

No delay in implementing e-tolls

There is no chance that the implementation of the e-tolling system on Gauteng's main highways will be delayed. The South African National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral) CEO Nazir Alli, who was briefing media on Thursday, said that the system would still kick off on 30 April, despite the opposition from motorists, business, unions and a pending court challenge.



He said that the implementation date could not be delayed as it would result in additional cost, adding that the number of registered motorists has increased to 500 000.

Last week, the agency gazetted that motorists who do not register for e-tags would pay more than those who do not have e-tags. They will be charged R1.74/km.

Alli said there was no way around this, and that Sanral was implementing government policy, where decisions on the project would have to be taken at that level.

He said it would be a criminal offence for any motorist to use the toll roads and not pay the tariffs.

"Under the law, it's a criminal offence not to pay toll fees while using the road." He said drivers could not pick and choose which laws to obey.

No Sanral police

However, Alli dismissed media reports that there would be Sanral police serving unregistered motorists with tickets. He said as Sanral, they did not have the power to arrest anyone nor to impound anyone's vehicles. Instead, he said, they would use the current law enforcement agencies to warn any motorists.

Alli said the issue of tolling the Gauteng roads did not crop up recently, but had been in the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project plan since 2007 when the project was introduced. The matter was approved by Cabinet. Sanral also had to get permission from all local authorities and public consultations where held, and this happened long before construction started, Alli explained.

He said they had documents that revealed that extensive consultation on the project was undertaken within government, at Nedlac and with the public, where presentations were made regarding the project when it was announced.

Responding to allegations that government was pushing ahead with the system despite opposition, because the Public Investment Cooperation (PIC) had acquired bonds in Sanral, Alli said this was not their motivation.

He emphasised that the PIC does not buy Sanral issued bonds only. "It invests in other state-owned entities, which have a mandate to bring about development in the country."

The PIC is wholly-owned by government and manages investment funds on behalf of public sector entities. Among its clients is the Government Employees Pension Fund.

By rededicating the fuel tax solely to roads?

Alli said the question South Africans should be asking was how the country was going to fund the lagging infrastructure and transport system. He said the e-tolling system worked and provided at least one solution to the country's fiscal and infrastructure development and environmental challenges.

Giving stats, he said, out the 606 000 km of public roads in the country, 3120km are tolled. There was a R149bn backlog on maintenance of the country's roads.

He said the most fundamental contribution of the e-tolling system had been job creation, as at least 20 000 jobs were created in the construction phase of the project.

Now the project has created 1200 permanent jobs in toll revenue collection and other areas.

Also speaking at the briefing, Cabinet spokesperson Jimmy Manyi said government had done a lot to accommodate the public, especially the poor in that taxis and buses were excluded from paying the tolls and the middle class had also been considered because there is a R550 cap for regular road users.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>