**TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE TAKES ANOTHER LOOK AT RABS BILL
PARTICIPATE IN PARLIAMENT

The Portfolio Committee on Transport has voiced reservations about the need for the Road Accident Benefit Scheme (RABS), as well as its affordability. The committee heard on Tuesday that the RABS Bill has lapsed and needs to be retabled. The fifth parliamentary administration had passed the Bill.

Committee member Mr Chris Hunsinger, welcomed the second opportunity to be able to deal with the Bill and said the Department needed to rethink its position. “In 2002, when many countries followed a no-fault system, it was fashionable to do so, but they have now reverted to a fault system. A lot has changed, and we need to look at the objectives of the Bill,” he said.

Even if the committee approved RABS in its current form, the country could not afford a dual system. “We need a bail-out to clean the books within the Road Accident Fund. RABS never passed the financial scrutiny. It never passed the test of the previous committee. RABS failed the public participation process,” Mr Hunsinger said.

Committee member Mr Lawrence McDonald agreed with Mr Hunsinger, saying that all the attention was directed at Eskom, even though the RAF is even more indebted. “We already have an Act. We do not need another bill we cannot afford. The country cannot afford this Bill.” The RABS Bill should return to the committee for thorough engagement, he said.

The RABS Bill is intended to provide a social security scheme for victims of road accidents, where benefits are adjudicated on a no-fault basis. At today’s meeting, the Department of Transport detailed the process the Bill went through, including the public participation processes, which is said was adequate. The scheme is meant to cut out court processes that benefited lawyers.

“When you do not have to go to court to prove guilt, this is where they [lawyers] are losing money. They have formed an opposition,” said the department’s Deputy Director-General of Legal Mr Chris Hlabisa. He advised the committee to look into the work of the previous committee. “We want to focus on the groups who submitted to the public hearings, and will come and brief the committee next week.”

Committee member Mr Pieter Mey said the RAF owed R471 billion to the taxpayer and should be done away with. “We must replace the scheme with legislation, and probably compel motor vehicle owners to take out third party insurance,” Mr Mey said.

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