



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Metropolitan Centre, 158 Loveday Street. Braamfontein

P O Box 1049, Johannesburg, 2000

Tel: +27 11 407 7558 Fax: +27 11 339 5704

City of Johannesburg Speech by
Executive Mayor, Cllr Herman Mashaba

The true state of infrastructure challenges in the City of Johannesburg

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***Note to editors:** This speech was delivered by Mayor Herman Mashaba at today's press conference on the state of Johannesburg's Infrastructure, held at the City Council Chambers.*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the 23rd of August 2016, my administration walked into the Office in the City of Johannesburg. We had an idea of the challenges that confronted our City, but the truth is that what we encountered was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

One of our earliest challenges, and one we still grapple with today, is the blatant act of sabotage from some senior officials working against the new administration and at the expense of residents.

But this cannot compare to the challenge created by past administrations. Our predecessors spent a great deal of time, effort, and money fooling themselves and our residents about the state of our City.

They spent hundreds of millions of Rand promoting an artificial image of the City that not even their strongest supporters actually believed.

R153 million spent in two years on self-promotional advertising, R193 million spent in three years on travel. They claimed Johannesburg as a World Class City, which couldn't have been further from the lived reality of the majority of our residents.

But we are not here today to apportion blame. Those days are over. Our role is an unconditional responsibility, a contract with our residents, to turn this City around and get it working.

But, when you consider some of our biggest challenges, we must appreciate that they cannot be resolved overnight. We have to take the residents into our confidence and explain the true state of our City.

Every day our residents suffer from these challenges, but they have never known why they are so many.

They have never known how these experiences relate to government failure, or of any real plans to address them. Never before has there been an appreciation of how fraud and corruption has robbed the poorest in our City of the dignity that comes from basic services.

Just think of the more than 2000 cases totalling over R16 Billion under investigation, and think of how our poor communities could have been serviced with that money. From day one in this job, I committed this government to being open and transparent with our residents, because, we are in this together.

On 3 August 2016 a social contract was formed - one that requires a change in the way the government of Johannesburg works. Today we are here to discuss the City's Infrastructure network. Infrastructure is not an issue that appeals to people. But, when it fails – when the lights go out, the water stops running, and the roads crumble, THEN people pay attention.

We have one electricity sub-station that supplies the entire Inner City of Johannesburg. It is 75 years old, 30 years past its useful lifespan. It is old enough to have served some of your great-grandparents. No service parts are available for this sub-station any longer – they stopped making those parts 20 years ago.

The thought should leave you cold.

The truth is that much of our infrastructure was built in the dark days of Apartheid, designed to exclusively serve small white communities.

To make matters worse, our City Entities have been hit by institutionalised corruption and crime.

Earlier this year I shared how City Power had been robbed blind by a company who had been paid massive sums of money even though there was no real work on the ground to build sub-stations in Hopefield and Eldorado Park.

Like so many other cases, officials in these entities colluded with corrupt companies to sabotage these communities and projects for their own financial gain.

To make matters worse, we are also fighting against criminals who steal crucial infrastructure from our entities. Just over a month ago, the inner city was plunged into days of darkness due to stolen underground cables.

Last week, we recovered vandalised and stolen City Power equipment and infrastructure worth R80 million.

The challenges are substantial.

Today, we live in a society where our communities are growing and diversifying, but the capacity of the City's infrastructure cannot match this growth or the changing needs of these communities.

In many ways, today is not dissimilar to that day when Members of Parliament warned that Eskom was heading towards the metaphorical cliff in its supply of power.

Four years later, the lights started to go out.

As you are no doubt aware, we in the City of Johannesburg, now face a very similar issue. Can you imagine that 27% of our electricity infrastructure is past its life span?

Can you imagine that we have had to accept over 45 000 leaks in our water pipes in our City?

Can you imagine that our road network is deteriorating because the R1 billion budget of JRA is inadequate to even just maintain the condition of our roads, let alone improve it?

The question is: are we going to drift towards that cliff while we fool ourselves and our residents?

The answer is: Not under my watch, not as long as I occupy this seat.

Because when we promised change in our social contract with our residents, it was not small change that was promised.

It was REAL change, COMPLETE change. In Sesotho, there is a word that captures this better than English does "*Phetogo*."

As we approach the planning for the next budget cycle I will be making sure that one of our "*Diphetogo*" has to be massive investment in City Infrastructure.

Currently our City's unfunded infrastructure backlog sits at R170 Billion over the next 10 years.

We have our work cut out for us.

