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For immediate release

RAIL IS THE BACKBONE OF THE GAUTENG PUBLIC TRANSPORT SYSTEM

In the light of recent, reckless and heedless statements made in relation to passenger rail and Gautrain, the MEC for Roads and Transport, Ismail Vadi, cautions that “in a country where costly transport infrastructure development has taken centre stage in the National Development Plan, it will be absolutely absurd to threaten to destroy existing transport and rail infrastructure”.

National Government’s focus has been, amongst others, on fighting poverty and reducing unemployment. Key components in achieving this are firstly, to create transport infrastructure that involves job creation. Another focus and stated government policy is that the preferred mode of transport should be public transport, particularly passenger rail transport.

The Gauteng City Region is an integrated cluster of cities, towns and urban nodes that together make up the economic heartland of South Africa. “The backbone of this economic heartland is rail as a mode of public transport,” reiterates Vadi. The Gauteng Provincial Government is in the process of finalising a 25-year plan for the development and integration of transport – the Integrated Transport Master Plan (ITMP25). A main focus in this master plan is the role that rail plays in keeping the economic heart of South Africa beating. In line with the ITMP25, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa’s (PRASA) Master Plan prioritises Metrorail and also has plans for developing a “super rail corridor”, which includes the Mabopane-Pretoria; the Pretoria-Germiston-Johannesburg, and the Johannesburg-Soweto corridors.

The critical priorities for PRASA over the next three years include the modernisation of the existing passenger railway system and the introduction as well as the implementation of new passenger rail technology, particularly in Gauteng. The modernisation of the signalling and telecommunication systems, rolling stock and train operating systems will lay the foundation for a modern, efficient and sustainable rail transport system in Gauteng.

A major component of the PRASA Rail Corridor Modernisation initiative is the revitalisation of the ageing train fleet. The first new train sets are expected by 2015 and will be deployed on the priority corridors. It also includes the improvement of access to stations and the upgrade of station facilities and amenities. A number of these station upgrades include joint project development with the Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport and local municipalities to create fully integrated, intermodal facilities at stations.

Given the key role that the passenger rail system play and will play in future in providing mobility across the Gauteng City Region, the respect for it needs to be supported by all the residents of Gauteng. "Let us stand and work together towards an effective, efficient and sustainable passenger rail system that works for all, instead of threatening to destroy key public transport infrastructure," says Vadi.

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