

Prasa promises full service on Cape Town's Northern Line by December

By [Tariro Washinyira](#)

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"Our people have suffered enough since trains have stopped working," says unionist.



Regional manager of Prasa Moseli Nsiki (left) and Group CEO Hishaam Emeran conducted an oversight visit on Cape Town's Northern Line on Wednesday. Photo: Tariro Washinyira

- Trains would run all the way from Cape Town to Muldersvlei and Strand by the end of the year, Prasa CEO Hishaam Emeran promised on Wednesday.
- The trains on those parts of the Northern Line have not been running since 2019.
- Though passenger trips on Cape Town's lines had risen 200% since the beginning of the year, "we are nowhere near where we should be," he said.

The full train service on Cape Town's Northern Line will be restored by the end of the year, the Passenger Rail Agency of SA (Prasa) promised on Wednesday.

CEO Hishaam Emeran took public servants, union representatives and media on a visit from Cape Town to Eerste River where the line branches to Muldersvlei and Strand. Trains on the Northern Line to Strand, Stellenbosch and Muldersvlei were last operational in 2019.

He said the line would be open in November. "We want this line to be operational by the end of the year," he said.

In March 2022 Metrorail [resumed train services](#) on the Northern Line from Bellville to Cape Town and a partial service was [introduced](#) between Eerste River and Bellville in January 2023. Metrorail said then that there had been significant damage to the Northern Line due to vandalism during Covid.

Emeran said since January passenger numbers on Cape Town lines had risen by 200%, though from a low base. "We can see that people are returning."

"While there has been a sharp increase this year, we are nowhere near where we should be. We were transporting 750,000 passengers per day or passenger trips; now we are transporting about 50,000 daily. We are still running on low frequency, running [every] 45 minutes in the peak. We need to get that service to 10-15 minutes in the peak period."

He said once the signalling system had been overhauled, trains could run more frequently. "We can then operate safe trains every five or 10 minutes. At the moment the team in operation is using manual authorisation."

In an interview with *GroundUp*, Emeran said Prasa's capital budget for the year for the country as a whole was R12.9bn, up slightly from R12.5bn the previous year.

"Last year for the first time in more than a decade we spent our capital budget. This year we want to ensure we spend our budget again because that's what is going to bring a modernised railway system."

He said the budget included new trains, corridor recovery (restoring train services on each line), depot modernisation, station refurbishment and an overhaul of signalling in Cape Town.

"We have already invested R800m on corridor recovery, R600m on the Central Line."

Emeran said the Salt River and Paarden Eiland depots were being secured with CCTV and security technology to house new trains, which are worth R150m each.



Participants at an oversight visit to the Northern Line. The full service on the line is expected to resume by the end of the year. Photo: Tariro Washinyira

South African Transport and Allied Workers Union representative Phumeza Yata, who lives in Stellenbosch, said: “I am here to hear from Prasa management themselves if this line is really going to open in November. Our people have suffered enough since trains have stopped working. Going to Cape Town from Strand by taxi is R35, R70 return. A train ticket is R26 return.”

“Many people lost their jobs because they didn’t have money to travel to Cape Town. Spending R500 per week is too much for our people who have low-paying jobs.”

In a statement on Tuesday, Prasa said trains were running on the Central, Southern and Northern corridors and were now stopping at 88 out of 121 stations in the province. “Five corridors have been earmarked for recovery in this financial year - Nyanga to Philippi; Philippi to Chris Hani; and Philippi to Kapteinsklop; Bellville to Strand; and Cape Town to Muldersvlei, and we are making steady progress in recovering these lines.”

CORRECTION ON 2023-08-30 19:21

The caption on the second photograph has been corrected.

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