

2026

SARA

RAIL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rail is more than a means of transport. It is a catalyst for economic growth, industrial development, regional integration and the movement of people and goods across borders. As Africa seeks to unlock new investment opportunities and strengthen its transport networks, collaboration within the railway sector has never been more important.

The 15th SARA Rail Conference & Exhibition, held from 20–22 October 2026 at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, brought together the leaders, decision-makers, innovators and industry partners shaping the future of rail across Southern Africa and the wider continent. The gathering provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, strategic engagement and the exchange of ideas on advancing railway infrastructure, investment and connectivity.

Under the theme, "Reimagining Rail Infrastructure: Unlocking Investment, Industrial Growth & Connectivity Across Africa," the conference explored the opportunities, partnerships and practical solutions needed to build a more efficient, competitive and sustainable railway sector. From infrastructure development and investment to operational performance, technology and regional integration, discussions reinforced the critical role of rail in supporting Africa's economic ambitions.

The 2026 edition was particularly significant as SARA celebrated 30 years of advancing railway cooperation and development across the region. The milestone provided an opportunity to reflect on three decades of collaboration, recognise the contributions of member railway administrations and industry partners, and celebrate the progress made in strengthening the regional railway sector. It also served as a moment to look ahead, reaffirming SARA's commitment to promoting greater connectivity, cooperation and a stronger future for African rail.

The success of this gathering was made possible through the collective commitment of the SARA leadership, railway administrations, government representatives, sponsors, exhibitors, speakers, partners and delegates. Their participation enriched the discussions, strengthened professional relationships and created opportunities for future collaboration.

As we reflect on both the conference outcomes and SARA's three-decade journey, the focus turns to building on this legacy, deepening partnerships and translating shared ambitions into tangible progress.

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88 Exhibiting Companies

10 Golf Sponsors

+1300 Delegates

19 October 2026	**Technical Tour** Huawei Innovation Campus, Woodmead, Jhb, South Africa
20 - 22 October 2026	**Conference & Exhibition** Sandton Convention Centre, Jhb, South Africa
23 October 2026	**Golf Day** Wanderers Golf Course , Jhb, South Africa

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30 YEARS
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Our Exhibitors
















































































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Our Speakers



Hon. Barbara Creecy
Minister of Transport
South Africa



Hon. Keoagile Atamelang
Minister of Transport
and Infrastructure
Botswana



Hon. Joshua Sacco
Deputy Minister of Transport
and Infrastructure Development
Zimbabwe



Jorge Bengue Calumbo
Secretary of State for
Land Transport
Angola



Dr. Bright Kumwembe
Ministry of Transport and Public Works
Malawi

Key Deliberations and Government Engagement

The 15th SARA Rail Conference and Exhibition attracted high-level government participation, including Ministers of Transport and Permanent Secretaries from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Angola. Their presence highlighted the strategic importance of rail transport in advancing regional integration, economic growth and cross-border trade.

The deliberations focused on strengthening regional railway connectivity, mobilising investment in rail infrastructure, harmonising policies and improving the efficiency and competitiveness of railway operations. Discussions also emphasised the importance of public-private partnerships and collaboration between governments, railway operators, development finance institutions and industry stakeholders.

The engagement reaffirmed the need for a coordinated regional approach to positioning rail as a catalyst for industrialisation, trade facilitation and sustainable economic development across Africa.

Technical Tour: Huawei Smart Rail Summit

The technical tour to Huawei marked an important step towards advancing railway digitalisation across the Southern African region. A key highlight was the launch of the African Intelligent Rail Initiative (AIRI), a collaborative initiative between Huawei and the Southern African Railways Association (SARA). The initiative aims to strengthen cooperation among regional railway operators and technology partners while accelerating the adoption of intelligent technologies and digital solutions across the railway sector.

During the engagement, Huawei showcased its Intelligent RAIL 2.0 solutions, demonstrating how emerging technologies, artificial intelligence and digital innovation can transform railway operations. The presentation highlighted practical opportunities to improve operational efficiency, enhance railway safety and strengthen infrastructure management.

