

M E T R O

# Life on the tracks: Prasa settlement impasse remains unresolved

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RESIDENTS from the informal settlements established in between Passenger Rail Agency of SA (Prasa) railway tracks have expressed mixed feelings over plans to relocate them to Stellenbosch.

This after the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) said it had identified land in efforts to assist with the relocation of the Siyahlala informal settlement in Langa, Eyadini in Philippi, and Nonqubela in Khayelitsha.

More than 7 500 families live in these communities, which were established from 2019 after the Central Line corridor, the busiest in the

province, came to a halt.

Zara Nicholson, spokesperson for DPWI Minister Patricia de Lille, said a valuation process of the parcel of land in Stellenbosch was expected to be completed around August 20 and the valuation report would then be submitted to the new Land Affairs Board for assessment and approval.

"It is measuring 17.7 hectares to the Housing Development Agency (HDA) in support of the human settlements programme and is processing this request which includes subjecting the property to a feasibility study expected to be completed towards the end of September, depending on the date of receipt of the valuations. The transfer of the property is also subject to National Treasury Endorsement."

Nicholson said the department, together with provincial departments and the City, was requested to release land to resettle people.

Siyahlala resident Mlondolozzi Maqhabhi said they had no problem being moved to Stellenbosch if they received services.

"We have communicated to Prasa and other relevant stakeholders that the land must be near essential services like clinics.

"If they move us in next month or upcoming few months then a plan must be made for our children who are schooling in Langa. We are unemployed and won't be able to afford transport."

Eyadini leader Jackson Kondile said residents did not want to be moved to

far areas including Paarl and Stellenbosch. "Many people work this side and these are jobs that don't pay much so they won't afford transport.

"We have also seen people being relocated to the city outskirts and abandoned without basic services for long. We heard there was vacant land in Philippi that was used for farming.

"Why can't that be bought? We are tired of these blame games between officials and will only move when we are certain of the place we're going to," said Kondile.

An eviction case was also expected to be heard later this month.

While Prasa's chairperson, Leonard Ramatlakane, had said the City has given the organisation the cold shoulder after proposing a land swop, Mayor

Dan Plato said the City had refused to give up land earmarked for housing opportunities to accommodate the illegal land invaders.

"The City refused to do so and advised Prasa to use some of their own unused land. They refused to do so and the Central Line remained closed.

"It is disappointing that instead of acknowledging their own shortcomings in addressing the challenges faced, and providing solutions to the problems, the Prasa chairperson attempted to shift the blame," he said.

Good Party secretary-general Brett Herron said following Plato's statement and Prasa's presentation to the Committee on Transport last month, the working relationship between the two was not healthy.