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RAL needs staggering R14 billion to fix Limpopo roads

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Road Agency Limpopo (RAL) will need a staggering R14 billion not only to rehabilitate but also to maintain the province's estimated 6,000 km of tarred roads. This was according to the MEC for Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure, Mr Ernest Rachoene, in a written response to questions asked in the provincial legislature by Ms Marie Helm of the Democratic Alliance (DA).

As a member of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature and the DA's spokesperson for Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure, Helm recently asked MEC Rachoene what the status of road rehabilitation and maintenance in the province was, following a major cut to the RAL's annual budget.

In a press statement issued on 31 July this year, Helm painted a bleak picture regarding RAL. She indicated that RAL is currently facing significant challenges regarding road maintenance and upgrades in Limpopo, including the R522 between Louis Trichardt and Vivo, and the D4 between Elim and Malamulele. She claimed that RAL had abandoned several rehabilitation projects in the province because of the budget cut. RAL's annual budget shrank from R2.886 billion in 2024/25 to just over R958 million in the 2025/26 financial year, and was further reduced to just over R861 million for the 2026/27 financial year.

In response, RAL's senior manager for communications, Mr Danny Legodi, said on 19 August that RAL projects, with specific reference to the R522 project, had not been abandoned. "The agency is ensuring that a capable contractor is appointed through a transparent process that safeguards public funds. RAL recognises the dangerous state of the R522 and the risks it poses to motorists. In the medium term, urgent remedial works will be implemented to stabilise hazardous sections, while the main upgrading contract is being finalised," Legodi said. As for a long-term solution, Legodi said that RAL had prioritised the R522 within its multi-year infrastructure programme, ensuring that once funding was fully secured, the road would undergo comprehensive rehabilitation to restore it to a safe and durable standard.

In the meantime, Helm had already written to MEC Rachoene and was waiting for a response. On 25 August, she received his reply.

Fifteen RAL projects are highlighted in Rachoene's written response regarding roadworks in Limpopo, but for the purposes of this article, we will only look at the two roadwork projects in our region, namely the R522 and D4 road. Regarding the R522, Rachoene said that a phased approach, because of budgetary constraints, was being followed for preventative maintenance. Phase 1 (Contract T1256) involved the rehabilitation of 2.5 km and was completed in the 2022/23 financial year. Phase 2 (Contract T1256A) included the maintenance of 9.3 km of the road and was completed in the 2023/24 financial year. Phase 3 (Contract T1256B) is currently at 60% completion but is undergoing a termination process because of poor performance by the contractor. The MEC said that RAL was actively taking steps to fast-track the completion of Phase 3, with the tender for this phase already closed and currently under evaluation. Phase 4 of the road, said Rachoene, was proposed for implementation within the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) as the contractor for Phase 3 was still in the process of termination.

With reference to the D4 road, a phased approach to preventative maintenance is also being followed because of budget constraints, with the total length of the road being approximately 97 km. Phase 1 (Contract T973) involved maintaining 30 km of the road, and this was complete. Phase 2 (Contract T973A) involved maintaining 5.5 km, which was also complete. Phase 3 (Contract T973B) involved maintaining 2.5 km, and this phase was also complete. Future phases are planned for the MTEF once funding became available, said Rachoene. In the meantime, cost centre teams are conducting routine road maintenance along the route. To address the demand for alternative technologies, investigations are ongoing into solutions like micro-surfacing, which is a low-cost option where potholes are patched to create a smooth driving surface. These solutions are planned under the MTEF. "It really is not good news. Once again, they are promising me that they will complete the R522 project. When I asked him when, the MEC promised that the contractor will be on site by the end of the year. But they have made similar promises in the past. In February they promised that the contractors will be on site on 1 April. That did not happen," Helm told the newspaper.