

Legislative reform true gateway to achieving outcomes for Public Works and Infrastructure

Samantha Graham-Maré MP – Shadow Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure

Thank you, House Chair,

Minister Patricia de Lille, amongst your first statements as the new Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure was a stipulation that you would not be buying new furniture for the Ministers and Members of Parliament. I am sure that the children sitting in Graaff-Reinet, in temporary classrooms amidst the rubble of demolished buildings, waiting for their new school to be built, are absolutely thrilled that Deputy Minister Kiewiet will not be getting a new couch this year.

Sadly, while a laudable sentiment and a very tiny step in the right direction, this Department as a whole, requires a major overhaul. In the 2017/18 financial year, Public Works spent 99% of its budget to only achieve a 55% target. Why?

Part of the reason is chronically outdated White Papers as the only form of guiding legislation for a Department with a R7.8 billion budget. And it will get worse this financial year if we do not provide legislative clarity for the Department. Especially with the newly incorporated Infrastructure mandate from the President.

The Public Works Bill must be finalized as a matter of priority.

In addition, legislation governing the Independent Development Trust must be drafted urgently. This entity is responsible for the implementation of social infrastructure of schools, clinics and courts. Financially mandated with over R4 billion worth of programmes, the IDT is supposed to be self-supporting but is operating at a shockingly huge deficit – R 92 million for the 2018 financial year. Once again, a lack of legislative clarity and mandate have rendered this entity toothless – it competes against other government Departments for contracts and it is also unable to recover monies owed to it, due to a lack of enforcement mechanisms, no real mandate and no legislation to guide it.

Minister, in developing the strategic management plan for this Department, the Department of Transport and Public Works in the Democratic Alliance (DA) - run Western Cape, provides valuable examples of where to begin. Their Infrastructure Framework, which allows for coordinated and strategic infrastructure planning, is one such starting point. By starting with such a Framework, it will be easier to develop legislation to clarify the roles and functions of the entities, avoid duplication of programmes and promote integrated cooperation between organisations.

Then, like the DA led Western Cape, you would develop and reform your department to maximise the strengths and capacities of each entity. Integration of strategic programmes as the next phase of DA-driven reform would then ensure that the entities are working in unison to develop sustainable, high-quality social infrastructure in a transformed built environment with an emphasis on skills transfer, women and youth empowerment, consistent job creation and work opportunities.

None of these outcomes can be achieved without legislative reform.

So, Minister de Lille, unless you and the Department give an undertaking to embark on a programme of legislative reform, the DA cannot support this budget.

I thank you.