

Remember rationale behind GFIP - Motlanthe

JOHANNESBURG: While government is prepared to listen to concerns, it is important not to lose sight of the rationale behind the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project (GFIP), which among other things is aimed at reducing congestion on the province's roads, says Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe.

In his opening address at the first of a series of stakeholder engagements on the project, the deputy president said that the project was aimed at reducing congestion on Gauteng's roads which had a negative effect on the country's economy. He added that this congestion was in the smallest province in the country.

"As we discuss this project and consider the various suggestions on the funding model, it is necessary that we remind ourselves of the rationale for this project," he said on Friday, 14 June 2012.

The consultations involved members from Business Unity South Africa (Busa) and members of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, among others. Cabinet ministers including Economic Development Minister Ebrahim Patel and Deputy Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene as well as newly appointed Transport Minister Ben Martins were also in attendance.

The North Gauteng High Court earlier this year halted the implementation of the e-tolls system which was supposed to go live on 30 April. Following the judgment, government established an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC), which is chaired by the Deputy President, to look into all matters related to the e-tolls system. The IMC resolved to hold further consultations on the matter with stakeholders.

Motlanthe said that government understood Busa's interest in the matter as it represented business.

"We have taken note of the comments made by the public and various organisations and express our appreciation for various views and solutions offered," he added.

The key question that needed answering was how to reduce congestion and make road transit more efficient.

Government had come to the conclusion that the user-pay model was the most equitable. "Let us not lose sight of the fact that in the end our highways must be decongested," he added.

Additionally, the Department of Transport was working together with the Gauteng Provincial Government and municipalities to ensure that the public transport system in the province was reliable and efficient.

In her opening remarks, Busa Vice President Advocate Brenda Madumise said business was pleased with the top-level engagement between business and government, but added that a lack of trust between government and business was of

concern.

"In South Africa the levels of trust are low. This issue of a lack of trust within South Africa particularly between government and business is one that has been raised over the past decades. It is an issue that persists," she said.

However, business is aware of challenges faced by the country and it was necessary for government and business to work together to address these challenges.

"Business feels that more could still be done to collaborate with the public sector, this is especially in terms of infrastructure development through public-private partnerships," said Madumise.

Business has welcomed the release of the National Development Plan (NDP) as a long term plan for South Africa.

"Business welcomes the call to develop a constructive partnership model with government. Business remains willing and ready to assist wherever possible," she added.

The stakeholder engagement process of the IMC, which kicked off today will include engagement with the Road Freight & Care Hire Associations and the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance (OUTA).

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