

## **Damning Report: Civil Engineers Warn Public Works at Risk**

SA's professional association of civil engineers has issued a damning report on state-run infrastructure, saying it is not coping with demand and that it is likely that the public will be subjected to severe inconvenience and danger unless prompt action is taken. The South African Institute of Civil Engineers (SAICE) has found that, with a few notable exceptions, every segment of the work of the state is bedevilled by poor planning, a lack of skill and capacity, corruption, neglect and poor maintenance.

It meant, said the institute, that the infrastructure necessary to protect and enhance the health and safety of citizens was compromised and that they were in large part denied social mobility and access to economic opportunity. "Efficient water and sanitation systems, for example, underpin modern increases in life expectancy," and "infrastructure is key to inclusive growth, as it facilitates broader participation in the economy", according to the report.

The institute's greatest concern, however, was the lack of maintenance of vital installations. It said this had been the most serious and persistent problem encountered in all three (2006 and 2011 previously) of its infrastructure reports to date. It blames multiple causes, but highlights inconsistent and deficient political leadership, planning capability and technical capacity as leading causes. The report was forwarded to the Department of Economic Development on Friday, but by Sunday morning Business Day had not received a response to its request for comment.

Treasury figures show that the state has spent more than R2.5-trillion on infrastructure over the past 20 years, or an annual average of 6% of GDP. But the institute observes that the country's economic slowdown has necessitated fiscal consolidation and a cut on infrastructure spending as a percentage of GDP. In the 2017 budget review, the Treasury's director-general said that the balance sheets of several state entities with extensive responsibilities for infrastructure were "now stretched to their limits", with government guarantees to them amounting to R477.7bn, or 11.5% of GDP.

On a scale of A to E, with A being "world class" and E "unfit for purpose", the report awards SA an overall D+, which rates the country's infrastructure as marginally better than being at risk of failure. Only one infrastructure project, the Gautrain, has received an A rating, while none was rated E.

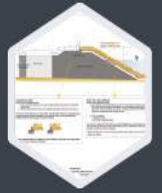
Political scientist and water expert Anthony Turton said the report reflected state failure and the government's inability to self-correct. "There is total failure in many deep rural areas, where local government is ... an employment vehicle for loyal cadres of the ruling party. "The ratings agency downgrade means SOE's are unable to raise capital on the bond market. Bail-outs of SAA and Eskom have so depleted fiscal resources that the government ... is now faced with debt liabilities of such a magnitude, that even under astute management, it would take years to navigate. "We need credible specialists to work with the government, recognising that healthy government is good for all members of society, other than criminals that thrive on chaos."

Sources: *Business Day*, 02 Oct 2017

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