City Power is locked in a R500 million dispute with the Receiver of Revenue, which has already seen the entity's financial position deteriorate.

Indeed, only weeks after this administration took office, the Kelvin Power contract between City Power and Eskom was suddenly terminated, further negatively impacting the financial performance of the MOE to the tune R268 million.

Some of these matters have been left alone for years, and the reasons for suddenly acting now have yet to be explained to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake, we are fast approaching the edge of that cliff.

It is going to take a mammoth effort and the very best leadership in our City to turn this situation around.

The difference is that we will not continue the previous regime's trend of putting our heads in the sand and pretending that we don't see disaster approaching.

But we cannot and will not allow ourselves to become paralysed by fear of the daunting nature of our task.

I am initiating a new approach to our budget planning cycles, which will ensure that we will be able to divert the required resources.

We are going to squeeze every drop of non-essential expenditure in our City towards this purpose.

We are going to make the tough decisions that have to be made on matters of lesser priority.

Since the City only has R10 billion to address a R170 billion shortfall, the City has to implement urgent intervention measures to address the challenges.

These measures include:

- establishing a professional public service to serve our residents with pride;
- Getting our City's Municipal Courts functioning again so that the rule of law can be maintained in our city.

I am happy to announce that in the next few weeks, we will re-launching these courts back into operation;

- intensifying our fight against fraud and corruption;
- fixing our billing system to ensure residents are correctly billed, and that the City recovers the R5-R10 billion that is lost annually due to under-valuation and non-billing of properties;
- declaring war on criminals who vandalise and steal our infrastructure; and
- kick-starting the city's economic revival by turning the City into a construction site to ensure the long-term provision of low-cost housing and to create job opportunities in the interim.

By 2021, we will have achieved a City where the roads are in a better state than we found them in.

We will have achieved a situation where communities experience less power outages than they live with right now.

We will have achieved a more stable supply of water, and reduced losses in our water-scarce environment.

This is what it means to be a responsive, accountable and caring government.

With the age of our City Infrastructure, it demands an approach where we move away from relying on repairs.

The idea of repairing over 45 000 water leaks in our water pipes, invokes the image of a cartoon character trying to plug all the holes in the dam wall with fingers and toes.

We see the same with pothole repairs, which is the equivalent of a bandage in engineering terms. In the wet season, that pothole will return in a matter of weeks.

You see, the repair and maintenance levels we are engaged with as a City, are quick fixes, and have us using time, people, and funds fixing problems, only for them to return in the weeks or months to come.

We need to focus on refurbishment, the process of replacing our old infrastructure with new, higher capacity infrastructure.

This means resurfacing and reconstructing our roads rather than just plugging the holes. It means new sub-stations with higher capacities, and it means new water pipes with larger diameters to feed growing communities.

It is my objective to turn our entire City into a construction site over the next four years. I want to ensure that on my way to work every day I see roads being resurfaced, cables being replaced, and water pipes being dug up.

But the nature of our social contract between government and residents requires me to appeal to our residents for understanding.

Because, like any contract, there must be two parties willingly entering into an agreement together, knowing all the facts.

My request to our residents is to please bear with us during this period.

Because the job of saving our City from the imminent collapse of our infrastructure cannot happen overnight.

It is a process, not an event.

But it is a process through which our residents need to accompany us.

So when you experience temporary power outages, water stoppages or potholes, I would like you to know that we are working on resolving the inconveniences and problems.

I would like our residents to see the construction around the City, and let it be seen as the progress towards a better, more reliable supply of services to our people.

As someone who felt the sting of poverty myself when I was still a young man, I want to see our City involved in a massive artisan training programme.

I want to see that the construction that is going to take place around our City, affords young people the opportunity to be trained as plumbers, electricians, brick-layers, and the like.

I want to see them gaining experience from this, and being able to make a living from these skills, and give them a hand-up to participate in our economy.

I will be ensuring that government goes on the ground to our communities and explains the plans for our infrastructure upgrades over the next few years.

Every community must know what the plans of this government are. Because no contract can ever work unless we partner together, and this means people must be informed.

I have always found the residents of our City to be reasonable. They have endured great suffering at the hands of their government.

Let today be the start of a new beginning, a new era where government sets a new course to deliver REAL change, and residents partner with government to be a part of this journey to a better City for all.

A City building golden opportunities for all.

Cllr Herman Mashaba
Executive Mayor
City of Johannesburg

For further information, please contact:

Luyanda Mfeka
Acting Director of Communications
Office of the Executive Mayor
Tel: 011 407 6727
076 171 5978