



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe



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In this issue you will find a report of an interview with Mr Siyabonga Gama, acting head of Transnet where he outlines his vision of where branch lines can play an important role in moving freight in South Africa. This is a far cry from the days when only the “core “ routes were seen as of any importance.

There is also a report on a line reopening brought about by public pressure and the forward thinking of the Scottish parliament. This parliament has also been instrumental in reopening a third route from Edinburgh to Glasgow via Bathgate, thereby taking commuters of the roads, and reopening the line from Stirling to Alloa with the same effect.

There is also a look at the Ceres line which has now been opened for traffic which bodes well for our line.

Finally, do not forget the Diaz Express which is operating from Hartenbos to Mossel Bay and to Outeniqua with a lunch stop at Grootbrak. Details are available from the website www.diazexpress.co.za

The Gama interview

State-owned transport and logistics group Transnet is spending close to R5 billion to revitalize fallow branch lines to upscale government's grand plans to reinvigorate economic activity in small and rural areas, which are key to economic growth and off-setting rampant unemployment, Transnet's acting chief group executive Siyabonga Gama said after signing a R30-billion loan agreement with China Development Bank (CDB) last Friday at the Taj Cape Hotel in Cape Town.

The agreement, which Gama sealed with CDB vice-president Li Gang under the watchful eye of Enterprise Development Minister Lynn Brown, will fast-track Transnet's rapid roll out of its 'record-breaking 1064 locomotives acquisition programme.

The money will be used to fund hundreds of locomotives to be built by Transnet with China South Rail, for which the parastatal will be drawing the first tranche of the R18 billion loan over four years.

Meanwhile, Gama asserts that revitalisation of branch lines is informed by a government strategy which has identified the transport sector as one of the significant drivers of the economy, since transport plays a critical role in enabling mobility and access to economic and social activities.

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"The Branch Line Network in Transnet Freight Rail constitutes a network of nearly 40% of the route network in Transnet Freight Rail. "This network has been neglected for many years and as a result nearly half of the branch lines network is either closed or has no active services," Gama admits.

Though funding remains the key risk factor in branch lines, Gama highlights that it is generally accepted by Transnet, policy makers and industry that private sector investment will play a pivotal role in restabilising rail.

He is convinced that rail should be the backbone on the South African freight logistics industry, given that most industries rely on the efficient movement of freight from origins such as farms, mines and manufacturing plants to destinations within and outside South Africa.

"The total branch lines network of +-7300 kilometres is dispersed nationally and almost half of this network is active and is an integral part of the Transnet Freight Rail Business, in serving its customers as feeder lines into the system and the other half of the branch lines network is closed," explains Gama. He stresses that branch lines are being revitalised to reinvigorate economic activity in small and rural areas and to continue serving customers in the business units served by these branch lines integral to the Transnet Market Demand Strategy (MDS).

"During the past three years of the MDS, more than R400 million was spent to remain operational; the financial needs to therefore upgrade the branch lines is R9, 1 billion to R10 billion per annum" says Gama.

He believes that though branch lines were currently a relatively under-utilised part of the country's transport infrastructure, it is expected that their revitalisation could unlock economic potential of both the country and region.

"Branch Lines remain crucial for economic development, particularly of rural areas and small towns in the country, and to reopen and operate them sustainably requires different strategic, funding and operating models to that of main lines and the remainder of the core profitable network," notes Gama.

BIAS TOWARDS ROAD TRANSPORT ILLOGICAL

As in the case of sibling's rivalry, Gama detests the ongoing absence of a comprehensive transport policy to guide industry - something he begrudgingly attributes to be partly responsible for exacerbating the branch lines situation.

"Ongoing investment in road infrastructure from the national fiscus may well be understood. However, it represents a contradiction and bias to road whilst propagating a migration to rail. "It must be understood that not one of the roads competing with a branch line is a toll road and that the rural road network is heavily subsidized," highlights Gama.

Revitalization of branch lines could certainly assist the state-owned enterprise to reclaim ground lost to road freight, given that an advanced logistics network is the backbone of industrial development and makes it attractive to foreign investment as well as globally competitive.

Transnet's invidious position is amplified by the fact that over the past two decades, South Africa has seen a big shift of freight cargo and passengers from rail to road due to under-investment in rail infrastructure by the state. Today, the movement of cargo inland is carried out primarily by road transport conglomerates, which operate big truck fleets.

South Africa moved 693 millions of tons of inland freight in 2003, 74% by road and 26% rail. In 2011, road transport moved 88.8% of freight and rail 11.2%. Airfreight carried an additional 350 000 tons while seaports handled 161 million tons per annum.

The rail network carries about 180 million tons of cargo annually for both the local and export markets. The physical network is divided into primary and secondary networks (the light and the low-density networks).

