

# Roads set to boost intra-regional trade in Africa

The initial free trade agreement between 26 African countries was recently signed in Uganda. Transport infrastructure - road, rail, shipping, and air cargo - will be a vital ingredient in this agreement.



Photo by Seb Creativo via Unsplash

The state of roads in Africa are a priority. The global roads body, PIARC, is presently focusing on African highway networks as well as updating design standards for rural roads. These will be vital arteries in boosting intra-regional trade among the member countries, which have a combined population of 625 million and a total GDP of \$1.6 trillion.

Sanral plays an important role in the World Road Association, a non-profit organisation established in 1909 as the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses (PIARC). It brings together governments, regional authorities, collective members and individual representatives from 122-member countries; with the aim of promoting international cooperation on issues related to roads and road transport.

Sanral, a PIARC member for the past 18 years, has a strong presence in the various working structures of the association. At the helm of the South African delegation is Sanral chief executive officer Skhumbuzo Macozoma. He is also a member of the PIARC Council which is responsible for governance matters. Sanral manager for planning, toll and transport, Alex van Niekerk, is also a member and was elected to PIARC's executive committee earlier this year.



## East Africa containerised trade volumes grow 1% Q1 2017

11 Jul 2017



Van Niekerk explains that the executive committee is responsible for the administration of the association in accordance with policies approved by the council. It is supported by three commissions (strategic planning, finance and communication) and the general secretariat, and it also actions recommendations by an advisory group on emerging issues.

“Sanral’s participation on PIARC conferences and technical forums also enhances the development of the road sector in South Africa.

“For instance, we are exposed to global industry best practices which, in turn, inform our adjustments to South African Design Standards related to the road sector. In specialised areas like bridges and tunnels, our PIARC experience does not only enhance the existing knowledge in South Africa but also contributes to the growth of the private sector through improved design standards, design principles, and construction processes,” he explains.

Van Niekerk adds: “The work of the association is guided by a four-year strategic plan which is aligned to the needs of member countries.”

## Five strategic themes

For the 2016-2019 cycle, PIARC has packaged its activities and research under five strategic themes: management and finance, access and mobility, safety, infrastructure, as well as climate change, environment and disasters.

One of the task forces focusses on finance, under the management and finance theme and is currently at work on identifying, reviewing, and evaluating alternative, available road funding and financing models which include tolling, public-private-partnerships, use of credit assistance tools and bonds.

“This work is particularly significant considering funding sources have not always kept pace with road investment needs,” Van Niekerk says.

In terms of PIARC’s focus on finding solutions for Africa, the African Regional Task Force is addressing two topics in this current four-year cycle: design standards for the African Highway Network and updating design standards for rural roads.

## "Road Tunnels in Low and Medium Income Countries"

This year, Sanral welcomes delegates attending the seminar in October entitled: *Road Tunnels in Low and Medium Income Countries* as part of its road tunnel operations.

Contributing scarce skills necessary to grow South Africa’s knowledge economy, the seminar welcomes speakers covering a wide range of road tunnel operation subjects from safety design and operations of tunnels, sustainable funding for safe tunnels and tunnel construction choices.



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The task force’s technical visit and case studies will cover The Huguenot Tunnel Project which constitutes a major transportation link between the coastal plains of the Western Cape and the interior and is one of the most strategic

infrastructure assets of the National Road Network in South Africa.

The Preferential Trade agreement is essentially a compact between the Southern African Development Community, the East African Community and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. Its aim is to boost intra-African trade, which is presently very low compared to other world regions.

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