SANRAL road projects help drive the EC's economic turnaround

MULTI-BILLION rand road projects in the Eastern Cape are a catalyst for the province's long-awaited economic transformation.

In the Chris Hani District alone, the South African National Roads Agency SOC Limited (SANRAL) has implemented 22 road projects worth R3-billion – a feat provincial premier Oscar Mabuyane said was making a significant difference to the lives of the municipality's constituents.

Premier Mabuyane has made no secret of his desire to uplift the region through mega infrastructure projects. He reiterated this position in an address to President Cyril Ramaphosa at the ninth District Development Model (DDM) Presidential Imbizo in Tsomo on Friday. Public works and infrastructure minister, Sihle Zikalala, was also in attendance.

"These projects come with jobs and opportunities for previously disadvantaged SMMEs in the communities where they are implemented," said Mabuyane.

"The key word in the DDM is 'development'. When we talk about development in this district, we focus mostly on infrastructure and agriculture development, because they are the foundation upon which we aim to build a better life for the people."

Mabuyane applauded SANRAL for its work on regional roads in the province – particularly the R56 and R61 in the Chris Hani District. Mabuyane said municipalities simply did not have the funds to repair them to the road agency's standards.

The R56 plan will revitalise the road from the N6 through the towns of Dordrecht and Indwe and all the way to Nqanqarhu (Maclear).

Meanwhile, the R61 at Tsomo Junction reopened early last year following the collapse of a major culvert in December 2021. SANRAL also widened that regional route.

The event was the Presidency's biggest imbizo to date, drawing an audience of some 6 000 people to hear from the president and high-ranking officials.

From early morning, people filed through the gates in droves to hear senior government leaders' plans for the district. They also learned more about various other state-owned enterprises, which had set up kiosks at the Tsomo sports grounds.

At a question-and-answer session opened to the floor, several district residents told Ramaphosa about access roads for school children in the Intsika Yethu local municipality in dire need of attention.

While not part of SANRAL's mandate, the agency does in such instances engage the relevant municipalities to intervene, and many of the same residents praised the agency for its efforts to resolve local issues.

Ramaphosa explained that while Presidential Imbizos offered communities the chance to voice their concerns to top-ranking government officials, what pleased him was that progress on the roads was also being recognised by audience members.

SANRAL plans to spend more than R60-billion on road infrastructure in the Eastern Cape over the next five years. This includes the towering 192 metre Msikaba Bridge near Lusikisiki and Mtentu Bridge on the N2 Wild Coast Road.

The latter is, however, being hampered by elements demanding a share of the work, the so-called "construction mafia".

Mabuyane used his address to highlight the severity of the situation to the president and guests, telling Ramaphosa he had engaged defence minister Thandi Modise to discuss possible solutions to the ongoing crisis.

Public works and infrastructure minister, Sihle Zikalala, gave the Eastern Cape further cause for optimism, announcing that his department was working with the Department of Defence to build 19 new bridges in the province.

In addition, the Department of Public Works was "putting youth to work" in the production of paving bricks to construct roads.

Ramaphosa welcomed the move, adding that paved roads were more durable than their tarred counterparts.

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