The technical tour provided delegates with valuable exposure to innovative railway technologies and practical digital transformation solutions. It also created a platform for knowledge-sharing and collaboration, reinforcing the importance of technology partnerships in modernising Africa's railway systems and strengthening regional connectivity.

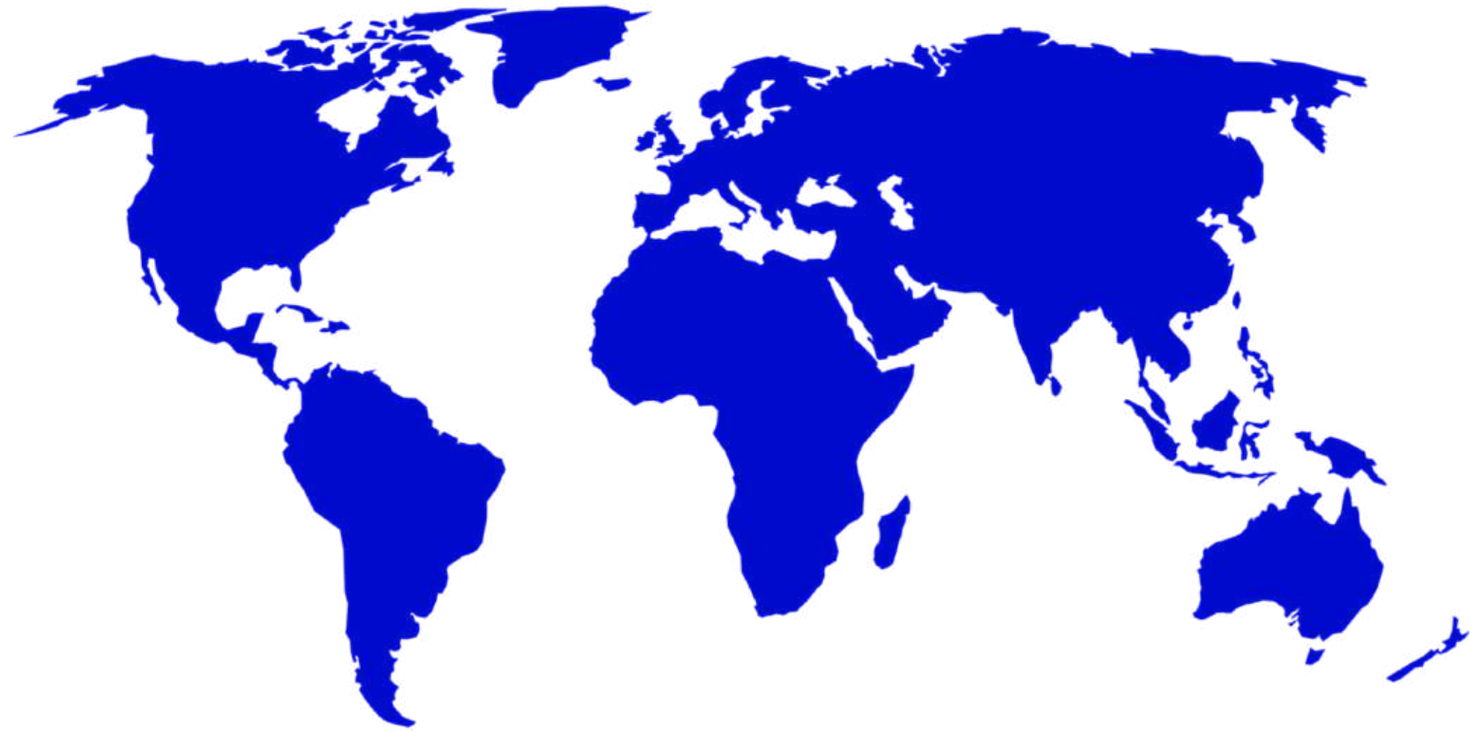






Delegate Reach & Participation







The 15th SARA Rail Conference & Exhibition attracted over 1,300 delegates, bringing together a diverse mix of government ministers, senior government officials, railway CEOs, regional industry leaders, and representatives from leading regional and international companies. Participation spanned Africa and global markets, including Asia, the Americas and Europe, reinforcing the conference's position as a key platform for international collaboration, investment opportunities and the advancement of Africa's railway sector.

