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SAICE REPORT

# Infrastructure gets poor rating

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IN THE latest Infrastructure Report Card (IRC) by the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (Saice), the overall condition of South Africa's infrastructure has scored a D.

The scorecard is based on a five-point scale – A (world-class), B (fit for the future), C (satisfactory for now), D (at risk of failure), and E (unfit-for-purpose) – and features a snapshot of the current condition and performance of 32 sub-sectors of infrastructure.

Saice said that 16 years ago, the first IRC gave South Africa's infrastructure an overall grade of D+.

By the 2011 report, it noted that the significant investments in new infrastructure for the 2010 Soccer World Cup had elevated the overall grade to C-.

Now they say, the "poor attitude" to maintenance has resulted in a downturn, with South Africa's public infrastructure declining to D.

"Broadly speaking, it is evident that, with the exception of energy generation, economic infrastructure remains in a satisfactory condition – even those assets that have deteriorated, such as heavy freight rail and airports, maintain grades of B or C."

However, the further degradation of social infrastructure paints a dismal picture of the plight that ordinary people face to access basic services of water, sanitation, health, education, public transport and electricity.

"Crime and non-payment for services as well as weak institutions lacking appropriate skills and accurate data have contributed towards a further decline in the overall condition of infrastructure since the last Saice Infrastructure Report Card."

Water supply for areas other than major urban areas was rated D.

"In some urban areas, the water supply systems have been operated at full capacity and will not be able to meet growing demands unless proactive measures are taken to decrease

consumption, refurbish critical components of the systems and expedite key bulk water augmentation projects that have been delayed."

Sanitation was even worse, receiving an E rating, as the report found that the quality of wastewater treatment is declining.

"Of the greatest concern is the extent to which substandard final effluent is discharged, raising the risk of disease transmission to communities downstream."

While national roads received a B, unpaved municipal and provincial unpaved were rated E, "with the exception of the Western Cape".

There is a risk of further deterioration due to increased vehicle overloading, poor maintenance, and the steady reduction of skilled personnel in road departments."

It added that while gravel roads constituted a significant percentage of the country's road network, few were in a satisfactory condition.

Clinics were rated D as "most provincial health departments and their associated public works departments do not place enough emphasis on maintenance".

"Inadequate budgets, shortages of suitable staff, and supply chain and administrative issues often result in poor infrastructure condition".

Policy analyst Nkosikhulule Nyembezi expressed concern about the deteriorating living standards and decaying infrastructure across the country.

"The provocation to citizens, is grotesque. But the political will to change the situation will remain lukewarm as long as nothing on the ground poses any strategic threat to politicians responsible for the perpetuating of incompetence and corruption of decision-makers at both the levels of elected representatives and civil servants," he said.

Provincial and national government infrastructure and public works departments did not respond to requests for comment by the time of publication