

Have your say on SA's rail policy

JOHANNESBURG: Transport Minister Dipuo Peters has called on members of the public to make a meaningful contribution to the process of formulating the country's National Rail Policy.



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This comes after Cabinet last month approved the release of the Green Paper on National Rail Policy for South Africa for public consultation.

Speaking at the launch of the National Rail Policy in Johannesburg, on Tuesday, Peters said railways in South Africa operated almost more than a century without an overarching Policy framework that guided its development. "We cannot wait till the last coach, wagon or locomotive is off the tracks to make decisions.

"Government had promised to accelerate the roll-out of a massive economic and social infrastructure programme, especially in energy, public transport, ICT and water supply to unlock economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life of our people," she said.

She said the railway line and its railway stations have played a pivotal role in the day-to-day lives of communities especially those in the rural areas. She said apart from the telegraph line, the railway was often the vital link to the outside world.

"Before the Second World War, few people had motor cars or access to any such transport other than the iron horse and

carriages. "The railway station was often the hub of public and business life, a social rendezvous for arriving and departing passengers, and a point of collection and delivery for townsfolk and businessmen," the minister said.

National Development Plan

Peters also referred to the National Development Plan (NDP), saying the plan aims to ensure that all South Africans attain a decent standard of living through the elimination of poverty and reduction of inequality.

"The Department of Transport in fulfilling the dictates of the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 of ensuring policy certainty and frameworks in critical sectors, started a process of developing the National Rail Policy for South Africa," she said.

The Green Paper

The minister explained that a Green Paper is an official government document that tend to be statements not of policy already determined, but of propositions put before the whole nation for discussion.

The department embarked on a process of developing a rail policy in 2010 and as a result has produced the Green Paper. This, according to the department, is the first step towards the formulation of a policy that will address the challenges facing the rail sector.

According to Peters, the Green Paper will create a foundation and framework to stimulate discussion for the development and finalisation of the White Paper on National Rail Policy. The Green Paper proposes evidence-based interventions designed to revitalise South African railways. It also proposes the revitalisation of rail in South Africa through the implementation of strategically focused investment-led policy interventions.

These interventions, according to Peters, will reposition both passenger and freight rail for inherent competitiveness by exploiting rail's genetic technologies to increase axle load, speed, and train length.

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