SARA CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

A major highlight was the high-level ministerial engagement, which brought together Ministers of Transport and senior government representatives from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Angola. The discussions provided an opportunity to reflect on the state of rail in the SADC region, assess the challenges facing national railway systems and consider the role of government in driving railway development. Key deliberations centred on political commitment, cross-border cooperation, infrastructure investment, policy alignment and the need for stronger regional coordination to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of rail transport.

The conference programme featured extensive discussions on railway investment, project bankability, operational efficiency, infrastructure rehabilitation, local manufacturing and industrialisation. During the Railway CEOs' Think Tank, railway leaders examined strategies for stabilising operations, improving service reliability and optimising regional railway corridors to unlock greater economic value. Discussions also considered the need to strengthen railway infrastructure, improve asset management and create an enabling environment for increased private-sector participation.

Financing and investment remained central themes throughout the programme. Representatives from development finance institutions and investment partners explored innovative funding models, public-private partnerships and mechanisms for accelerating investment in strategic railway projects. The discussions highlighted the importance of developing bankable projects, improving institutional capacity and aligning infrastructure priorities with regional trade and economic development objectives.

The programme also placed considerable emphasis on railway industrialisation and the development of local manufacturing capabilities. Industry stakeholders explored opportunities to increase local supplier participation, strengthen engineering capacity, promote technology transfer and build competitive regional supply chains. These discussions reinforced the potential of railway investment to stimulate industrial growth, create employment and support the development of related industries across the continent.

Technology and innovation featured prominently, with sessions examining the application of artificial intelligence, intelligent rail systems, digital transformation, predictive maintenance and advanced railway safety solutions. The collaboration between Huawei and SARA through the African Intelligent Rail Initiative (AIRI) further demonstrated the opportunities presented by digital technologies in modernising railway operations. The Huawei technical engagement also provided delegates with exposure to intelligent rail solutions and emerging technologies that could support more efficient, connected and sustainable railway networks.

Other key programme topics included passenger rail development, open-access operating models, regulatory alignment, railway safety, dry ports, port connectivity, cross-border trade facilitation and the development of integrated pit-to-port supply chains. These discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening the relationship between railways, ports and other transport systems to improve the movement of goods and support regional and international trade. Dedicated sessions also addressed workforce development, skills transfer, women's participation and leadership in the railway industry, as well as environmental sustainability and the transition towards lower-carbon transport systems.

Beyond the formal conference sessions, the exhibition created an important platform for railway operators, manufacturers, technology providers, engineering companies and service providers to showcase their products, solutions and capabilities. It encouraged direct engagement between industry players, facilitated networking and provided opportunities to explore potential partnerships and business relationships. The 30 Years Milestone Gala Dinner offered a further opportunity to recognise SARA's contribution to the regional railway sector and celebrate three decades of cooperation among railway stakeholders.

Through these engagements, the 15th SARA Rail Conference & Exhibition provided a valuable platform for government, railway operators, investors and industry partners to exchange knowledge, discuss shared challenges and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Golf Day

Sponsors



The SARA Golf Day provided an additional platform for networking and relationship-building among railway executives, industry leaders, sponsors and other key stakeholders. Held at the Wanderers Golf Club, golfers came from across the regional railway sector in a relaxed and engaging environment, allowing delegates to strengthen existing relationships and establish new business connections outside the formal conference programme.

The golf day also created valuable opportunities for sponsors and participating organisations to engage directly with decision-makers, exchange ideas and explore potential areas of collaboration. Beyond the sporting experience, it reinforced the importance of relationship-building and industry partnerships in supporting SARA's broader objective of strengthening cooperation and advancing railway development across the region.

Golf Day



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"Together we are better"
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2027 SARA

RAIL CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

18 - 21 October 2027

Sandton Convention Centre ,Jhb, South Africa

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