

RAILWAYS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA – CONVERTING OUR COLONIAL HERITAGE INTO CORRIDORS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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It is alleged that railways in Southern Africa were built primarily to serve the interests of the former colonial powers, with no regard for economic interactions between neighbouring states. While this may be true in some cases, it can also be argued that nothing was done in the post-independence period to develop an integrated regional rail network. The colonial authorities kept the railways in good running order. Their successors, through neglect, mismanagement and political interference, ran them into the ground.

Present-day African governments are now recognising the need for efficient rail systems to promote trade and stimulate economic growth. Some rail reconstruction and expansion programmes have proceeded beyond the planning stages and hopefully the subcontinent will soon be served by railway companies that operate across national boundaries. This paper comments on the possibility of securing foreign investment to accelerate the upgrading of Southern Africa's poorly maintained rail assets.