FREIGHT RAIL REVITALISATION FRAMEWORK

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Freight Rail Revitalisation Framework (FRRF) is the Western Cape's coordinated effort to bring reliability, capacity and economic value back to the province's freight rail system. The project responds directly to declining rail performance, severe maintenance backlogs on branch lines and the rising social, environmental, and financial costs of a road-heavy freight economy. Drawing on detailed rail-flow analysis and the Western Cape Freight Demand Model, the framework identifies where rail-friendly commodities, particularly agriculture, manufacturing and mining, can shift from road to rail, thereby reducing congestion, emissions and infrastructure degradation.

Anchored in national reform processes such as the National Rail Policy, the Freight Logistics Roadmap, third-party access, and the emerging role of the Transport Economic Regulator, the project positions the province as a convenor and enabler rather than an operator. It brings together Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM), municipalities, private operators, freight owners, and communities to revive feeder and short lines, develop a provincial terminal network, and unlock private-sector investment in infrastructure and operations.

The Framework aims to build a more resilient, reliable, and climate-aligned freight ecosystem: one where revitalised rail corridors support regional industries, stabilise export competitiveness, reduce the impact of road and transport-related disruptions, and strengthen long-term provincial growth.

MAP OF THE PROJECT

Feeder lines:

- Bitterfontein (380 km)
- Saldanha (143 km)
- Worcester to George (357 km)

Short lines:

- Overberg (211 km)
- Riebeek West (60 km)
- Ceres (25 km)
- Atlantis (24 km)

Western Cape feeder and short lines map, including Bitterfontein, Saldanha, Worcester–George, Overberg, Riebeek West, Ceres, Atlantis

PROJECT STATUS

The Overberg Rail Business Case Phase 1 has been completed, establishing the demand, service design, and financial viability case for the Overberg corridor. Phase 2 is underway and includes infrastructure rehabilitation costing, refined road maintenance savings, incorporation of additional freight volumes, and identification of viable funding and investment options.

In parallel, the Prioritisation of Other Branch Lines project has been scoped to systematically assess and rank additional Western Cape branch lines against a defined set of criteria, identify investable opportunities, and develop a pipeline of bankable projects beyond the Overberg corridor.

FINANCIAL NEEDS

Approximate value: To be determined through business cases and feasibility studies.

The project's financial needs span early-stage preparation through long-term capital investment. Initial funding is required for detailed feasibility studies on priority feeder and short lines, and freight terminals, drawing on the Western Cape Freight Demand Model to quantify shiftable volumes, infrastructure condition, and operational viability. Additional resources are needed to analyse infrastructure condition, maintenance backlogs, clarify access tariffs under TRIM's Network Statement, and define the cost structure for terminal development and rolling stock requirements.

Capital investment will be required to rehabilitate inactive or underperforming branch lines, upgrade sidings, improve signalling and security, and establish an integrated terminal network that supports rail-friendly commodities. These needs remain dependent on TRIM-confirmed cost baselines and the final access regime for the B-network. Given Transnet's constrained balance sheet and the national emphasis on structural reform, the project anticipates a combination of blended finance, provincial support mechanisms, climate-aligned funding, and private capital through PSP models such as concessions, service contracts, and asset-maintenance partnerships.

FREIGHT RAIL REVITALISATION FRAMEWORK

PUBLIC/ PRIVATE SECTOR OPPORTUNITY

- Invest in terminal development aligned with identified freight flows and provincial economic priorities.
- Partner on branch line revitalisation through concession models supporting long-term operational sustainability.
- Collaborate on feasibility studies, business cases and pilot projects advancing freight modal shift.
- Co-fund infrastructure upgrades enabling rail access, reliability and competitive logistics services.

KEY PARTIES

- Western Cape Mobility Department (WCMD)
- Western Cape Government (WCG)
- Transnet Rail Infrastructure Manager (TRIM)
- Department of Transport (DoT), including PSP unit
- Private freight operators and Train Operating Companies
- Municipalities across the Western Cape
- Rail Safety Regulator (RSR)
- Transport Economic Regulator (TER)
- National Treasury
- Freight owners: agriculture, manufacturing, mining sectors
- Industry associations across agriculture, manufacturing and mining sectors
- Western Cape Freight Demand Model (WCFDM) data partners

TIMELINE

Short-term (Completed)	Medium-term (Active — 2026/27 FY)	Long-term (Implementation)	Ongoing
Rail analysis and Overberg Phase 1 Business Case completed.	Advance feasibility studies, develop a ranked investment pipeline, continued stakeholder engagements.	Deploy revitalised branch-line operations, expand terminal network, enable third-party access.	Reporting, monitoring, regulatory alignment, and refinement with national reforms

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

To be determined through business cases and feasibility studies for each branch line and freight terminal under consideration