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Tshwane parliament shift would cost R9bn

By THABO MOKONE

● It would cost almost R9bn to build a new parliamentary complex in Pretoria and relocate the legislature's more than 1,000 employees from Cape Town, according to a study leaked this week.

An asset management company was commissioned by parliament in 2018 to conduct a feasibility study into the socioeconomic effect of relocating the institution from the Western Cape to Gauteng.

The study was carried out in 2019 but had been kept under wraps until it was leaked this week after its presentation at a closed special meeting of the chief whips' forum on Tuesday.

Chief whips had pushed national assembly speaker Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and senior officials to brief them on the report as they discuss relocating to Pretoria or rebuilding the historic structure in Cape Town after it

was gutted by fire in January.

EFF leader Julius Malema has tabled a private member's bill seeking to move parliament from Cape Town and Mapisa-Nqakula has invited public comments.

The study by Pamoja Asset Management found that:

Construction of a new parliament in Pretoria would cost R8.4bn over five years.

This would offset the cost of regular renovations and maintenance of the current precinct, which came in at R4.2bn over four years, by 2019.

The cost of shuttling ministers and their support staff between the two cities would be cut by R183m a year.

Relocating parliamentary officials to Tshwane would cost R205m, including possible retrenchments and severance costs for those not keen to move to Gauteng.

Parliament's spokesperson, Moloto Mothapo, said the institution was

processing the report and no final decision had been taken.

"Parliament is engaging with the report and neither opinion nor conclusion has been formed.

"The survey was commissioned by parliament so that any debate on parliament's geographical location can be informed by research data on the socioeconomic implications. Parliament is therefore unable to discuss it publicly at this stage," he said.

Political parties represented in parliament, departments such as public works, and the National Treasury would be among the ultimate decisionmakers.

ANC deputy chief whip Doris Dlakude said her parliamentary caucus had not adopted a position as it was yet to discuss Pamoja's report.

The study found that Cape Town would lose nearly 3,000 jobs in the skilled formal category while Tshwane would gain 2,364.

The report said R1.3bn would be lost to Cape Town's GDP, while Tshwane's would gain R1.2bn.

While some sectors of the Western Cape economy may be negatively affected, "the size and structure of the City of Cape Town economy suggests that most of the negative economic affects will be overcome very quickly", said the report.

Sectors strategic to Cape Town's economy, such as domestic tourism, were "unlikely to be much affected" by the relocation "because of the relatively small contribution of business visitors".

But that has been rejected by Cape Town mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis.

He said the city would make a submission on Malema's relocation bill, arguing against a move to Gauteng.

"The argument around the cost of government is nonsense ... that report

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Losing parliament 'will hurt Cape Town'

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was written before Covid so I will forgive them for not knowing about Zoom.

"There's no need for 10 government officials to come to every portfolio committee – they must log on. Three thousand jobs would be a massive loss to the local economy and I don't say you just say 'oh well, you'll be OK' – tell that to people whose livelihoods will be affected," said Hill-Lewis.

The study said concerns that staff might be reluctant to move to Tshwane because of issues such as crime were "not warranted" as Cape Town "had much higher crime levels in all categories".

The cost of education and accommodation was found to be higher in Tshwane than in Cape Town.

The report said 54% of parliament's 1,300 staff who were surveyed by Pamoja were in favour of a move to Gauteng, while 35% were against it.

"Those in favour of a relocation see the likely resulting cost saving to the country as a key argument in favour of a relocation, followed by the increased accessibility of parliament to the majority of the citizens of the country and the perceived lower costs of living in Gauteng."

But Sthembis Tembe, chair of the parliamentary branch of labour union Nehawu, said they rejected any plan to move parliament from Cape Town until they are properly consulted by management.

"This intended move will destabilise employees and their families. How are workers and their families going to be accommodated when they move to Gauteng?"

"We are totally against it until such time we are consulted properly and the employer is able to respond sufficiently and comprehensively to the concerns we have."

The report found that the relocation would improve citizens' participation in the legislature's affairs due to Gauteng's central location.

It proposed that the current buildings of parliament be "converted to museums" as the Western Cape legislature was not keen take them over.

"But there is the possibility that the AU could be convinced to move in. Whatever the outcome, any alternative tenant of the precinct will experience challenges in adapting it to their use, given its heritage," says the report.