

COVERSTORY |

South African transport utility Transnet's healthcare train, Phelophepa, has entered its seventeenth year of providing South Africa's poor rural communities with primary healthcare services, while the State-owned enterprise accelerates plans to significantly expand the long-running corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative from the beginning of next year.

'Phelophepa', which combines elements of Sotho and Tswana to roughly translate to mean 'good, clean health', has proved successful to the point where Transnet announced in 2009 that it would spend R82-million on a second healthcare train, with the Transnet Foundation planning to introduce the so-called 'Phelophepa II' from January 2012.

At present, 172 Transnet employees are working, when required, on the construction of the train at Transnet Rail Engineering's (TRE's) Salt River workshop, in the Western Cape.

TRE Phelophepa technical project manager **Peace Kopper** tells *Engineering News* that Phelophepa II will have the same layout as its predecessor, with a few improvements.

TRE is currently busy with the refurbishment of the first ten coaches – including four accommodation coaches, the health clinic, the dental clinic and the power car. All 18 coaches will be completed by the end of September 2011.

"All the coaches for Phelophepa II are refurbished coaches donated by Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) and reused. The coaches are stripped and redesigned and then moved to be equipped with high-technology medical equipment by the suppliers that we work closely with," says Kopper.

TRE started the production in August 2010 and is currently working on the first ten coaches.

One of the significant changes that Transnet plans to implement on Phelophepa II will be the improved on-board communications system and vacuum ablution system.

Transnet Foundation portfolio manager: health **Dr Lynette Coetzee** says that currently Phelophepa I has a communication system with vast room for improvement. The new system envisaged for Phelophepa II will enable students to continue their studies and research while on the train and away from class.

The power car will be refurbished from an old parcel coach, and will generate electricity in the absence of a locomotive, which is provided on a timetable basis by TFR.

The power car will hold two 250-kVA alternators and two diesel tanks that carry about 9 000 ℓ of diesel each to provide a constant supply of electricity.

Coetzee says the trains should be almost identical in appearance to avoid comparisons between the old and new versions.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

HEALTH TRAIN ACCELERATES

Expanding Phelophepa health train still a South African corporate responsibility flagship

MARY-ANNE O'DONNELL | STAFF WRITER



DOUBLING UP

The Transnet Foundation announced in 2009 that it would spend R82-million on a second train. Work on the Phelophepa II started in August last year

"Phelophepa II will be a replica of Phelophepa I, right down to the clinic equipment on board. We are also thinking of rotating the staff between the trains to further avoid the idea that Phelophepa II is a newer, better version," she explains.

When the trains are not running, they will be housed at the Salt River workshop, where they undergo the necessary maintenance and upgrades.

The Service

Running for 35 weeks every year through eight provinces, excluding Gauteng, Phelophepa I covers a total of 15 000 km of railway track, and treats about 46 000 patients in its on-board clinics during this time.

In addition, 200 000 adults and learners are reached through outreach programmes such as counselling workshops, healthcare education, visual, oral and health screening, and education; this number could be doubled with the launch of a second train.

The train has an on-board dental clinic, a primary healthcare clinic, an optometry clinic, a pharmacy and a counselling service to help patients deal with issues such as suicide, depression, abuse, parenting, conflict and violence.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

>> Running for 35 weeks every year through eight provinces, excluding Gauteng, Phelophepa I covers a total of 15 000 km of railway track and treats about 46 000 patients in its on-board clinics during this time.

>> Transnet is to spend R82-million on a second healthcare train, the so-called Phelophepa II, expected to be introduced in January 2012.

>> The cost of treating each person that comes to the train adds up to about R74.

>> Transnet Foundation head **Cynthia Mgijima** says that Transnet has undertaken such a large CSR project because the need to extend the reach of healthcare is just too great for government to tackle alone.

Coetzee says that the cost of treating each person that comes to the train adds up to about R74.

The cost of each procedure varies, just as it would in an urban practice; however, the cost for Phelophepa patients to receive treatment is significantly less and some procedures are offered free of charge.

The charge for a pair of spectacles is R30, dental procedures can cost as little as R10 and medication costs R5 for the dispensing of a script.

All procedures for children are free, while health screening, examinations and tests