to restore operational stability in most of its provincial corridors, including in the Western Cape.

On the 9th April, just two days ago, the President officially, handed over two test trains that will be operating in the Cape Town corridor.

Additional thirty (30) more test rains will be deployed in this corridor, thirty (30) in KwaZulu-Natal and thirty (30) in Gauteng.

We remain concern of acts of vandalism of our trains and the stealing of our network cables. We appeal to members of the community to protect this important public transport mode. We are also improving our security measure in to make sure that our Metrorail services and infrastructure is protected.

As Minister of Transport, I have appointed stakeholder relations managers. They will be based in Cape Town, Gauteng, eThekwini, and East London, where Metrorail has operations. These stakeholder relations managers will act as a direct link between my office and various stakeholders, including commuter and community organisations.

I have also escalated the vandalisation and torching of trains to the Security cluster of Cabinet so that government deal decisively with this criminality.

I will also be working to change our laws to, including amongst other, the torching of trains so that it be declared as a serious crime of arson, which is a more serious offence in law.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to thank, the Board, the management and staff led by Acting Group Chief Executive Officer, Dr Sishi for holding the fort under these difficult circumstances.

I also would like to thank the outgone Acting Group CEO, Mr Sibusiso Sithole for being at the helm of this organisation from the 1st June 2018 to the 28th February 2019.

Thank you