

Sanral briefs ANC on e-toll issue ahead of election

By [Nicky Smith](#) 10 Jan 2014

Toll roads chief Nazir Alli has briefed the top leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) on the highly divisive e-toll system, which is set to be a burning issue in the run-up to elections later this year.



Sanral chief, Nazir Alli has briefed the ANC's NEC on progress with e-tolls, saying that he doesn't believe tolls will be an election issue in the run-up to national elections. Image: Sanral

Alli, chief executive of the South African National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral), said he had briefed the ANC's national executive committee (NEC) on the work done since tolling started on 3 December. He warned that the financial health of other state-owned entities was interlinked with the fortunes of Sanral.

Widespread public opposition, as well as court challenges, led to a more than two-year delay in implementing tolling, with credit ratings agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's cutting Sanral's debt to one level above junk status.

The opposition Democratic Alliance has claimed e-tolls is a key election issue and is likely to be central to its bid to win Gauteng from the ANC.

Ahead of the meeting, ANC communication subcommittee chairwoman Lindiwe Zulu said, however, that issues such as e-tolls were not "campaign issues". "We know people will continue to raise those issues. It doesn't stop us from explaining those issues," she said.

Alli said he did not think that e-tolls would be a big election issue.

"Tolls not an election issue in Gauteng"

"I don't think it (e-tolls) was a major concern. Government just wanted to hear from horse's mouth so to speak; to hear it from our minister and it is right that we account for what we are doing," he said.

"They wanted to know about the whole e-toll package and we have given them sufficient detail. There is a better understanding of how the system works and an understanding of what the links are if Sanral defaults on any of its programmes with other state-owned entities."



Sanral says it has sold more than 960,00 e-tags so far, a figure disputed by opponents. Image: [Aarto Facts](#)

The ANC has been holding a special meeting of its NEC in Mbombela to finalise its election manifesto and its January anniversary statement, to be presented by President Jacob Zuma on Saturday (11 January).

Alli dismissed suggestions from the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance (Outa) that Sanral had lied about the number of e-tags and e-toll accounts that have been registered. Last month Outa said Sanral had "fabricated" the number of e-tags in circulation.

"It would be downright stupid of us to lie about this," Alli said. "The auditor-general's office would begin its audit this month ahead of the financial year-end on 31 March and we will have to provide proof of the number of tags registered," he said.

Outa said it had received hundreds of complaints from motorists over demands for payment for using toll roads from Sanral. Some of these complaints were that people who did not live in Gauteng, were too young to drive or had not been on the toll freeways at all had received demands for payment.

Alli said Sanral was willing to fix problems and misunderstandings with the system and road users. So far only 1% of the problems reported related to incorrect user information, which he said was low for a system this large and this new.

Sanral would decide by the end of this month or in the first week of next month about returning to the bond market. The agency has not been able to find any buyers for its debt since September 2011 - its first failed auction - because of uncertainty over the tolling programme.

Alli said he would like to go on a road show in March to gauge investor appetite and hoped to start issuing bonds again in April. Sanral would have to share financial information with potential investors on how well the system was doing.

Outa chairman Wayne Duvenage said this week that between 20% and 25% of vehicles on the highways were carrying e-tags.

Duvenage said this was too low for the tolling programme to be a success adding that compliance had to be as high as 90 to succeed.