

N2 project to make travelling easier

The N2 Wild Coast project will improve mobility and connectivity between provinces and towns, says Transport Minister Joe Maswanganyi.



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In an update on the project following his meeting with Eastern Cape Premier Phumulo Masualle, MEC for Roads and Public Works Thandiswa Marawu and MEC for Transport Weziwe Tikana, Minister Maswanganyi said the N2 is a strategic route. The N2 traverses four provinces, namely, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga.

"As government, we are aware that an investment in this road can have major socioeconomic benefits for these provinces said the Minister in a joint statement with Premier Masualle following their meeting at the Eastern Cape State House.

In the Eastern Cape, the N2 Wild Coast stretches from East London to the Eastern Cape border with KwaZulu-Natal. Of the total length, some 112km would be on a new "greenfields" alignment between the Ndwalane (near Port St Johns) and the Mtamvuna River (near Port Edward). The road will include two mega-bridge structures on the Msikaba and Mtentu Rivers, seven additional major river bridges and five interchange bridges.

The remainder of the project comprises the upgrading of the existing roads, mainly the R61 (already underway) and the future construction of ring roads in Mthatha, Idutwya and Butterworth.

Once complete, the route will be approximately 85km shorter than the current N2 alignment from Mthatha to Port Shepston and will be up to three hours faster, particularly for heavy freight vehicles.

"Economically, the project will result in significantly faster delivery times and lower transportation costs in terms of freight. It will improve mobility and connectivity between provinces and towns within and between provinces," said Minister Maswanganyi.

Expanding tourism opportunities

The Wild Coast has a lot of tourism potential and the project is expected to improve access, mobility and attractiveness for tourists. It will open up the provinces' agricultural potential by improving access to markets through an improved road.

In terms of local economic development, the project will yield significant local SMME business opportunities, both directly and indirectly.

The South African National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral) will ensure that local SMMEs have a significant involvement in project through training of local small, macro and medium enterprises (SMMEs). The roads agency will also ensure the training and development of SMMEs and labour during construction, as well as the development of local hard rock quarries and sand mines among others.

"The positive economic impact will be felt by places such as Port St Johns, Lusikisiki and Mzamba, as well as towns such as Flagstaff, Bizana and Holy Cross. The mandate given to Sanral is to ensure that locals benefit from both jobs and business opportunities."

Funding

When it comes to the funding of the project, the budget for the upgrading of the existing N2 and R61 portions of the N2 Wild Coast project has since 2011 been funded from the Sanral non-toll budget.

The total budget required for the N2 Wild Coast Road "greenfields" portion is approximately R8.5 - R9bn. Funding for the 10 bridges has already been made available through the Department of Transport.

"The ministry will be making an announcement as soon as I have completed my interaction with the SANRAL Board in this regard," said Minister Maswanganyi.

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