

# This is where people are occupying Metrorail's Central Line in Cape Town

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Metrorail's Central Line in Cape Town was [suspended](#) in October 2019. This followed extensive theft and vandalism of cables and signalling equipment from Cape Town Station to Khayelitsha, as well as the branch line to Mitchell's Plain.



Source: [Pexels](#)

Then, during the Covid lockdown in 2020, [Prasa cancelled security contracts](#) on the Central Line. Families began moving onto the rail reserve and constructing shacks on the railway line. Many of them occupied the rail line because they could no longer afford to pay rent for the backyard shacks they had been living in.

In Langa, more than 1,250 households moved onto the line, according to presentations to Parliament's Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa). They have since been moved off the line that continues to Khayelitsha. But this move is considered temporary. Scopa has been told land for the permanent relocation of the Langa households has been identified, and a rezoning application was lodged with the City of Cape Town in August. A fast tracked rezoning process is expected to be finalised by March next year.

But households continue to obstruct the adjacent line which runs parallel to the Khayelitsha line until just after the Philippi station, where it branches south through Mitchell's Plain, terminating at Kapteinsklop train station.

Subsequently, the line was partially reopened in [March this year](#), and currently runs as far as the Nyanga station. But the train does not stop at train stations between Bonteheuwel and Nyanga.

## Relocation dates postponed

Langa resident Sipelele Maneli said he moved onto the railway line in 2021 after he lost his waitering job. Maneli said the restaurant had been struggling to make money so he and some of his colleagues were retrenched. With two school going children, he could no longer afford the rent he was paying for a backyard shack, and built a home on the rails.

He and his children live in a one-room shack between Langa train station and Jakes Gerwel bridge. He is one of more than 1,000 families living on the line that runs to Mitchell's Plain.

Community leader Ntobeko Mbi noted there were meetings with Prasa officials about permanent relocation but there were delays.

"I don't know what is the holdup but I believe the officials are doing all they can to fast track the relocations."



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25 Oct 2023



Mbi said initially they were told they would be moved by the end of 2022. Then it was shifted to mid-2023, and lately they've been told the relocation would take place at the end of 2023.

But the Housing Development Agency (HDA) this month [told](#) Scopa that permanent relocation would only be finalised by February 2025. "We community leaders understand the delays but the people are frustrated," said Mbi.

## Nyanga and Philippi

The provincial head of the Housing Development Agency, Ndumiso Mkhwanazi, told Scopa that there are 3,941 households on the railway line from Philippi to Khayelitsha. But our inspection of the line found it was only occupied from the Govan Mbeki bridge on the border of Philippi and Gugulethu, to shortly before the Philippi train station. There are no households occupying the line from the Philippi station to the end of the line at the Chris Hani station in Khayelitsha.

Of these households, nearly 900 are to be temporarily relocated onto vacant Prasa land at the Stock Road station in Philippi in order to clear the track running to Khayelitsha. The Stock Road station site has been assessed for temporary accommodation and is currently being levelled.

But no temporary relocation has been mentioned for the remaining 3,000 or so households. As far as we can tell these are occupying the marshalling yard adjacent and south of the Metrorail train station in Philippi. Moving these will be a difficult undertaking, both legally and logistically.

“As the current leaders of the rail industry, we must be the generation that makes a difference in the rail environment and collaborate in revitalising rail in our cities and countries.” - Mr. Hishaam Emeran, PRASA GCEO, speaking at the [@SaraRail\\_Org](#) conference [#SARARail pic.twitter.com/lsXmGd9MH2](#)— PRASA Group (@PRASA\_Group) [October 25, 2023](#) ”

## Accusation of lack of consultation

Prasa chief executive officer Hishaam Emeran told Scopa there had also been consultation with residents of ward 34, where households occupied the rail line. This included job opportunities related to the relocation. But community leader Mthokozisi Bulengu told *GroundUp* that Prasa had not been communicating in good faith.

Bulengu said they only hear of plans to move households to the Stock Road station land through the media.

“We feel we are sidelined even though we should be at the forefront of the negotiations.”

Bulengu said the households had no water or ablution facilities. “We relieve ourselves in the nearby bushes and we go to the formal houses nearby to get water. ... The sooner we are moved the better for our health and well-being,” he said.



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Matthew Hirsch 8 Sep 2023



A community leader on the Philippi side of the occupied line, Mzoxolo Bila, said families living on the rail lines felt “lost and hopeless” because the last time anyone spoke to them about being relocated was early this year. He said they were “completely in the dark” about relocation plans.

Nobesuthu Xoloba said she and her two young children moved onto the railway line in 2020 because they could not afford rent as backyarders. Xoloba said living conditions there were terrible and inhumane.

“I am not living on the railway line by choice. Who would want to live like this?” She said the people who moved onto the rail line had lost their income during the Covid lockdown and could not afford to pay rent.

Xoloba said people were willing to be relocated but wanted to be consulted about the process.

Although the line is not occupied beyond Philippi station, the electrical cabling has been stolen, as well as the actual rail line in places. The branch line to Mitchell’s Plain has also been stripped of electrical cabling. Stations beyond Nyanga, including Philippi have also been vandalised and stripped. Prasa spokesperson Andiswa Makanda said work had started to recover the section of the line to Mitchell’s Plain, and was being conducted in phases.

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