In November 2010, Transnet Freight Rail told Parliament that over 100 private sector companies had applied for concessions to operate 3 255km of branch line tracks around the country. Over a third of the closed branch lines (1 202km) are located in the Eastern Cape and a further 563km in the Free State'

HOW SA MISSED COMMODITIES' BOOM

The opportunity slipped through South Africa's hands due to under-investment in infrastructure particularly in rail, road, ports, energy, and telecommunications.

The branch line initiative and opportunities in the pipeline, though in part, will go a long way to make a difference and produce desired outcomes.

"Branch lines current initiatives and in the opportunities in pipeline per Province

Province	Branch Line	Commodity	Status
Western Cape	Wolsley – Ceres – Prince Alfred Hamlet (phase 1-20km Phase 2-6km)	Containers, Tourism, local passengers	Public - private sector involvement with long term right of use of the assets
Western Cape	Paarl – Franschhoek (lease of 27km of track)	Tourism - Franschhoek wine tram	Operational since Q4 2012 Long term lease shopping centre
Western Cape	Windemere-Atlantis (46km)	Potential Gas/ Fuel	Currently Closed, to reopen in short term; to Eskom Ankerlig
Eastern Cape	Amabele – Umtata (358km)	Canola seeds Containers, Fuel	Line upgraded
Eastern Cape	Alicedale - Port Alfred Grahamstown (126km)	Tourism, Real Estate, Arts & Culture, Heritage Education & training, ICT developments	Alicedale-Grahamstown section active; public - public and private sector involvement
Eastern Cape	Klipplaat – Rosmead (259km)	Fuel, Containers FMCG, Grain, Timber	Currently closed - targeted to be reopened in Sept 2015; the creation of this Capacity is integral to the mega Manganese MDS project development
Eastern Cape	George – Knysna (67km)	Tourism, Timber, Solid waste	Closed to traffic since 2006 due to storm damage; public - public and private sector proposal for the investment and re-opening
Eastern Cape	Qamata - Imvani (68km)	Agri products Cement	Currently closed and lifted; study being undertaken at present-to be concluded by September 2015
Northern Cape	Belrnont – Douglas (85km)	Grain - Maize Wheat, Barley	Upgrade completed to 18.5/axle Proposals on the concession currently being evaluated
Kwa-Zulu Natal	Pietermaritzburg Cluster (769km)	Timber	Continued maintenance investment;

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Kwa-Zulu Natal	Empangeni- Nkwalini (64km)	Sugar Cane	Continued maintenance investment
Kwa-Zulu Natal	Port Shepstone – Harding (122km)	Fuel Timber	Currently closed
Mpumalanga	Nelspruit Cluster (161km)	Timber	Needs investment
Mpumalanga	Balfour North – Grootvlei (21km)	Eskom Coal	Reclassified from branch line to mainline, reinstated as 26t/axle line to transport Eskom coal
North West	Klerksdorp Grain Cluster (422km)	Grain	Partly operational
Free State	Kroonstad Cluster (335km)	Grain, Timber Gold Ore	Operational, Orkney Vierfontein reinstated
Free State	Bethlehem Cluster (531km)	Grain, Cement	Partly Operational

A day out in Yorkshire

Members Willem and Irene van Zyl recently spent a couple of days visiting the railway sights of Yorkshire. Here is their report.

On Sunday 21 June 2015 we drove to Pickering station, from Dunnington, outside York, about a half an hour's distance away. The North Yorkshire Moors Railway operates this scenic line through the north Yorkshire Moors National Park from Pickering to Grosmont and beyond to Whitby. The railway 'family' of volunteers numbering over 300 and staff keeps the historic locos, coaches, wagons, track and equipment running. The preservation society was established in June 1967.

From Pickering station the rail is a twisty track, straightening out before the next station, Levisham, about 17 minutes away. The rail then curves below Levisham moor following the river to Newton Dale halt about 10 minutes away. The line climbs on a gradient as steep as 1 in 49 with the Newton Dale, formed by glacial action, increasingly steep on either side. Here after the view opens up as the rail straightens toward Goathland station about 15 minutes away. The scenic buildings at Goathland station was the setting for filming of Harry Potter's Hogsmeade station. *(also featured extensively in the TV series “Heartbeat” Ed)*



A4 Sir Nigel Gresley approaching Goathland

After leaving Goathland station the line drops steeply and follows and crosses the river to Grosmont station 10 minutes away. I had a glimpse of the 60007 LNER (London & North Eastern Railway) Class A4 4-6-2 Sir Nigel Gresley engine here.



At Grosmont

Between these stations is a very pleasant hiking trail which is in fact the old route of the line which used to be worked by rope haulage. The new and current line is known as the deviation line. At Grosmont our steam train was changed to a diesel locomotive. Here the track joins the Esk Valley line from Battersby (*Network Rail track* Ed) which crosses and follows the Esk river to Whitby about 25 minutes away.

Just before the last straight into Whitby we passed under the Larpool Viaduct way above us. At Whitby we had a pleasant fish lunch and walk around, before having a look in at captain Cook's museum. We then headed back on the same route we followed to Whitby.

