

Cape Town proceeds with rail dispute despite President's assurances

By [Matthew Hirsch](#)

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Cyril Ramaphosa has told Parliament rail devolution is on track. The City of Cape Town disagrees.



The City of Cape Town is proceeding with the declaration of an intergovernmental dispute against the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, despite assurances from the President that rail devolution is on track. Archive photo: Ashraf Hendricks

- Cape Town's mayor says attempts to establish a working committee on rail devolution have failed, despite the President's previous commitment to respond to the City's requests.
- Last month, the City gave the President a 31 August deadline for the creation of a joint working committee, failing which, it would declare an intergovernmental dispute against the Passenger Rail Agency of SA.
- The President this week assured Parliament the agreed timeframes for the devolution of rail to capable metros was being adhered to.

- **But the City is proceeding with the declaration of an intergovernmental dispute.**

The City of Cape Town says it still plans to lodge an [intergovernmental dispute](#) on rail devolution despite assurances from President Cyril Ramaphosa in Parliament this week that the timeframes set out in a White Paper were being adhered to.

During a Q&A session with President Ramaphosa on Tuesday, DA leader John Steenhuisen asked whether Ramaphosa would make a policy decision “to support and expedite the devolution of passenger rail to competent metros”.

Steenhuisen references the urgency of it in light of the recent [taxi strike in Cape Town](#) and the cost of living crisis.

In response, Ramaphosa said the Department of Transport had undertaken consultations with key stakeholders, including all provincial departments responsible for transport, transport authorities, National Treasury, affected metros, the South African Local Government Association, the Gautrain, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa), Transnet, the Railway Safety Regulator, commuter forums in all the regions, unions in the railway environment, and business chambers in the affected provinces.

Ramaphosa said the White Paper on National Rail Policy was approved by Cabinet in March 2022, and it specifies certain implementation priorities and timeframes in the devolution of passenger rail.

“A National Steering Committee has been established to guide all major deliverables of the project. The [Department of Transport](#) is confident that it is on course to deliver on the 2024 timeframe approved by Cabinet in the White Paper on National Rail Policy,” Ramaphosa told Parliament.

However, Minister of Transport Sindisiwe Chikunga denied the City’s request for devolution of rail as recently as May. “For now we are not in the process of devolving railway services. That is why Prasa is busy building railway services in the Western Cape,” Chikunga said at the time.

Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis said the City was in the process of briefing lawyers in the declaration of an intergovernmental dispute on the matter.

“We have been unable to secure a working committee on devolution despite President Ramaphosa previously committing to respond to our requests. We have made this simple request to both previous and current transport ministers, and most recently to the President on 16 June, but to no avail,” said Hill-Lewis.

He said he was “taken aback” by the President’s claim of broad consultations on a national rail devolution strategy taking place.

“As a leading city preparing to take over passenger rail, we are completely in the dark about these alleged consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including transport authorities, of which we are one,” he said.

He said in light of the recent fuel increase, Cape Town needed working trains

According to the City’s latest data, only 2% of commuters currently use the rail network on a regular basis. The City’s ongoing Rail Feasibility Study has so far determined a functional rail system will sustain more than 51,000 jobs and add R11bn to the local economy each year.

“For these reasons, we are now briefing our lawyers to launch an intergovernmental dispute mediation process. Under section 42 of the Intergovernmental Framework Relations Act, a mediation committee will need to be ‘promptly’ convened to set the terms of the dispute,” he said.

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