



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
MS BARBARA CREECY ON THE OCCASION OF THE 14th SARA
INTERNATIONAL RAIL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION IN
SANDTON CONVENTION CENTRE, SANDTON
ON 26 AUGUST 2025**

Programme Director

President of SARA, Mr Nixon Dlamini

Hon Jacob Hara, Minister of Transport and Public Works from the
Government of the Republic of Kenya

Hon Veikko Nekundi, Minister of Works and Transport from the
Government of the Republic of Namibia

Hon Keogaile Atamelang, Deputy Minister of Transport and Infrastructure
from the Republic of Botswana

Hon Joshua Sacco, Deputy Minister of Transport and Infrastructure from
the Republic of Zimbabwe

HE Wamkile Nene, Secretary General of the African Continental Free
Trade Area (AfCFTA),

Mr Raymond Shoniwa, SARA Executive Director

Mr Hishaam Emeran, PRASA Group CEO

Representatives of Foreign Governments

Permanent Secretaries, Director Generals, Chief Executive Officers

Members of the media, Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet today at a complex time for our individual domestic and continental economies. Recent global developments including import tariffs are disrupting long standing trade and market access agreements. African economies are searching for new export markets on the continent and in the wider world.

In this context the African Continental Free Trade Area takes centre stage and provides important economic opportunities for all of us.

For generations, railways have been the arteries of African trade and mobility — connecting mines to ports, farms to markets, and people to opportunities.

Today, as Africa experiences unprecedented trade disruptions, population growth, and rapid urbanisation, we stand at a defining moment. The choices we make now will determine whether rail becomes the driving force behind Africa's integration and prosperity

The African Integrated Railway Network, emerging from the 2023 Zanzibar Declaration, offers us a continental vision of seamless connections, strong manufacturing capabilities, and a united approach to infrastructure development.

Already we are witnessing important investments in upgrading and expanding rail networks across our continent.

High-speed rail projects, urban commuter expansions, and freight corridor modernisation have the potential to redefine how goods and people move — lowering costs, increasing competitiveness, and connecting landlocked countries to global markets.

Across the continent, we have inspiring examples of Strategic Investments and Policy Reforms which illustrate examples of what is possible, these include:

- The Lobito Corridor in Angola, connecting to Zambia and the DRC;
- The Nacala Corridor in Mozambique and Malawi;
- The Beitbridge Bulawayo Railway in Zimbabwe; and
- TAZARA linking Tanzania and Zambia.

This transformation is not just about building more tracks. It is about creating a modern, interconnected, and efficient African rail system that links our cities, countries, and regions — making borders gateways rather than barriers.

However investing in rail alone is not enough to achieve our objectives. Modern supply chains mean we must integrate rail with ports, roads, and inland logistics hubs. We must also harmonise regulations, standards, and procedures across borders so that goods can move easily within the free market area.

Today at this 14th edition of the SARA Rail Conference and Exhibition we meet under the Theme: *Transporting Africa Forward: Accelerating rail growth to boost mobility and economic opportunity across Africa.*

I thought I would share with you some aspects of the implementation of the national rail reform programme that is underway in South Africa and our country's broad objective of making rail the backbone of our transport system.

To this end, the National Rail Policy of South Africa establishes the principle that rail infrastructure will remain state-owned, while opportunities will exist for third party access in rail operations. The policy emphasises the importance of economic regulation to facilitate equitable access to the rail network and ensures that it is properly managed.

Last week Friday I announced that eleven private sector operators have met the initial application criteria and have been allocated amongst them a total of 41 routes across six corridors, for operating periods of up to ten years.

The Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM) estimates that the new Train Operating Companies (TOCs) will carry an additional 20 million tonnes of freight per annum from the 2026/27 financial year. This will supplement Transnet Freight Rail's (TFR's) forecasted volumes and contribute to Government's target of increasing freight moved by rail to 250 million tons per annum by 2029.

This is a significant step in our rail reform journey and makes open access to freight rail a reality in our country. It will contribute to a more efficient, reliable and sustainable rail system that can promote inclusive growth and ensure job retention and job creation.

