



Flagship SDI gets State buy-in

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The Mpumalanga government has reaffirmed its support for the Maputo Development Corridor.

Speaking at a convention of the South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors Mpumalanga director-general adv. Stanley Soko said that the provincial government was committed to the project and wanted to make sure it was successful for the benefit of the province and its people.

The Mpumalanga government has been severely criticised for its apparent lack of support for the project, the backbone of which is the 503-km N4 toll-road between Balmoral, in Mpumalanga, and Maputo, in Mozambique.

Last year, a Canadian-funded report, commissioned by the development policy research unit at the University of Cape Town, found that, in Mpumalanga, the behaviour of provincial and local politicians was not conducive to promoting the project coherently.

The study reported that the attempt to pull the State out of active involvement with the project after its initial fast-track facilitating role was "highly problematic", leading to the private sector having to take on a role it is not suited to.

It is said that, along the corridor, private contractor Trans African Concessions (Trac) was left to defend its tolling policies against members of the public, while the provincial and national governments seemed to wash their hands of the issue.

While admitting that the government team given the task of developing the project were neglecting their duties, Soko said that these problems had been dealt with and that the government was ready to play its part.

South Africa's flagship spatial development initiative (SDI) has been plagued by a number of problems since it was initiated in about 1996.

Exaggeration of the potential of the project has led to some disappointment of the outcome four-and-a-half years down the line, reports Trac CEO Trevor Jackson.

The border posts between South Africa and Mozambique remain inefficient, with the renovation of the Maputo port being slow, he said.

This has affected the flow of traffic using the N4 toll-road negatively, and investors have not yet received the returns expected.

Yet, the project has had some positive spin-offs for the communities surrounding the project.

Mpumalanga capital Nelspruit has become South Africa's fastest-growing town as a result of the improved road infrastructure.

Every month, people from nearby Mozambique and Swaziland spend as much as R50-million on consumer goods in the town.

The project phase of the development, which involved building 60 km of new road infrastructure, extensive rehabilitation work and resealing and resurfacing, has been completed ahead of schedule.

More than 6 000 casual, temporary and permanent jobs were created by the project, of which 82% of which went to local communities and 71% to women.

In addition, more than 20 000 people received training in various areas, including construction, basic life-skills and general jobs skills (such as sewing, childcare, small-farm management).

The improved road has also reduced the number of fatal accidents drastically.

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