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MCLI leads to economic development

NELSPRUIT - The Maputo Logistics Corridor Initiative (MCLI) is starting to prove its worth as a major contributor to the economic development of Mpumalanga.

It recently held its third annual general meeting in Maputo, where representatives of the various key players gave delegates an update on progress.

The key elements of the MCLI are the road, railway, the border post at Lobombo/Rassano Garcia and the port and its various terminals.

The event was opened by the South African high commissioner to Mozambique, Ms Thandi Lujabe-Rankoe and she emphasised both country's commitment to achieving regional integration in the future. She said, "Regional integration programmes must assist in the eradication of poverty and must help to enable economic growth in a sustainable way. The MCLI is a key role player overall to help the southern African region to strengthen its strategic role on the world map."

Mr Hannes van Wyk of Trac says traffic on the N4 is increasing annually by between five to seven per cent and truck traffic is increasing by an enormous 10% annually. The concession's 30-year contract to operate the highway expires at the end of 2027. Van Wyk highlights some of the current construction work that is being done such as the recent completion of the resurfacing of the road near Machadodorp and the construction of an extra lane between Wonderfontein and Belfast, which is expected to be completed in 26 months. He also notes that, although not part of the original concession agreement, Trac has agreed to develop the proposed 23-kilometre ring road to the north of Nelspruit before 2009.

Speaking for Mozambican ports and railways (CFM), Mr David Gomes says the rehabilitation of the Mozambican railway is almost finished. Coal and magnetite traffic on the line is reported as being on the increase. "The rehabilitation programme is increasing the maximum tonnage per axle on the railway to 20 tons, which will provide us with an overall capacity increase, in the hopes of achieving the nine million tons of traffic handled per year, envisaged by the year 2009," says Gomes. "Projections are also that the number and frequency of trains on the route will also increase."

Dr Danilo Nala of the Mozambican Revenue Authority gave an inspiring message in that he said the concept of achieving a "one-stop" border post was no longer a dream but a reality.

He said the principle would be applied in the three main areas at the border post including the one for commercial freight, one for passengers and one for rail. He said it would become standard practice for trucks to be processed at the site four kilometres east of the Ressano Garcia Border Post, in order to speed up services.

The Maputo Port Development Company's Dick Moore reported that there was a marked increase in the traffic handled in Maputo's port. He said there was an increase in the number of lines calling at the port.

Maputo's port was currently the subject of a $273 million investment to upgrade facilities. This included the construction of new bulk liquids-, a ferrochrome- and car terminals. Moore did point out, however, that since the introduction of the scanning system at the harbour, the annual growth rate of 12-16% could not be maintained and the growth rate had now dropped to two per cent.

"We really hope to be able to sort out these remaining issues soon and be able to run our world-class security system and maintain the competitiveness of the port," Moore said.

The current South African chairman of the MCLI and long-time champion of the corridor project, Dr Mathews Phosa, urged authorities to work towards achieving a 24/7 border post, while pledging his continued commitment to the project to ensure that all the original objectives were met.

Phosa also emphasised the fact that the MCLI was the fundamental reason for the economical development the region was experiencing.

Concluding the evening, MCLI's CEO, Ms Brenda Horne said she was pleased with the progress the MCLI was making, but she also recommitted herself to drive and advance the project further in future.