

MEDIA RELEASE

SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD FEDERATION/SOUTHERN AFRICAN BITUMEN ASSOCIATION

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Road maintenance in SA: challenges, progress and solutions

Thursday 8 April 2021: “South Africa’s road network has a pivotal role to play in the country’s economic recovery but the condition of some of our roads are preventing this. Road users have valid concerns when it comes to the state of SA’s roads, especially in municipalities and provinces. On international road maintenance day today, it is important to recognise challenges around road maintenance but also to acknowledge progress and offer solutions to accelerate the delivery of road maintenance projects.” This is according to Philip Hendricks, President of the [South African Road Federation](#). International road maintenance day is celebrated worldwide on each first working Thursday of April, but this year, it takes place on the 8th of April. Roads are a vital public asset that can deliver a higher economic return on investment than any other single type of infrastructure.

Hendricks says that “Since 1991, there has been a steady decline in the condition of our road network, especially at provincial and municipal levels. The reasons for this range from curtailed budget allocations for roads in the past and shrinking capacity in the public sector, resulting in inefficiencies in delivery.”

Saied Solomons, CEO of the [Southern African Bitumen Association](#), says, “The condition of SA’s road network varies between transport authority and type of road. We have found that since 2017/18, the condition of many provincial roads and gravel roads have worsened and are in a poor to very poor condition. About half the country’s gravel roads are in a poor or very poor condition.”

Hendricks explains that “There are however national programmes that are working. First launched in 2018, the Rural Roads Asset Management Systems grant is helping to ensure effective investment in municipal roads through the development of road asset management systems, the collection of roads data and the prioritisation of projects. The grant covers 44 district municipalities across all provinces. Young professionals are being trained as part of the programme to build road sector management capacity at local government level. Based on its success, R127-million has been set aside for 2021/22.

“As the SA Road Federation, we welcome this investment but to adequately meet the maintenance requirements at local levels, 10 to 20 times more than the current spend is required. In addition, some of the graduates trained under this programme have been unable to be absorbed into the relevant road authorities due to the unavailability of posts,” he says.

“The Provincial Roads Maintenance grant, first introduced in 2011/12, saw 8,7-million square metres of roads re-sealed and 4,165 km of roads re-gravelled in 2017/18. All nine provinces are benefitting. R13-billion is expected to be transferred to the provinces for the 2021/22 financial year. This is another example of the headway that is being made.

“Routine road maintenance projects across Gauteng’s three major metropolitan areas of Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Tshwane are also set to commence with SANRAL recently announcing the appointment of contractors and expected rollout over the next six months.”

Hendricks explains that, “Road authorities are obliged to publish annual reports on the condition of their roads and planned improvements. These reports are publicly available and promote visibility

and accountability. Because we are concerned about the skills and competencies that road maintenance depends on, these reports should also include the human resources capacity and deficits of each authority. It is cheaper to develop skills than to rehabilitate roads beyond repair, and without timely maintenance, roads deteriorate to the point where the cost to restore them is three to five times more than if they had been timeously maintained.

“In 2014, the road maintenance backlog was reported as being R197-billion and recent studies estimate that it is now over R400-billion, but the actual cost of our backlog is currently unknown,” says Hendricks. “Data from the rural and provincial grant programmes is being collated in a central database housed by the National Department of Transport. Once this information is published, the road sector will be able ascertain the full extent of the road maintenance funding requirement. The road sector needs to understand this cost because we will be unable to manage the response if it is not first properly measured.

“We also believe that the data being collated across these two programmes should be used to better consolidate the road network and de-commission roads that are not contributing to economic and social needs,” says Hendricks.

“Ultimately, it is cash-strapped road users, including businesses trying to recover, who are paying the price for poor maintenance through crashes, delays, loss of productivity, missed economic opportunities and vehicle operating costs caused by potholes, cracks, etc. People in need of essential services like health and security are also affected. In rural areas, livelihoods are at stake because of lost production such as spoiled agriculture produce due to bad roads. Poor road maintenance also increases CO² emissions.”

The South African Road Federation runs numerous training programmes on road maintenance. Since 2016, 850 road officials have been trained. “Our mandate as the SA Road Federation is to provide a wide range of continuing professional development programmes to upskill people and keep them abreast of the latest road trends and technologies,” concludes Hendricks.

South Africa boasts the world’s 10th longest road network (750 000 kilometres) and 18th longest paved road network. In 2014, its value was estimated at around R2-trillion.

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The **South African Road Federation (SARF)** is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of the road industry in South Africa through the dissemination of information, the promotion of sound policies and training and skills development for people working across the road and transport sectors. SARF provides accurate information, credible data and reliable commentary on road funding and road safety as part of its goal to promote prosperity in SA through an efficient road network.

The **Southern African Bitumen Association** is a non-profit organization that represents producers and applicators of bituminous products, consulting engineers and educational institutions. Its main activities are in the fields of advancing best practice in Southern Africa in the:

- use and application of bituminous materials
- in worker safety and environmental conservation
- education and training and
- contact with government on the value of road provision and preservation.

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