

Eskom to spend R9.79bl on road-to-rail move

Speaking at the CoalTrans Southern Africa conference held in Johannesburg recently, Kiren Maharaj, Eskom's divisional executive for primary energy said that Eskom has been moving some 30 million or so tonnes of coal a year to its power stations by road, ESI Africa reports.



"While conveyor carried coal is the ideal," Maharaj said, "rail [is] cheaper [and it] eliminates other negative effects in terms of road safety hazards and wear and tear on the roads. Road transport won't be sustainable."

Eskom dominates the South African domestic steam coal market. Even though the utility aspires to reduce its dependence on coal fired technology from 90% to about 65%, it will remain the country's largest buyer of domestic coal for a long time to come. Eskom's R9.79 billion investment in rail infrastructure will result in 1 km of new rail in Mpumalanga and a reliable rail haulage capacity of 32 million tonnes by 2018, up from 8.8 million tonnes today, which will remove 2,500 daily road truck trips for coal delivery.

As part of Eskom's future greening plans, ESI Africa says, biomass for co-firing and the use of limestone flue gas desulphurisation will need to be transported. This would have to be done by road until a rail ready solution was in place.

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