



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT  
MS BARBARA CREECY AT THE AFRICA CONVENTION  
SANDTON CONVENTION CENTRE  
7 JULY 2026**

Ministers of Transport from the broader African Continent present  
Representatives of Foreign Governments from our African continent and  
abroad

Permanent Secretaries, Director Generals, Chief Executive Officers  
Captains of Industry; Members of the rail industry and operators from  
South Africa, SADC and the African continent at large

Members of the media,

Distinguished guests

Programme Director

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to deliver a keynote address at the 26<sup>th</sup> Africa  
Rail Conference and Exhibition, convened under the theme: “Investment,  
Development, and Technology for Rail Operators, End-Users,  
Government and Investors”

We gather at a pivotal moment for South Africa's rail sector and for the African continent. Across Africa rail is recognised as a strategic driver of economic growth, regional integration, industrialisation and sustainable development. For South Africa this is the moment of transformation as our rail reform programme moves from policy formulation to execution.

The White Paper on National Rail Policy laid down our foundational vision for a modern, competitive, and high-performance rail sector. The Roadmap for the freight logistics system translated that vision into an actionable operational recovery timeline. In partnership with the Presidency through Operation Vulindlela, we have been able to unblock regulatory bottlenecks, drive institutional structural reforms and accelerate project delivery.

Rail transport remains the most efficient sustainable and inclusive mode of moving freight and passengers over long distances. Within the SADC region, which collectively operates a railway network of approximately 40 000 kilometres, the rail sector must be positioned at the centre of an efficient and integrated freight and passenger transport system.

The strategic shift of freight from road to rail is not only a transport imperative but also an economic and environmental necessity. Increased rail utilisation reduces road maintenance costs, lowers emissions, improves road safety, and creates the conditions under which the objectives of the African Continental Free Trade Area can be genuinely realised.

South Africa is committed to playing its part in advancing this vision recognised by the African Union's 2016/2017 resolution; our country has

a mandate to serve as a hub for rail manufacturing on the continent. We are committed to honouring that mandate through the sustained implementation of sector reforms and targeted investments. Our rail manufacturing plant in Dunnotar, Gauteng continues to demonstrate the strength and potential of local industrial capability. Through ongoing production and skills development, the facility is contributing significantly to the growth of Africa's rail manufacturing sector

When I addressed this conference a year ago, I outlined the vision and priorities for rail reform. Today, I am pleased to report that South Africa's rail reform programme has moved beyond planning and policy formulation to implementation.

Our reform programme is informed by the White Paper on the National Rail Policy of 2022 and the National Freight Logistics Roadmap of 2023. Over the past year, we have focused on establishing the institutional framework needed to translate policy commitments into practical and measurable outcomes.

I am pleased to share a significant milestone in South Africa's freight rail history - the approval of the first eleven private Train Operating Companies to access national freight rail network on 13 March 2026. This marks the beginning of the era of open access, with operations expected to commence on 1 April 2027. Collectively, these operators plan to move up to 24 million tons of freight per annum.

For the first time, South African minerals, vehicles and agricultural produce will access the rail network through operators competing on service quality and efficiency. The entry of these operators will generate

much-needed revenue for the fiscus, secure and create jobs, and demonstrate to investors across the continent that open access rail reform is achievable.

I am delighted to also announce the approval of our Draft National Rail Master Plan by Cabinet and its subsequent launch for public comments. Through this plan, we have tabled a blueprint that will re-energise our rail transport system until 2050 and beyond.

The National Rail Master Plan seeks to address the critical gap between the 165 million tons of freight currently moved by rail and the 280 million tonnage market demand, while also tackling the burden high transport costs place on commuters and households.

Economic modelling commissioned for the National Rail Master Plan indicates that every 1 million invested could generate approximately 4.3 million in GDP growth, highlighting the significant potential economic impact.

The plan would certainly complement the African Union Rail Master Plan which seeks to connect all the capital cities and advance the objectives of Agenda 2063 by creating an integrated and efficient African rail network of our continent as part of Agenda 2063.

A key enabler of our ambitions for private and international investment is the regulatory and financial framework that South Africa has been developing. At last year's conference, I was pleased to announce South Africa's formal depositing of the Luxembourg Rail Protocol for ratification.

