
Roads boon for citrus industry

R1bn earmarked to upgrade routes linking Sundays River Valley with PE export centre

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THE Eastern Cape government will pump R1-billion into a massive road construction project in the Sundays River Valley area, in a venture set to boost the citrus industry.

Three major routes used in the Addo, Kirkwood and Paterson areas will undergo a revamp from October to make it easier for the industry to transport its produce to Port Elizabeth for export.

There have been complaints that the roads are riddled with potholes which cause massive financial losses.

The citrus industry in the Sundays River Valley region contributes about R1.5-billion to the province's GDP.

Delivering her budget policy speech in the Bhisho legislature yesterday, Roads and Public Works MEC Thandiswa Marawu said about R500-million would go towards the upgrade of the R335, linking Addo and Motherwell.

Her department would set aside R200-million for special maintenance of the R342 from Addo to Paterson, and R300-million for the upgrade of the R336 between Kirkwood and Addo.

Sundays River Citrus Company (SRCC) managing director Hannes de Waal said the planned upgrades would be a boon to the citrus industry, tourism and Valley residents.

"Addo is about 65km from the Port Elizabeth airport and in theory that should be a 45-minute drive. But currently it takes on average an hour and 20 minutes," De Waal said.

"The roads are too narrow and in a bad condition. So we are extremely happy to hear about the proposed improvements."

The SRCC represents the majority of citrus farmers in the Sundays River Valley and sends fruit across the country and abroad, including Europe and Asia.

"From a business point of view, the

citrus industry is bursting at the seams and better roads along our main export lines will only bolster our industry further," De Waal said.

"Better roads mean smoother and quicker travelling, as well as less damage and better maintenance of vehicles."

Their efforts to improve the roads leading to and from the Valley stretched back a number of years, he said, but since a sit-down meeting with Eastern Cape premier Phumulo Masualle last year, they had seen real progress in government efforts to improve the roads in their region.

"We have enjoyed some great cooperation with government officials, and our farmers are very impressed with the feedback we have received.

"It has created a general feeling of positivity in our region that I hope continues as these projects develop."

De Waal said Kirkwood had also been earmarked by the government's Small Town Revitalisation Project, a further boost for the region's agriculture and tourism industries.

In another big project for the Sarah Baartman district, Marawu's department will rebuild the Sand River Bridge at Cape St Francis in a project worth R58-million and expected to be completed by September.