

Ramokgopa: ‘Transmission grid needs major upgrade to unlock renewables’

South Africa's Minister in the Presidency responsible for Electricity, Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, has emphasised the critical need to expand the country's power transmission network. This upgrade is essential to unlock thousands of megawatts of new renewable energy generation capacity that's currently stranded due to grid limitations.



South Africa's Minister in the Presidency responsible for Electricity has had a busy week

"Transmission issues are the biggest hurdle," Ramokgopa said at a recent infrastructure forum. "We need to modernize and significantly expand our transmission lines by over 14,000km. To put that in perspective, we've only managed 4,000km in the past decade. This 14,000km expansion is specifically to allow new generation capacity to connect to the grid."

Ramokgopa highlighted the potential benefits, particularly in areas with strong renewable energy resources. "If we had sufficient transmission capacity in the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, and Western Cape, the grid could handle over 11,000MW of additional power," he remarked.



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Lindsey Schutters 11 Mar 2024



While acknowledging the challenge, he expressed optimism about the existing renewable energy pipeline.

"The pipeline is healthy, with over 66GW of potential," he said. "We've already identified priority corridors that could deliver at least 2,300MW. Upgrading substations is a more pressing need than building new transmission lines in these areas. Once that's done, we'll be able to harness this 2,300MW."

This push for grid expansion aligns with recent pronouncements from the government. A statement issued earlier this month following a meeting between President Cyril Ramaphosa and business leaders indicated progress on the National Energy Crisis Committee's (NECOM) initiatives and the implementation of the Energy Action Plan.

Load shedding

"Load shedding has decreased by 61% compared to the same period last year," the statement said. "This is due to the return of units at the Kusile power station, as well as the positive impact of new generation capacity from rooftop solar and private sector investment."

The statement also highlighted ongoing reforms in the energy sector, including the appointment of an independent board for the National Transmission Company of South Africa (NTCSA). Preparations are underway for this new entity to begin trading.

Despite these advancements, South Africans are still facing power cuts. Eskom has recently implemented Stage 3 load shedding during peak evening hours, transitioning to Stage 2 during the day. This alternating pattern is expected to continue until further notice.

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