Our Third-party access framework is anchored by the Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM), which was established in late 2024

Since the last SARA conference of 2024, TRIM published its First Network Statement together with the Rail Access Tariff on 20th December 2024 for the 2024/25 financial year. This milestone provided the industry with an opportunity to have complete information about the state of the entire rail network in the country.

This included information on network description, infrastructure information, operational rules, access and capacity, security and maintenance issues.

We are on course to publish the Fourth Network Statement for 2026/2027, including the Rail Access Tariff later this year.

The current state of Transnet's rail infrastructure is cause for concern for freight operators and cargo owners alike. The state has limited availability of resources for major refurbishment. This makes private sector investment critical. Earlier this year we concluded a Request for Information process.

Transnet will issue Requests for Proposals later this year and begin the formal procurement process which will bring substantial private sector investment into our rail infrastructure probably through a concessioning model.

It is important to emphasise once again that this process will take place in the context of the network as a whole remaining in state ownership.

To sustain our economy, we cannot afford to wait until the PSPs reach financial close in before launching a programme to rehabilitate Transnet's rail network.

Immediate sources of finance for this work include Transnet's current infrastructure budgets, two applications to National Treasury's Budget facility for infrastructure and a joint funding and collaboration framework which could allow current customers to assist in repairing the network without adding to Transnet's debt.

In South Africa, reforms such as the separation of infrastructure and operations at Transnet, the strengthening of the Railway Safety Regulator, and the expansion of passenger rail through PRASA's revitalised services are setting important examples for the continent.

The White Paper on National Rail Policy, 2022 centralises strategic rail planning at a national level and directs the development of a National Rail Master Plan (NRMP).

The Plan will be a comprehensive, evidence-based framework to guide the transformation of South Africa's rail sector over the next thirty years, which we intend to complete during this financial year.

When implemented, our Master Plan would complement the SADC Regional Rail Master Plan. Going forward we can use both plans to work together as a region we can work together to:

- Assess the state of railway institutions, infrastructure, safety, regulation, and intermodal linkages;
- Build comprehensive data to make projects financially and technically bankable;
- Embed health, gender inclusiveness, job creation, and climate awareness into all projects;
- Evaluate and prioritise railway corridors for investment;

- Define short-, medium-, and long-term investment programmes; and
- Establish clear appraisal procedures and roles for all stakeholders.

This structured approach could serve as a blueprint for continental cooperation, inspiring similar frameworks in other African regions.

Our footprint in international rail development was anchored when South Africa became the 6th State, and the second African state after Gabon, to ratify the Luxembourg Rail Protocol. The ratification of the Protocol is an essential part of the rail open access strategy of Government.

South Africa's ratification of the Protocol supports the development of international financing in the railway sector and is an important step in facilitating financing in the rail industry, which is a key element for social development and economic growth in the whole continent as recognised by the African Union Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In the passenger rail space, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) is restoring routes, introducing modern train sets, and improving safety — proving that passenger rail can be an affordable, reliable, and dignified transport option for millions.

Thus far PRASA has successfully revived 35 out of 40 corridors and sections of service lines, and the agency achieved an unaudited figure of 77 million passenger journeys for the last financial year.

In September we will launch the Request for Information (RFI) for passenger rail, which will initiate the process of determining the appetite for investment in commuter rail.

By recovering our passenger rail capacity we aim to reach the milestone of 600 million annual passenger journeys on the PRASA network, within five years.

As we expand, we must ensure our railways are green, climate-resilient, and sustainable. Electrification, hybrid locomotives, and circular economy practices will help us meet our climate goals.

At the same time, we must invest in our people — training engineers and logistics practitioners, technicians, managers, and innovators who will design and operate the railways of the future. This is about building African skills for African rail solutions.

Colleagues, the theme *Transporting Africa Forward: Accelerating rail growth to boost mobility and economic opportunity across Africa* is more than an aspiration — it is a commitment. We have the tools, the technology, the policy frameworks, and above all, the people to make it happen.

Let us move from discussion to delivery, from vision to action. Together, we can build an African rail network that powers our economies, connects our people, and secures a better future for generations to come.

The Africa we want is within reach — and we will get there together, because together we are better.

I thank you