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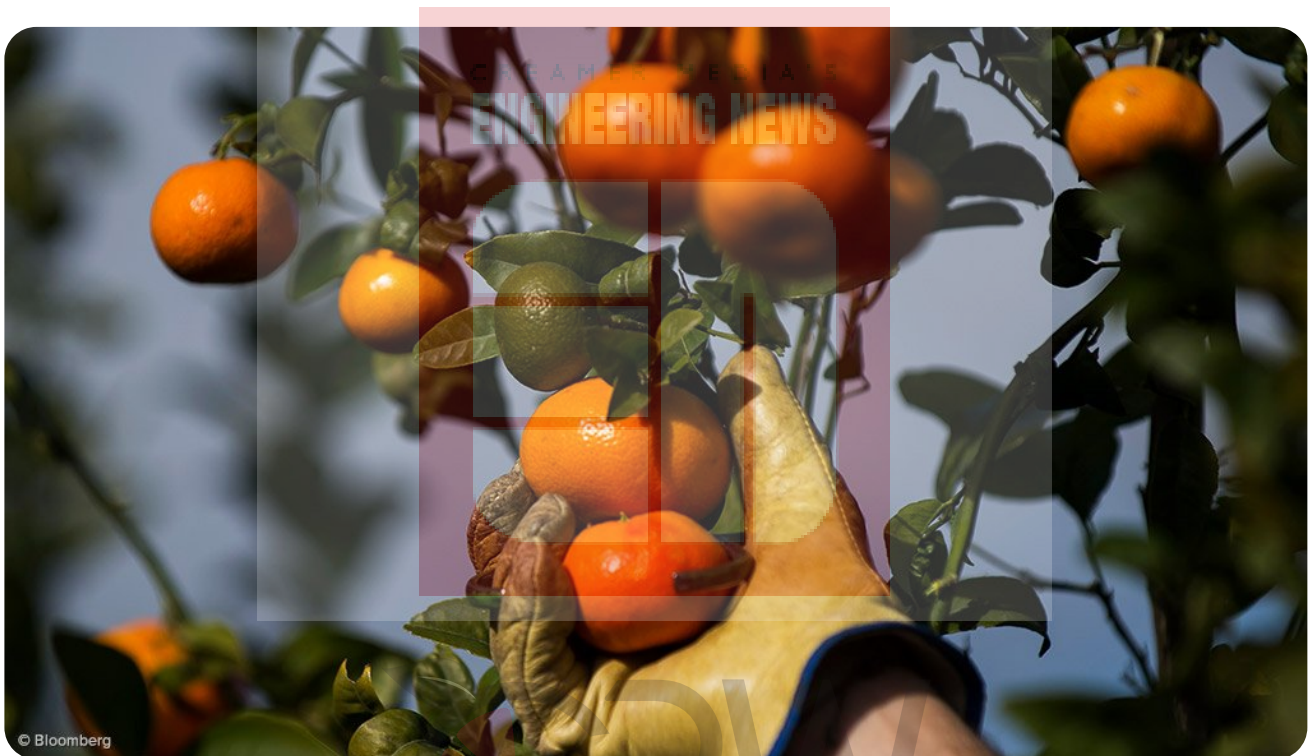
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Citrus growers call on DPE to urgently invest in rail for future growth



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By: [Schalk Burger](#)

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Industry organisation the Citrus Growers ' Association of Southern Africa (CGA) has called on Public Enterprises Minister **Pravin Gordhan** to announce a turnaround to fix the current freight rail network crisis, which is threatening the future growth of the citrus growing sector, which



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ment, and a shortage of locomotives and rolling stock.

About 95% of fruit is currently transported to ports by truck, with only 3 000 containers out of a potential 100 000 having been transported by rail to Durban in 2022 as a result of inoperable rail lines.

"An optimally operating rail system has been identified as a key enabler to achieve the CGA's vision of exporting 260-million cartons of citrus by 2032, which could sustain 100 000 new jobs and bring in an additional R20-billion in export revenue a year," CGA said.

Many roads in provinces are in a poor state or not fit for purpose, with potholes causing damage to citrus fruit, posing a safety risk for drivers and causing major congestion outside ports.

"As a result, citrus growers are keen to transport their citrus via rail instead. Farmers in Newcastle, in the Eastern Cape, recently chose this option to send their fruit to the Durban port. However, cable theft in the area resulted in containers of citrus being stranded for nine days, impacting on the quality of the fruit destined for overseas markets and forcing these growers to return to trucks," the CGA said.

The current situation is set to worsen owing to the expected major increase in trucks travelling from citrus regions to the ports over the next four years. It is projected that an additional 750 trucks of fruit per week will be added to roads in the northern regions by 2027, 450 trucks in the Eastern Cape region, and 300 trucks per week to roads in the Western and Northern Cape regions. This will add significant pressure on an already distressed road network.

This unsustainable situation threatens the ability of the industry to attain its growth projections over the next few years, which is why it is critical



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made by Transnet CEO **Portia Derby** regarding procurement processes to return out-of-service locomotives, the development of mothballed and under-used rail terminals in the Northern and Western Cape regions and approaching the market seeking qualified parties interested in entering a lease with Transnet to operate the Container Corridor from City Deep to Durban port.

"However, we need these interventions as well as plans to safeguard the rail network against cable theft to be actioned as a matter of urgency, so that growers can begin using rail to transport their citrus as soon as possible. We, therefore, call on Minister Gordhan to use his budget speech tomorrow to showcase national government's commitment to fixing the rail network over the immediate, medium and long term.

"The CGA remains committed to actively engaging and operationally supporting the management at Transnet to come up with solutions to ensure growers are able to move their fruit in the most sustainable, cost effective and secure way to reach key markets, and in this way, support livelihoods and generate revenue for South Africa," said CGA CEO **Justin Chadwick**. 

Edited by Chanel de Bruyn

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