

N2 upgrade a strategic move

The upgrading of the N2 Wild Coast Road in the next six months will benefit the economy with more jobs created

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THE upgrading of the N2 Wild Coast road will help to unlock the potential of the Eastern Cape economy and contribute to job creating sectors such as eco-tourism, agro-processing and light manufacturing.

Upgrades of the road, which stretches from East London to the KwaZulu-Natal border, will begin in the next six months and are expected to be completed in 2021.

The project was announced by Eastern Cape Premier Phumulo Masualle during his 2017 state of the province address (Sopa).

The South African National Roads Agency (Sanral) has welcomed the announcement, saying Masualle's endorsement is a way forward for the road which is at the core of one of 18 strategic integrated projects designed to rejuvenate South Africa's infrastructure landscape.

Sanral spokesperson Vusi Mona said its mention in the Sopa suggests it is regarded as strategic to the province's development agenda.

He said the 410km upgrade would save road users up to three hours of driving time between East London and Durban.

"A world class highway is critical to the successful implementation of the provincial development strategy. There is a strong emphasis on tourism, agriculture and the oceans economy," Mona said.

"These sectors require a reliable road network to attract new investment."

Impoverished communities along the Pondoland coast will benefit through

improved access to local towns, faster travel times and lower transportation costs. A survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2015 showed 99% support for the project among the local population.

Mona said planning for the road was accompanied by a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and conservationists have been assigned to protect the biological diversity and natural heritage of the Wild Coast.

The upgraded road will include the construction of two of the largest bridges in Africa across the Msikaba River and the Mtentu River just outside Xolobeni.

The project will create some 6800 direct jobs and close to 28 000 indirect jobs during the construction phase.

Black-owned and women-owned businesses will benefit from the project and have the opportunity to gain further experience by working with the primary contractors.

Mona said this is a catalytic development for the Eastern Cape and adds to the R14bn value of infrastructure and maintenance projects already undertaken by Sanral in the province.

In his 2017 provincial budget presentation last week, MEC for economic development Sakhumzi Somyo allocated R2.3bn in 2017-18 and R6.9bn to roads infrastructure delivery in the province.

He said the money would see to the continuation of projects such as the Sabalele Road, Isiphethu Hospital road Phase 2, Magusheni Road Phase 1, Isilimela Hospital Road and Centane to Qholorha Phase 2.

He said an additional amount of



OPENING NEW AVENUES: The upgrading of the N2 Wild Coast road will help to unlock the potential of the Eastern Cape economy and create jobs. PICTURE: ROAD TRANSPORT NEWS

R261m in the 2017-18 financial year and R566m over the medium term expenditure framework (MTEF) was allocated to the department of roads and public works.

"We must highlight that our efforts to upgrade our roads network is being undermined by cost factors which are highly exorbitant compared to other provinces. The provincial treasury is

undertaking an assessment of how we can address this phenomenon to ensure better returns on our investment given the constrained fiscus," Somyo said.

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