

Minister talks on Africa's transport sector's full integration

Transport Minister Fikile Mbalula has emphasised the importance of establishing a regional regulatory authority to enforce agreed harmonised standards.



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"With 54 countries in Africa and over 109 international boundaries, and 350 border crossings it is indeed a tall task to coordinate and have uniform standards but a tall ask is not an unachievable matter," the Minister said.

Addressing the African Port and Rail Evolution Conference in Durban on Tuesday, Mbalula said the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is at an advanced stage of establishing the Regional Rail Safety Regulator (RRSR), with the support of the South African Rail Safety Regulator.

"The potential of the transport sector to contribute more towards full integration of the region is constrained by serious operational and infrastructure inefficiencies. We must deal with operational delays and congestion at the border crossings, which add to the inefficiencies of the cross border transport system in general.

"There is an urgent need to mobilise regional resources to modernise our ports so that turnaround times could be improved - there are serious infrastructure backlogs that hinder efficient cross border transportation systems," the Minister said.

The backlogs manifest in the many missing links on continental rail corridors and poor port infrastructure.

"With the investment and maintenance of infrastructure at low levels in Africa, the African Development Bank estimates that the continent has lost approximately 25% in potential economic growth over a period of 20 years.

"It could be argued that the losses are possibly worse when the foregone opportunities for job creation and other multipliers are taken into account," the Minister said.

The African Union has designated South Africa as the manufacturing hub for locomotives thereby underscoring the commitment of African leaders to increase the level of intra-Africa trade.

The Head of State of South Africa was also assigned the responsibility of championing the North-South Corridor (NSC), which is a multi-modal transport corridor, connecting the continent from the north down to the south.

"This is arguably an important intervention which brings to life the vision of our forebears of creating a Trans-African-Highway which comprises a network of transport infrastructure and services from Cape to Cairo.

"Therefore, mobilising private sector funding to deliver on the twin mandates of developing cross-boundary infrastructure and creating sustainable jobs is going to be one of the major tasks of the championing initiative.

"A call for the private sector is to realize Africa's potential and a call for our governments is to seek partnerships with the private sector in a win-win situation placing our people and the environment first," the Minister said.

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