

Prasa infrastructure vandalism receives attention

Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) chief executive officer, Zolani Matthews has committed to addressing vandalism and the general state of neglect and maintenance at the agency through various interventions.



Col André Kritzinger via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

These include the appointment of dedicated bid committees to process the capital programme, appointment of panel of contractors who will be on call to ensure quick turnaround and recovery, whilst also strengthening the agency's programme management unit to provide monitoring and oversight.

"The 2019 annual station condition assessment report showed that a total of 66 commuter stations across the country were in a poor condition, whilst the 2021 report reflects an increase of up to 250 stations that are now in a poor state due to escalated levels of theft and vandalism.

"Ninety-five of these stations are in the Gauteng south region, which includes the Soweto corridor. I mentioned the 2019 statistics precisely to highlight the great impact of Covid-19 which contributed immensely towards vandalism and theft of our assets," Matthews said on Monday.

He made these remarks during the oversight visit attended by Minister of Transport Fikile Mbalula at some of the vandalised PRASA stations in and around Johannesburg.

Prasa recovery plan

The chief executive said the work on the recovery plan as announced by the Minister during the Department of Transport's 2021 budget vote has commenced.

"The contractors are on-site now to recover the vandalised substations on the Mabopane corridor. Importantly, these workers will also contribute towards job creation as we will be involving the communities," he said.

In the short term, Prasa Cres (Corporate Real Estate Solutions) will also be sourcing alternative building technologies such as containers to open the stations and service commuters.

"Essentially, we cannot re-introduce our rail service if our stations are not fully operational to enable Prasa to collect the much-needed revenue. We are planning in the next month, to re-introduce more rail services in line with the pronouncement made during the budget speech," said the chief executive officer.

In addition to the current services on the operational lines in Gauteng, the agency will add the Daveyton – Germiston line.

Matthews said the agency has challenges around overhead traction energy, which has severely affected its services as it currently relies on locomotives, which are not ideal.

Infrastructure programme

Prasa has commenced with the infrastructure programme to rehabilitate what has been damaged and vandalised.

"Whilst the production of the new trains at Gibela is progressing well, the current rolling stock will still be in use and to this end, we have recently awarded an ad-hoc maintenance contract to ensure [that] in the short term, we recover trains that have been damaged and vandalised," he said.

The chief executive officer has also established the "Isitimelasabantu" project office to oversee a focused programme on recovery and capex rollout plan to align to the needs of commuters and business.

"We have adopted a corridor-based approach targeting seven lines in Gauteng where we will offer services using electricity power instead of the current diesel service. Prasa's capital programme will be implemented to ensure we address the challenges facing the business," Matthews said.

He said the destruction of assets during the Covid-19 lockdown, which exposed the vulnerability of the network, has brought to the fore new risks that PRASA should manage.

"One of this risk is around security, and I am glad to update the Minister that whilst the challenges remain, we are making strides in reducing the security challenges through a number of measures implemented following the integrated security plan launched last year," Matthews said.

Prasa has recruited an additional 3100 permanent security officials to supplement the current deployment in the security personnel.

Prasa is further working closely with Transnet, Eskom and Telkom on plans to push back the security challenges facing the

businesses.

"We will soon be going to the market to invite contractors to build walls as part of protecting our network and also install with this the CCTV and vandal-proof technologies.

"Prasa's business intelligence, with the help of other law enforcement agencies and the South African Police Services, continue to work around the clock to curb this escalating criminal activity through random and continuous surveillance and monitoring of the scrap dealerships alongside Metrorail operational areas," he said.

According to Matthews, these efforts are bearing positive results as a number of scrap metal dealership premises have been found in possession of Prasa stolen material.

Prasa continues to make gains in the fight against vandalism with a recent major bust of an illicit ring trading in the agency's cables.

"We have successfully made arrests with the help of "tip-offs" from community members," he said.

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