

An appropriate response is required to fix transport besides bullet-train-dreaming

by Chris Hunsinger MP - Shadow Minister of Transport

House chair, allow me to thank all our protection and emergency officers and staff all over the country – never before have we been exposed to such high levels of risk and violence directed against citizens and infrastructure of this country.

At the beginning of this 6th Parliament, two reality departure points matter, they are:

- The repeated phrase during SONA: “that the detail will come”; and,
- A 4th appointed Transport Minister in just 3 years.

For the Transport Sector, this is the moment where detail on change, improvements and new direction should flourish and not be contested with so many factors which interrupt, undermine and dis-invests particularized goals and scope for progress.

The Democratic Alliance’s (DA) transport team will be constructive and contributing-drivers of the needed change to improve mobility in South Africa. Meaningful ideas of all my predecessors will not go lost since we have studied and filtered out the best ideas from the past 5 terms. We have gained, Minister, not *Facebook*, but face-to-face knowledge and understanding from technical experts, and have listened to sector specialists and other stakeholders like taxi, bus, train and truck drivers. We have built relationships with them, which I, together with my team, will remain connected to, and expand.

Three burning aspects, with a common factor, clearly stand out with regards to the protection of our transport: these are our users, assets and funding. Users use their hard-earned money on public transport, and they need to feel safe. Needs, which should be acted upon instead of explaining why over R640 million was not spent in the 2018/19 financial year by this Department.

As reform-essentials in mobility, the DA would promote regular Joint Committee Meetings between Transport and Police. This will provide a platform to engage on the current unacceptable levels of violence against users and the destruction of infrastructure. With more than R1.3 billion not being spent by the police in 2018/19, we most certainly do have a couple of suggestions on how to protect our commuters, trucks, busses, trains, motorists and infrastructure.

We will push for the merging of Transnet and PRASA since more than R1 billion is exchanged every year between these two entities. This, while they both use the same rail lines, platforms and signal equipment yet cross-invoice each other when everything belongs to the same government. By saving R1 billion every year, the DA could have purchased 250 trainsets and enough railway lines to build Moloto Rail. However, reality links to fact that not a single meter of rail track was purchased in the last five years. We remain adamant and determined that the DA-led Western Cape should run Metrorail.

We will apply pressure to merge all Controllers like the Railway Safety Regulator and others directly under the Department of Transport. Their dependency on income through licences and fines compromise their function. Millions of Rands will be saved in this way.

A rand spent should be a rand of improvement. We cannot pay for stuff which never finds purpose, let alone collapses. Therefore, the DA would promote the establishment of a National Transport Infrastructure Inspectorate to mitigate risks of all public bridges, walkways, platforms and stations.

We would create a specialised Audit-like regulator with inspectors, to control everything from tender specifications to maintenance terms.

Given the growing number of entities with escalating fiscal risk to our economy, it has become evident that less value ends up in tangible improvement that which benefits the very people who provided the funding. A drastic change in mindset is required to acknowledge the public as customers and not as convenient bail-out partners when things do not work out.

The financially burdened Road Accident Fund can be fixed by amendments to the current Act, including the concerning occurrences of greedy practitioners. The DA will soon present 15 recommendations on how to immediately stop the financial bleeding of this ill-managed administration.

Our position on the lapsed RABS Bill in its current form remains unchanged, because the already ballooned fuel levy cannot be burdened with a dual compensation system. It is also immoral to indemnify the wrongdoer and unconstitutional to deny someone the right of access to common law.

Instead of hawking RABS to justify under-settlement, lawless behaviour on our roads should be pursued. Less deaths and injuries will naturally, over time, result in less claims.

In summary, we are looking forward to this term as an opportunity to make mobility count as a catalyst to fix and improve our economy, while making the DA a driver of reform-essentials and every citizen count as valuable beneficiary towards building a better South Africa for all.