**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:**

**QUESTION NUMBER: 2083**

**Mr C D Matsepe (DA) to ask the Minister of Transport:**

(1) Whether, with regard to the passenger rail service provided by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa between Buffalo City/East London, Butterworth and Umtata, it is envisaged that the rail line will be upgraded to provide a regional passenger rail service that would operate on improved timetables, instead of the current slow and unreliable service on the specified route; if not, why not; if so, on what date(s) will such improvements be implemented;

(2) whether it is envisaged that a proper rail service will be implemented on this whole route instead of using buses for certain sections of the route; if not, why not;

(3) will the Government provide budgetary funds towards the upgrading of the specified rail line, as the service is entirely devoted to serving the rural poor?

**NW2237E**

**REPLY :**

1. A rail service between East London and Mthatha, known as the Kei Rail service, was provided in the past. The service has been stopped as it was unsustainable. The patronage was very low for a rail service and the travel time exceedingly long due to the terrain and rail geometry. The journey by rail was approximately 12 hours as compared to 3 hours by road.

Subsequently, in 2013 The Eastern Cape Department of Transport further investigated the feasibility of the Kei Rail service and confirmed that in its current state it was not economically viable as a stand alone passenger service. Other road based public transport modes were found to be more economically viable. The railway line is currently owned by Transnet and the provision of a passenger rail service for socio-economic reasons was always considered a possibility on the basis of having a sustainable freight service to offset the costs. Unfortunately, sustainbale freight operations on this corridor has not yet materialised.

There are no plans at this point in time to reintroduce the service.

1. See above
2. Current studies undertaken suggest little justification for investment at this point in time.