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Funding

A train and trucks moving cargo to and from the port of Walvis Bay. Photo Otis Finck

# Effective rail infrastructure a must

The ailing state of the national rail infrastructure is cause for concern, says a communications graduate.



Namibia is fortunate to have a relatively developed transport infrastructure such as modern ports and a well-developed and internationally acclaimed road network.

However, the ailing state of the national rail infrastructure is cause for concern, says Daniel Likius in a research paper titled "Effective transport/railway as a catalyst for Namibia's economic development".

According to the communications graduate, it is essential that Namibia make the most of its transport infrastructure in order to become a prosperous and industrialised nation.

Namibia's ambition of becoming a logistics and distribution hub by 2030 thus hinges on a significant amount of investment required in all four modes of transport infrastructure, namely road, rail, maritime and aviation.

"Transport and Logistics are essential for trade, industrialization, socio-economic development and regional integration and thus remains a key developmental priority. The onus is thus upon Government to initiate and incubate the process of ensuring that the transport infrastructure, rail infrastructure in particular, is well-maintained and at least up to SADC standard," Likius says.

### Skills transfer

He lists the lack of adequate funding for development of transport infrastructure, inadequate skills and an imbalance between the development and preservation of infrastructure as factors which

hampers the sustainability of the sector.

"The transfer of technical skills is taking place at a slow pace while a shift of transporting heavy bulk from rail to road has put immense pressure on the structural integrity of the road infrastructure," he says.

According to Likius, the railway sub-sector is characterised by dilapidated infrastructure, aged and obsolete locomotives and rolling stock, while the maritime sub-sector suffers from a weak institutional and legislative framework.

"Despite boasting well-developed road infrastructure, some weaknesses are emerging. The ageing rail network if not addressed with urgency, could become a bottleneck for continued growth and development in Namibia's quest to become a logistics hub."

He highlights that apart from the urgency and safety considerations of maintaining developed

rail infrastructure, it also presents a solid business case.

"Modern, reliable transport infrastructure is critical for high and sustained economic growth. Without it, almost everything in the economic value chain tends to be slower, less reliable and more expensive than is necessary. A well-functioning transport system also contributes to the ease of doing business in the country."

Likius points out the development of transport infrastructure has always been prioritized in all previous National Development Plans, while the audacious goal of becoming a logistics and distribution hub was only adopted in NDP4.

It was during NDP4 the expansion of the Port

of Walvis Bay that was almost running at full capacity was kick-started.

Equally, significant progress had been made under NDP4 with respect to road infrastructure, and the upgrade of security-related infrastructure at our airports.

### 'Less progress'

However, he emphasises much less progress was made with regard to the upgrade of the rail infrastructure of the country.

"Certain sections of the rail infrastructure are in urgent need of repair or replacement. The lack of rail upgrades may also have negative consequences on the significant investment at the Port of Walvis Bay with major shipping lines having indicated that a function-

ing rail system would be a prerequisite for them to utilise the Port of Walvis Bay."

He adds that mines operating along the Walvis Bay-Tsumeb railway line stretch have also indicated their preference to transport their products via rail as opposed to road.

"Transporting via road is deemed more expensive and less safe. The current over-reliance of cargo transportation on road infrastructure creates damage that is very costly to maintain and also negatively affects road safety. Traffic congestion is not only prevalent on some national roads, but also in more densely populated urban centres, in particular in the capital Windhoek, as well as between

places like Windhoek and Rehoboth, Windhoek and Okahandja, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, and Omuthiya and Ondangwa."

Likius also welcomed moves to expedite the implementation of the Africa Integrated High-Speed Railway Network (AIHSRN) - an integrated, cross-border, high-speed railway network for the African continent.

"The construction of the Walvis Bay-Windhoek-Gaborone-Pretoria-Johannesburg railway line [Trans Kalahari Railway] which would connect landlocked Botswana to the Namibian coast for example, will unlock the value of coal mining in Botswana as well as power generation in the region," he says.

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