

SATC sheds light on SA's road maintenance backlogs

The alarming state of South Africa's paved and gravel road maintenance backlogs was revealed in a presentation on the issue during the 38th annual Southern African Transport Conference (SATC), which concluded this week.



Matthew Townshend, Transport Economist

According to Professor Don Ross and Mathew Townshend from the University of Cape Town who presented 'The Road Maintenance Backlog in South Africa', 77.5% of all gravel roads in the country are currently in poor or very poor condition. This translates into a R243.7bn functional maintenance backlog and a R281.2 billion technical needs maintenance backlog.

The research paper the duo presented suggests that R115 billion is required to upgrade high volume gravel roads in South Africa, the majority of which are provincial. It adds that upgrading all gravel roads in South Africa would amount to about R1.7 trillion.

The research paper indicates that the functional backlog for paved roads is approximately R61.2bn and the technical maintenance backlog R135.4 billion. The total technical maintenance backlog in South Africa for paved and gravel roads currently stands at around R416.6bn.

Were South Africa to try and cover these maintenance backlogs in a five-year period, it would take up the entire new economic stimulus plan presented by President Cyril Ramaphosa. Alternatively, it would require a 4% rise in the VAT rate or that an extra R3, per litre, be added to the national fuel levy.



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8 Jul 2019



The research paper showed that the calculated provincial road maintenance backlog, at R150.7bn, is six times the annual provincial expenditure, while the municipal road maintenance backlog at R242.9bn, is eight times the annual municipal expenditure.

The two presenters explained that the magnitude of these backlogs is going to be immensely difficult to eradicate completely, saying the country could possibly address them over the long term given South Africa's current low growth trajectory and emphasis on fiscal consolidation.

Still, a very high degree of prioritisation is required within the road network maintenance space. Alternative road maintenance funding solutions are also being created.

About 11% of the national road network is in poor or very poor condition. There is a fairly low road maintenance backlog within the metros, however, with the majority of the backlog found within provincial networks.

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