

# The great pothole problem

By [Phetane Rapetswane](#)

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Potholes are an indicator of poor maintenance and lack of technical skills - and are the tip of the iceberg of South Africa's infrastructure problems.



Poor road maintenance has led to the development of large numbers of potholes in mainly inland areas.  
Image: [Mysoa](#)

This is the view of Chris Herold, vice-president of the SA Institute of Civil Engineering, as Gauteng begins to repair road infrastructure damaged by the heavy rains.

Herold said the roads have not been maintained properly for decades and that, when the rain came, infrastructure could not stand the stress.

He said potholes start with cracks on the road surface. The cracks are caused by routine traffic and ageing. If the crack is patched properly, there is more protection and heavy rain is less likely to penetrate the surface.

"But if you have the cracks, the water penetrates into the sub-base - and the base underneath the tarmac - it gradually forms a pothole," Herold said.

"The potholes are the tip of the iceberg. They are what we see now after the floods but are a much bigger problem than just that. We have poor maintenance of all infrastructure - water supply systems, pipes corroding, storm water drainage, sewerage system overloading and so forth," Herold said.

He said the cost of rehabilitating infrastructure increased as it deteriorated.

Gauteng Roads and Transport MEC Ismail Vadi said that the province had an emergency plan to fix the damage caused by heavy rains that damaged both municipal and provincial roads, causing potholes and sinkholes, and resulting in damage to low bridges.

Vadi said the department had put aside R50m to fix damaged provincial roads.

"Fortunately, no major provincial road has been washed away," Vadi said, adding that an assessment of sinkholes was under way.

Vadi also announced that 40km of the N14 connecting Mogale City with Tshwane would be rehabilitated over the next two years at a cost of R500m.

Herold said a 2007 study showed that just one in seven engineers employed in the public sector 20 years ago was left.

"Very often engineers are pushed underneath political appointees, who are not technically competent . As a result they become very frustrated and leave," he said.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge

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