



South Africa's vast transport system is essential not only to its own economy but to those of several other African states which use it to move their imports and exports. The size and quality of this infrastructure are impressive and, for many first-time visitors, something of a surprise.

Road transport

The national road network consists of some 7 200 km with plans to extend this to 20 000 km of primary roads. This is just a small part of the total road network which comprises more than 500 000 km. Some 80% of goods are transported by road.

The N4 Maputo Corridor toll-road is currently under construction. It will be one of few privately financed, cross-border toll-roads in the world.

Nationally, there is an estimated road expenditure backlog of R27 billion. However, recent government budgets have started to address this situation. The Cabinet has approved a five-year holding strategy for the

development of infrastructure, which will prevent further deterioration of the road network. The holding strategy will also address areas where the need is most critical. An amount of R30 billion has been made available for the implementation of this strategy.

There are close to 127 000 minibus-taxis in South Africa, which provide 65% of the 2,5 billion annual passenger trips in urban areas and a high percentage of rural and intercity transport.

The major allocations in the Department of Transport's budget are for bus and rail subsidies, with a total funding of R3,7 billion in 2002/03. This includes additional funding of R140 million for rail infrastructure and R150 million for bus subsidies.

The Department is working on a subsidy policy for public transport which, it is envisaged, will be finalised soon.

The implementation of the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme is one of the key priorities of the Department. The Programme should be completely rolled out by 2006/07. An amount of R37,6 million has been allocated for 2002/03 and is aimed at realising and unlocking the economic potential of the taxi industry. By February 2003, six bidders had been shortlisted for the production of new taxi vehicles. It was envisaged that the first vehicles would be rolled-out towards the end of June 2003.

Transnet

Transnet Ltd handles 180 million tons of rail freight per year, 2,1 million tons of road freight, and 194 million tons through the harbours, while 15 400 million litres are pumped through its petrol pipelines annually.

The company also flies 6,1 million domestic, regional and international passengers per year.

Transnet is worth R58 billion in fixed assets and has a workforce of some 80 000 employees. It is a public company of which the South African Government is the sole shareholder.

Transnet Limited consists of nine main divisions, a number of subsidiaries and related businesses. Its main divisions are:

- Spoornet, which focuses on the transportation of freight, containers and mainline passengers by rail
- The National Ports Authority (NPA), which focuses on the provision of total port infrastructure and marine-related services, the management of port activities in a landlord capacity and the regulation of the port systems
- South African Port Operations, which focuses on port terminal and cargo operations in commercially viable business units
- Petronet, dedicated to transporting petroleum products and gas through a high-pressure, long-distance pipeline network
- Metrorail, a commuter rail transport business.

The upgrading of Metrorail rolling stock is a top priority. So is upgrading signalling equipment and stations, 73 of which have been upgraded across the country with another 14 upgrade contracts to be executed.

Spoornet, the largest division of Transnet, is the biggest railway and heavy haulier in southern Africa with an annual turnover of R9 billion. Keeping the wheels of commerce turning are 3 285 locomotives, 123 000 wagons and 30 600 km of track. Spoornet's General Freight Business conveys some 96 million tons of commodity freight a year. A more specialised business unit is COALink which ensures that South Africa remains the world's second-largest exporter of coal. In December 2000, the billionth ton of coal was transported through the dedicated Richards Bay terminal. Similarly specialised is the Orex unit which transports iron ore (21,6 million tons in 1999/00) from mines in the far Northern Cape to the steel industries of the Western Cape over a dedicated line.

Long-distance passenger services link the major cities of South Africa and southern Africa. The most famous of these services is the Blue Train, voted the world's leading luxury train in 2001. The train is to be concessioned as part of Spoornet's privatisation process.

Commuter rail services are provided by the South African Rail Commuter Corporation (SARCC) which falls under the Department of Transport but has its own board of control. It owns the assets and acts as an agency of the Department. It is envisaged that, in future, public and private operators will be able to bid for the right to operate rail lines, services or network concessions. SARCC started upgrading 236 coaches as from September 2001 with the final upgrade to be delivered in September 2003. By February 2003, more than 88 coaches had been upgraded at a cost of more than R240 million. The overall cost to upgrade the total fleet of commuter coaches is R900 million.

Metrorail, a business unit of Transnet, has made steady progress in implementing far-reaching efficiency-improvement projects. This has saved taxpayers millions. Safety is a major concern, with a significant portion of the R355 million capital budget being spent on refurbishing or renewing critical signalling installations.

Civil aviation

The Airports Company of South Africa owns and manages the country's nine principal airports comprising three international gateways at Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town and mostly domestic airports at Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, East London, George, Kimberley and Upington.

These nine airports combined, handle more than 196 000 aircraft landings and 10 million departing passengers on average annually. The company also has a 35-year concession to operate Pilanesberg International Airport near Sun City.

Johannesburg International Airport is Africa's busiest. It is predicted that the number of its users is set to soar to 18 million a year with the opening of the airport's new R450-million domestic terminal on 11 February 2003. The new terminal spans an impressive 80 000 square metres of floor space, and comes complete with inclined travelator ramps, the first on the continent.