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On Monday 22 June we headed to the National Railway Museum York, known to be the world's largest railway museum, housed in a massive old steam engine shed, which has a turntable in the middle of it. The museum in York is over 80 years old. The museum's collections ranges from the most powerful of steam locomotives to the most ornate carriages. They include models, archives, photographs, film and works of art. Amongst the carriages are a few of the royal carriages going back to queen Victoria's time.



Duchess of Hamilton



Mallard

Exquisitely finished were the red Duchess of Hamilton built in 1938 and the Mallard an A4 class, Pacific type locomotive with four small carrying wheels under the cylinders at the front, six big driving wheels, all coupled together and another two carrying wheels under the cab. The A4 class were built to power light express trains at speed from London to Newcastle and Edinburgh. The Mallard holds the world record speed for steam engines and was clocked at a top speed of 202 km/h in 1938. (During the Second World War, one of these locomotives was observed hauling a train of no less than 26 carriages, almost 1000 tons. Ed)

Today's high-speed trains, a marvel in the museum too. The Flying Scotsman is another example too. The Flying Scotsman started life as an A1, but was uprated in 1940 to an A3 with a more powerful boiler and considered the king of the tracks then.



Flying Scotsman in the works

To step behind the scenes there is a workshop gallery where the public and others can see the restoration of trains and coaches. In the great hall there is a good cafeteria catering for all needs. We had a wonderful time these last two days in Yorkshire with the trains.

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Consider that the railways had changed Britain for ever by creating the suburbs and the birth of the commuter!!!!

Willem van Zyl

The Borders Railway

It is almost half a century since the borders railway closed. With the line linking Edinburgh and Carlisle lifted, the Scottish borders region was without rail connection of any kind. (one wonders if the line had stayed open just a few more years whether it would have ever closed. It's sister line, the Settle and Carlisle, was saved through vigorous campaigning by a group of locals with support from all over Britain and now it is carrying more traffic than it ever did.) An attempt to take over the line by a group of private individuals in 1969 came to nothing and the track was torn up in indecent haste. But dreams of reopening the line never stopped and now a thirty mile stretch of this famous railway has been reopened. Locals insisted the closure left them isolated and a campaign to restore the line began in the 1990s. The reopened stretch costing 294million pounds follows the old trackbed. It is expected to carry 650,000 commuters and tourists every year, stopping at seven new stations and helping to rejuvenate the borders region. It is the longest stretch of UK rail line to be opened for more than a century. Almost 140 bridges had to be rebuilt or repaired. However campaigners say they are disappointed the new line does not extend to it's original destination, or at least as far as Hawick, a major town. For six weeks, until the end of October, Steam hauled trains are scheduled to run three times a week along with the commuter trains. On the day she became Britain's longest reigning monarch in September, the Queen officially reopened the railway. She joined a special train hauled by A4 Pacific, "Union of South Africa" for the journey to Tweedbank.



A4 "Union of South Africa" leaves Edinburgh on the Royal Train

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Alighting at Tweedbank



Aboard the train

DEVELOPMENTS ON THE CERES LINE.

For some time now, discussions have been taking place between Transnet, Ceres Rail Company and Witzenberg municipality to explore the possibility of reintroducing rail services from Wolseley to Ceres and Prince Alfred Hamlet. The objective was primarily to move freight, principally fruit and agricultural produce from Ceres to Cape Town with the added attraction of tourist trains at weekends.

Once agreement was reached, the line was brought back into running condition quite quickly and the first test train of empty containers was run on 3rd August. A train of empty passenger vehicles was run on 20th August.



Trial train leaving Wolseley



Taking it easy across the road!

Photos Jan-Louis Spoelstra

The first commercial train of empty containers was run to Ceres on 26th August and departed full on the 27th August and the first commercial load was sent out several weeks later. The traffic is mainly fruit destined for Cape Town docks.

Ceres Rail Company acquired a number of carriages that were used on the Union Limited tourist train stabled at Voorbaai. These were moved to Wolseley some time ago. They were

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once a familiar sight on the George Knysna line, being headed normally by a 19D and a GMA.

They have also bought a number of 19Ds and a 19B and these are under restoration at Voorbaai under the direction of Bobby Redman. The first one (to be named Jessica) has had it's boiler hydraulically tested and has now been tested in light steam, moving under it's own power for the first time in 11 years.

The hope is to have a passenger service up and running by the end of October

Locomotive news from Voorbaai

Over the last few months, work has been concentrated on preparing a class 19D for use on the Ceres line.

This work has been carried out under the guidance of Mr Bobby Redman. Considering that none of the locomotives at Voorbaai have turned a wheel in 11 years, it is a miracle that so much has been achieved in so short a space of time.

The Ceres line is taking 3 locomotives in all and this one was the best of the bunch having successfully passed it's hydraulic boiler test, it went on to have it's first steam test and then it's boiler certification steam test. It is expected to leave Voorbaai for Ceres around the 9th October.



Putting the rods up



Movement!

