

Debility is rife and the ANC cannot be trusted to steer Transport

By Chris Hunsinger MP – DA Shadow Minister of Transport

One of the most striking remarks mentioned by leader John Steenhuisen following his recent visit to Ukraine was that despite the war and accompanied destruction that this country had to deal with, the electricity flow is maintained, roads are cleared, trains are moving and bridges are being repaired. The government of Ukraine is focused on preserving infrastructure with the general public supporting the preservation and rebuilding of the country.

In contrast, we here in South Africa, are confronted with a war by our government: heaps of unimplemented ideas, crime, corruption, management debility and bad leadership. This 2022/23 Transport Budget Report is no different to any from previous years – strongly resembling the traditional format of a copy and paste edition in which, unsurprisingly, the words “service delivery” does not appear once.

Two components of implementation facilitate Transport’s budget functions to the people. The first is via the 12 entities under the Department of Transport (DoT) and the second component of the implementation of transport functions happens through provinces. As such, public transport is a concurrent schedule 4A function between national and provincial spheres, while provincial roads and traffic are an exclusive schedule 5A provincial function. Coordination and integration are crucial, also with metros and municipalities aligned to their IDP processes.

Sadly, the Department of Transport has been reluctant to accept the long-standing view of the Democratic Alliance that their current indicators are not aligned to civic experiences of transport and the Department's service delivery provision. For example, 95% of passenger rail services were lost in the last 10 years, yet Prasa shows 100% of targets achieved and the Department and Minister applauds this.

Another aspect that the DA has repeatedly warned against centres around the use of consultants versus building internal capacity and competence. This 2022/23 budget is no different given the 73% increase in budget provision for consultants, the biggest of which is for the public transport programme. How can effective and efficient coordination ever be achieved through consultants? How can improved coordination and budget functions ever be improved based on individualised projects through consultants? How would we ever effectively serve communities with choice and option of different modes in varieties of integrated options of mobility when ¾ of a budget is reserved for consultants?

After having spent millions on consultants, we have more company-owned vehicles parked at Prasa-offices than moving trains. A recent parliamentary question revealed that more than R2 billion is owed by Transnet to Prasa – a ridiculous phenomenon where the same government owns all the rail infrastructure yet allows this nonsensical cross-invoicing between them. The sooner these two entities unite, the better.

Any aspiration to increase freight cargo towards the rail network to alleviate pressure on roads would only be possible after the full merging of Transnet and Prasa. This should not be seen as a new project, but rather as an already lost opportunity. During a time when container activity in the Durban harbour increased by more than 40%, it was the trucking industry that stepped forward and absorbed the growth. 15 000 truck fleets of owners who have five or more trucks now compete with this aspiration. In total it amounts to well over 300 000 trucks of 3.5 tons capacity and more. Amidst this phenomenal growth Transnet could barely secure 15% share in container movement.

The Department and Minister Mbalula is not driven by rational facts and logical data. Self-delusion, instead rules – and nothing will change.

It carries little value in promoting employment and economic growth when you have 11 435 invoices over 90 days outstanding to creditors, amongst the 12 Transport entities. This potential income to supplier businesses in the transport sector has cost suppliers R57 million. Shame on you.

Debility is rife and evident in the decline of rail passenger numbers by 95% from 2010 until now. Put differently, the mismanagement of this Department has left only 5% of passenger rail intact. During one of my oversites, I met a working mother who said that she had 40% less to spend in her household and home, because she has to pay much more to get to work as the trains that are not available.

In this budget, R12.6 billion have been set aside for rail capital programmes. It would have been prudent to use this money to expand on rail and improve signaling equipment. For example, just five kilometres of rail track could've connected the King Shaka airport with a whole network of passenger rail.

Recently, I shared the significant discrepancy between Sanral and the nine provinces' budgets for road maintenance. This budget substantially benefits Sanral, which looks after only 10% of road-kilometres compared to the combined nine provinces, yet Sanral receives the bulk-share, once again.

Apart from these disappointments in the Transport budget, the returned AARTO and NLTA Bills yield absolute proof that the ANC cannot be trusted and the sooner the DA takes control of the budget and regulation, the better.