

Passenger train upgrades for Prasa

Plans for a makeover of South African trains that include installing air conditioning systems, security cameras and bigger seats for all passengers were unveiled by the Passenger Rail Agency of SA (Prasa) on Tuesday (11 December).



The state-of-the-art blue and silver trains would become a reality by 2015, the company said in Johannesburg.

Chief executive Lucky Montana said the current fleet would be replaced and all trains, commuter and long distance, would boast high level security, bigger seats, a new shape and better communication and technology.

"These trains will bring higher levels of comfort for passengers with doors opening and closing automatically. People who try and stop the doors will get hurt," he said, emphasising that there be no more hanging from trains or train-surfing.

"The trains will have air conditioners and CCTVs to monitor passenger behaviour. So those who burn trains or commit acts of vandalism will be caught on camera and prosecuted. Each train will have a route map, visual verbal descriptions of the route and on-board communication systems," he said.

Montana said the long-distance trains would have WiFi capabilities.

A signalling facility would ensure that the trains braked automatically to prevent drivers from travelling too fast. They would also brake automatically if two trains were on the same track or if level crossings were not closed.

Montana said the trains would be designed for people with disabilities and special needs, and would include wheelchair facilities.

With 80% more capacity, Montana said it was hoped over-crowding would be a thing of the past in commuter trains.

The rolling stock fleet renewal programme means the new trains will be manufactured and assembled in South Africa.

"The current fleet has served the country well but they have now reached the end of their line," he added.

The upgrades were not limited to the trains. Stations would be revamped and electricity sub-stations would be overhauled to ensure there was reliable electricity supply on the railways.

During peak hours the capacity would be increased and trains would be available every three to five minutes.

from 2015.

With an average age of 39 years for the current 4638 coaches operating in Gauteng, Durban, Western Cape and the Eastern Cape, Montana said the upgrade was imperative.

"It was a mistake for South Africa not to invest in its railway network for the past 33 years," he said.

"We are paying the price for that lack of investment."

About 90% of the trains were purchased in the 1950s, although the last purchase was made in 1986.

With a fleet this old, the technology was also dated and Prasa said the systems technology of all trains would be replaced to ensure safety.

Montana said that despite the upgrades to the trains and the infrastructure, there would be no significant fare increases for commuters.

"We are not looking at substantially increasing fares in the next five years although there will be adjustments to cover inflation," he said.

Production of the trains are set to start in 2014 after Prasa signed a US\$5.8bn contract with French company Alstom for the trains.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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