

Transport needs real action not lip service

Chair,

Once again the Minister, and the Deputy Minister in particular, spent a considerable time with the Portfolio Committee during this budget process. My experience tells me that this is a rare occurrence and the Democratic Alliance therefore appreciates your presence during our deliberations.

However, it appears that this is where it ends. Daily, one encounters transport-related problems and the Minister and her deputy are nowhere to be found.

E-tolls

The e-Tolling system is arguably one of the biggest transport issues presently on the lips of South Africans which the public continues to almost unanimously reject.

Despite Sanral's massive multi-million rand marketing spend throughout 2014, we see that the scheme's compliance levels peaked at around only 45% in June 2014. This is confirmed by statements made by the Minister in Parliament. This translated to R120 million per month, confirmed by Sanral in a media statement. This was well short of their original target of R250 million per month.

In July 2014, Sanral and the NPA had indicated their intention to begin prosecuting e-toll defaulters, however, Minister Peters wisely instructed Sanral to halt such plans, because of massive billing problems and chaos in the system, and maybe also due to possible anticipated wide-scale negative public reaction.

During the Gauteng E-Toll Panel hearings between September and November 2014, virtually all business and civil society entities denounced the e-toll scheme and blamed its existence for the high negative impact on the socio-economic conditions in the region.

On 4 November, Sanral did an about turn and decided to engage with Makhura's e-toll Advisory Panel. This resulted in a series of blunders heightening public anger, particularly Minister Dipuo Peters' comment that a fuel levy increase of R3.65 would be required to fund the GFIP (Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project).

This intensified when Dr. Roelof Botha announced that the poor should "shut up" and remain out of the e-toll debate.

Later in November 2014, during an inquest into a fatal crash collision on the M1, the State subpoenaed electronic data from Sanral recorded by the e-toll system's gantry cameras. The information supplied by Sanral was grossly inaccurate and proved to be "inconsistent and unreliable".

The absence of Sanral's ability to enforce the e-toll policy and the growing public anger has reduced the scheme's monthly e-toll revenue collections to around R60 million by the end of February 2015, estimated to be less than 23% of users paying for the use of the freeways.

But wait, it doesn't stop there! Sanral has been embroiled in other cases which point to questionable conduct of public engagement programs. The one is with the Amadiba community on the Wild Coast N2 Toll Road plan where we understand that Sanral's CEO, Nazir Alli's affidavit that seeks to challenge Attorney Cormac Cullinan's representation of the community, contain allegedly false statements. If this is indeed true, this could be seriously damaging for Mr. Alli's reputation and the image of Sanral

The other is regarding SANRAL's Western Cape Winelands freeway Toll plan. The Supreme Court's ruling on 30 March 2015 asks serious questions around Sanral's lack of transparency relating to their tolling model, the costs of the project and tenders awarded to the "preferred bidder" or appointed concessionaire.

When one considers all this, there must surely be enough evidence to suggest that something is amiss with the leadership and performance of this State Owned Entity.

Rail

It is clear that although government is saying the correct thing – that rail is the backbone of public transport – its actions contradict this. Just like last year, the largest amount in the budget is still allocated to roads infrastructure. Rail continues to be treated as a side issue.

Road Safety

And again I repeat myself; I bring up one of the Minister's other monumental failures: her inability to stem the tide of deaths on our roads. A prime example was the cancellation by the Minister of the 2014 Road Safety Summit on very short notice to avoid being embarrassed because the recommendations that emanated from the 2013 Summit had not been implemented.

On 14 March, I wrote the Minister an open letter about this subject. I pointed out to her that she should take heed of Albert Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again

and expecting different results. Indeed, there is little semblance of a road safety “strategy” as we are witnessing minimal positive results year after year.

Besides not having the plain courtesy of an acknowledgement of my letter or at the very least taking up some of my internationally proven suggestions, at a recent Portfolio Committee meeting the Minister chose to chastise me for daring to write to her!

Rebuke me as much as you want Minister, the reality is that South Africa last year was ranked 177th out of 182 countries studied for road fatalities. These fatalities result in a huge socio-economic cost, estimated at R306 billion per annum. We would be the first to support and congratulate you when we see more results and less rhetoric.

Deal with the overlapping functions within the RTIA, and the RTMC, and Provinces, and with the fact that we do not have anyone collecting data. When only 17% of fines in South Africa are paid one can safely say that this doesn't even cover the cost of having enforcement!

Minister, do something! Anything to reduce deaths on our roads.

We as the DA are here to make transport and its potential to our economic growth work. We need to become single minded in everything we do so that this can become a reality.

I thank you.