

## **Business Report 02 June 2009**

### **Co-ordination needed to fix potholed local roads**

Speeding is up, but SA Roads Federation says provinces are not coping

June 2, 2009

By Donwald Pressly

The **Financial and Fiscal Commission** has proposed that money earmarked for road construction and repair be closely monitored, while the SA Roads Federation wants a new roads agency to resolve capacity and funding problems hampering road improvements.

Commission chairman Bethuel Setai said that even though spending had expanded, the overall state of the country's roads was declining.

The commission said in a report to Parliament that a comprehensive programme of public sector capital investments was initiated in 2005 under the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for SA. High levels of capital investment had boosted spending on roads.

Road spending would be about 1.8 percent of gross domestic product by 2009/10, compared with about 0.3 percent 10 years ago. Spending had risen from less than R4 billion to R20bn in this time.

"A general decline in the condition of the country's roads has continued," Setai said. "A recent report on road conditions noted that the number of roads categorised as poor and very poor doubled between 1998 and 2008, while the number of roads categorised in 2008 as good and very good was only a third of what obtained a decade earlier."

Malcolm Mitchell, the chief executive of the SA Roads Federation, a non-governmental body, said the decline in roads was mainly at provincial level.

He believed this was because of the plethora of provincial road authorities. For a country with a smaller network than the state of Texas in the US, South Africa had far too many agencies, whereas Texas had just one. This translated into lack of capacity and lack of co-ordination of data, said Mitchell, who is a former transport deputy director-general.

He suggested either that the SA National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral), which maintains national roads, extend its work to provincial roads, or that a separate agency co-ordinate work on all provincial roads.

The commission said: "A well-resourced and technically capable agency has ensured that the national road network remains in good condition, while the focus on social service delivery and lack of dedicated roads bodies at subnational level has lowered the quality of road infrastructure within provinces and municipalities."

Mitchell noted that Sanral was able to fix potholes in 48 hours, an international norm. But some potholes survived for years at provincial level.

Deputy transport minister Jeremy Cronin could not be reached for comment.

The commission said the US, New Zealand, Japan and India earmarked a portion of user charges and taxes to special road funds. The possibility of expanding tolling to high traffic volume routes needed to be explored.