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WAY FORWARD. To modernise Cape Town's port operations, the city is advocating for greater private-sector involvement.
Picture: Bloomberg



Cape's bid for more control

DRAFT PLAN: PUSHES FOR DEVOLUTION OF POWERS FROM NATIONAL TO LOCAL GOVT

» Mayor wants metro in charge of policing, rail and ports.

Liesl Peyper

Moneyweb

Cape Town is doubling down on its push for the devolution of key service functions – policing, rail and ports – from national to metro-level control.

In its recently released 25-year draft development plan, the city argues that it requires greater autonomy to deliver services more efficiently and ensure long-term fiscal sustainability.

In a media release announcing the publication of the 25-year plan, mayor of Cape Town Geordin Hill-Lewis noted that the city aims to have “more control” over the regional economy by 2028, through collaboration with provincial and national government on key priorities such as expanded city-level policing powers, control of passenger rail, reforms to manage small harbours, and private-sector-led improvements to the Port of Cape Town and development of an inland port.

The plan emphasises that devolution of powers from national to local government level is critical for integrated planning and more effective urban governance.

Strengthening police powers

Cape Town has welcomed the proposed amendments to the South African Police Service (Saps) Act, which are expected to be tabled later this year.

However, according to city spokesperson Luthando Tyhalibongo, there is an even more “immediate means” of devolving powers if the police minister issues regulations under the current Act.

“The minister has, in fact, recently issued such regulations, but these do not go far enough. The city will use the public comment period to recommend improved regulations that will give our officers the necessary criminal investigative powers to help Saps and the National Prosecuting Authority gain more convictions,” he said.

Tyhalibongo warned that the city will “challenge the rationality in court” if the

national government fails to devolve the necessary powers.

Rail business plans await national signal

Cape Town is also preparing for the devolution of passenger rail. Following a Rail Feasibility Study commissioned in 2024, the city is finalising detailed business plans that will be tabled in council in the coming months.

These plans will allow for a swift transfer of functions once national legislation – and the long-awaited Rail Master Plan – are published. Transport Minister Barbara Creecy confirmed in May that the plan would be released this year. The master plan will be as a blueprint for South Africa's rail sector, outlining passenger and freight rail developments through to 2050.

Port strategy

To modernise Cape Town's port operations, the city is advocating for greater private-sector involvement. According to Tyhalibongo, the Transnet National Ports Authority's recent request for information received substantial interest, and a request for proposals is expected this year.

“The city has long called for greater private sector involvement in running the port and will play any enabling role necessary to further private investment in expanding and improving port operations,” Tyhalibongo said.

In its draft plan, the city also notes its pursuit of control over smaller harbours such as Hout Bay and Kalk Bay, which currently fall under the department of public works and infrastructure (DPWI). “The Hout Bay and Kalk Bay small harbour are owned by the DPWI,” the draft says.

The city argues that while municipalities are constitutionally mandated to manage small harbours, DPWI's ownership of much of the land and infrastructure prevents the city from exercising that mandate effectively.

“The Hout Bay harbour has, for many years, fallen into a state of severe disrepair, with visible decay, crime and ongoing allegations of corruption, theft, vandalism and poaching.

“[But it] is an area rich in historical and cultural significance, which if managed correctly has immense potential to become a vibrant hub for tourism, commerce and community activities.”