The Protocol creates new opportunities for international financing by reducing investment risk and improving access to affordable funding for rolling stock acquisition and enabling the economic and environmental benefits of shifting freight and passengers from road to rail. Work is underway to domesticate the Protocol through the Mobile Equipment Act of 2007, ensuring its full implementation within South Africa's legal framework. This would certainly provide a boost to Train Operating Companies that seek to compete in our rail network corridors.

We continue to encourage our partners across the region and continent to consider ratifying the Protocol. This would unlock much-needed investment in our ecosystem and facilitate the purchase of rolling stock

Ladies and gentlemen

A significant milestone was the establishment of Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM) in November 2024. Within a month of its establishment, TRIM published the First Network Statement together with the Rail Access Tariffs. TRIM's establishment creates the dedicated institutional focus necessary for the proper maintenance and revitalisation of rail infrastructure, while enabling third-party operators to access and compete on the network. On Thursday last week, TRIM published the second network statement that is now open for public comment.

This year marks another important milestone in South African's rail reform with the formal establishment of the Transport Economic Regulator. The Regulator will play a pivotal role in creating a fair, transparent and competitive operating environment, ensuring that all rail operators

compete equally while promoting efficiency, investment, innovation across the sector.

The Private Sector Participation Framework has generated a strong pipeline of investment-ready projects through the PSP Unit, hosted with the Development Bank of Southern Africa. This year will see a number of significant projects advancing to market, including:

- The Ngqura Manganese Export Corridor;
- The Richards Bay Dry Bulk Terminal; and
- The Container Corridor between Gauteng and eThekweni.

The Durban Container Terminal Pier 2 Concession has reached financial close, increasing port handling capacity from 2.0 million to 2.8 million TEUs a year and establishing a bankable model for future public-private participation. Through the Budget Facility for Infrastructure, R16.8 billion in public investment is already in execution, with a further R23.6 billion in development.

Ladies and gentlemen

South Africa's passenger rail revival is a story that deserves particular attention. By the end of March 2026, annual passenger journeys on our commuter rail network surpassed 100 million. In addition 35 of 40 priority lines have re-entered service. In Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, we are increasing train frequencies, strengthening security, and restoring reliable rail connectivity for communities that have long excluded from reliable public transport.

The recovery of Central line in Cape Town has been significant achievement in South Africa's passenger rail revitalisation programme. Today, the majority of stations in central line have been restored to operation, reconnecting communities with safe, reliable and affordable rail transport. The central line recovery has also delivered broader socio-economic benefits. More than 2 500 direct jobs have been created and over 50 SMMEs participated in the programme.

The objective remains clear, to achieve pre-pandemic levels of 600 million passengers per annum on our commuter network by 2030. To catalyse the next phase of investment, a Request for Information process for passenger rail was launched at the end of 2025, seeking market appetite for rapid regional rail, depot modernisation, rolling stock leasing, automated fare collection, and optic fibre installation.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our sector-specific target is to move 250 million tonnes of freight on South Africa's rail network annually by 2030. This target is supported by the significant rail reforms implemented throughout 2026.

In March 2026, we convened the National Transport Conference bringing together government, industry, labour and stakeholders to build consensus on the future of South Africa's rail sector and accelerate the implementation of rail reform.

As we look beyond 2030, we are planning for a future in which the full market demand of 280 million tonnes is served by a rail network that is modern, efficient, resilient and open to competition.

As President Ramaphosa said at the inaugural Transport Conference: we must choose reform over stagnation, competitiveness over decline, and inclusive growth over exclusion. Those words continue to guide our transport and logistics reform agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, the themes of this conference: investment, development, and technology are not abstract aspirations for South Africa. They are the practical imperatives driving our daily work.

We have established the institutions. We have published the tariffs. We have named our first private train operators. We have reached financial close on major port concessions. We have surpassed 100 million passenger journeys. And now, with the National Rail Master Plan, we have set out a comprehensive, evidence-based framework for the future of rail in this country

I wish you well in the forthcoming discussions and the exchange of knowledge and experience that makes this conference so valuable. This is an exciting time for the renewal and revival of rail on our continent. With vision, policy implementation and determination, we can ensure this introduces a new era of logistical efficiency and inclusive economic growth — for South Africa, for Southern Africa, and for Africa as a whole.

I thank you.