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## Building better, safer roads

### What are the biggest challenges facing our roads sector?

**PH** First, the lack of work. We are currently hampered by lack of progress by Sanral and the provincial roads departments in awarding contracts for the design, construction and maintenance of roads. Capacity in evaluating and awarding contracts seems to be at the heart of this issue.

Second, skills and capacity shortages are concerning. Covid-19 will also have an impact, affecting both new construction as well as maintenance contracts.

Third, disruptions on construction sites. These include the 'construction mafia', community disruptions, and attacks on contractors, site staff and client bodies.

### South Africa's road network requires significant funding. What are your views on the maintenance backlog and related funding shortfalls?

The country's road network comprises 606 978 km of proclaimed national, provincial and municipal roads, with a replacement value of more than R3 trillion. Preservation of this asset should be a national priority. To neglect it is something South Africa call ill-afford.

Insufficient spending, including on maintenance and upkeep, is leading to a rapidly deteriorating road network, increasing transport costs, and placing time and financial pressure on businesses and citizens. The costs of poor road management and inadequate road financing are borne

primarily by road users through increased vehicle operating costs.

Without maintenance, roads deteriorate to a point where the cost of their restoration is three to five times more than if timely and effective maintenance had taken place.

### Should government be prioritising spending on roads?

Yes. The fuel levy is South Africa's main income from road users, supplemented by vehicle- and user-based charges, such as licence and toll fees. The magnitude of the fuel levy is mainly determined by the revenue requirements for investments, for example, in infrastructure, social policy, etc.

Neglecting to fund our road network will only cost road users, who ultimately pay for poor maintenance because of increased vehicle operating costs. Poor maintenance has significant impacts on our economy, especially in rural areas – where there is a direct cost in terms of lost production (e.g. spoiled produce). In urban areas, road users are also paying in time due to congestion.

Government needs to play a fine balancing act in providing for infrastructure investment and rehabilitation versus other pressing social demands.

### Road safety is a major issue in South Africa. How can we address the problem and what is SARF doing?

SARF has been instrumental in forming a National Road Safety Committee, which comprises engineers from national, provincial and local roads authorities as

well as entities such as the Road Traffic Management Corporation, CSIR, National Department of Transport, Road Traffic Infringement Agency, Road Accident Fund, consulting engineers, as well as suppliers of road furniture, road signs and road markings.

We work with road stakeholders to better maintain road networks, to reduce road safety incidents, and to promote actions like visible policing and increased law enforcement. SARF has also developed several road safety-related courses.

SARF recently joined forces with Mogale City Local Municipality and 3M South Africa to develop a Road Safety Risk Assessment Model. Using this Road Safety Risk Index, we can prioritise schools with high accident risks and measure the impact of the Index. Our work here has been made possible by funding from the Fondation Botnar Child Safety Challenge in Switzerland.

### You recently took on the role of president of SARF. What will your focus be during your term?

SARF has a rich history of working with its members to benefit roads and road users in South Africa. We aspire to positively impact all road users in this country, both economically and socio-economically.

As president of SARF, I will continue what former president Saied Solomons began, which was raising awareness in the public domain, and among ordinary South Africans, about the importance of roads and why it is critical to fund and manage them properly.

This year, SARF celebrates its 70th anniversary and I will work with our current exco and the regions to promote the organisation and attract new members. One specific focus will be on the development of the future of our industry, the SMMEs and QSEs and their associated training needs.

Central to the organisation are SARF's training programmes. Last year, we ran over 50 courses for 1 500 people, upskilling and building capacity across the sector. It is vital that SARF's training continues to meet the industry's technical requirements and demands, especially given the loss of skills from South Africa to more attractive destinations abroad. **3S**

