Towards sustainable logistics reform

Dr Boitshoko Ntshabele
CGA CEO

One year ago, logistics loomed terrifyingly large as a concern for citrus growers and exporters. Inefficiencies at ports and underutilised rail networks have hampered SA's ability to compete globally for years. Yet, one year later, things have improved. There are signs of a logistics reform trajectory that could positively impact fruit growers, as well as exporters in SA.

In 2025, thanks to a unified effort across the logistics value chain, citrus exports were processed with minimal delays, particularly at the Port of Durban. Transnet, shipping lines, cold storage operators, and growers worked together with a singular focus: getting fruit to market on time. The result? A record export year for the citrus industry.

Transnet Port Terminals increased its throughput, driven by investment in new equipment and operational reforms. And productivity-linked incentives boosted efficiency. These improvements ensured that most fruit reached overseas markets on schedule, even accommodating the truncated US shipping season ahead of August's 30% tariff hike. Rail also saw progress, and long-haul container movements rose, despite lingering technical and security challenges.

The logistics landscape in SA still presents many unique challenges. While major obstacles still exist within the ports system, we acknowledge the meaningful progress achieved during the past citrus season. A foundation for improved efficiency has been laid through meaningful reforms in Transnet. But this represents only one leg of the journey. The second and equally critical leg is large-scale private sector participation, which brings investment, innovation, and capacity that will complement Transnet's turnaround. Together, these two pillars strengthen each other – public sector stability paired with private sector agility can create a logistics ecosystem capable of supporting the citrus industry's growth ambitions.

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Last year, Minister of Transport Barbara Creecy announced that 11 private operators were awarded 41 rail routes across six corridors for up to 10 years. The announcement of the private rail operator Traxtion investing R3.4 billion in rolling stock is another significant indicator of meaningful partnerships forming in this space.

And the new private partnership between ICTSI and Transnet to manage Durban's Pier 2 Container Terminal – essentially the heartbeat of SA's export economy – is a promising development indeed.

Swift, ongoing logistics reform is imperative, to align with the anticipated growth in citrus production volumes. This alignment will be instrumental in realising the full economic potential of the citrus industry, as well as the broader fruit industry of SA.

> Public sector stability, paired with private sector agility, can create a robust logistics ecosystem.