

Weekend Post

Bay recruitment programme proposes to address civil engineering skills crisis

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Rapid Transit system need civil engineering skills, which are lacking in the Department of Roads and Transport.

THERE is a “severe shortage” of technical skills in the provincial departments of roads and transport, especially in the civil engineering field.

The situation is “even more acute within municipal jurisdictions”, according to the **Financial and Fiscal Commission (FFC)**. Nelson Mandela Bay has embarked on a recruitment programme to secure staff with scarce skills, particularly in the engineering field.

In its submission on the division of revenue for 2010/11, the FFC stated few local authorities had dedicated road authorities, lacking the capacity to carry out road management functions. The FFC added that according to South African Institute of Civil Engineers research carried out in 2005, 78 of the 283 municipalities did not have civil engineers and 49 had only one civil technician.

“Although municipalities account for about a third of road sector employees, some 70% of these employees fall into the elementary or semi-skilled category (mainly labourers), while skilled personnel (mainly engineers) make up less than 9% of personnel.”

The FFC said the results of a survey undertaken by national Treasury in 2006 in five provincial Departments of Transport (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, Limpopo

and Northern Cape) revealed:

The technical sectors of provincial departments of transport were understaffed;

The average age of engineers was 50, so most senior engineers would be retiring in the next few years;

The few remaining senior engineers played a managerial role, so departments did not benefit from their technical skills; and

In some cases senior engineers had to do junior level work because of the shortage of available young engineers.

The commission said the lack of critical technical skills had "major implications" for road management functions of second- and third-sphere authorities, adding that very few sub-national authorities had well-developed road management information systems, while little or no studies existed on assessment of road conditions.

It noted that without "such key inputs" many second- and third-sphere authorities had very little quality information "on which to base managerial performance evaluation and needs identification processes, further exacerbating the poor condition of available road network infrastructure".

The FFC said priority should be given to addressing the lack of technical skills in the road management sector of sub-national governments.

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