

## MINUTES OF MEETING

**CLIENT** : KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport  
**PROJECT** : Sani Pass Road Upgrade – Phase 2  
**PROJECT No** : J27344  
**PURPOSE** : Project Meeting No. 5 – Tour Operators and Taxi Operators  
**PLACE** : The Himeville Arms Hotel  
**DATE & TIME** : 20 June 2008 13h00 – 16h30  
**MINUTE TAKER** : Sanusha Govender

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<b>APOLOGIES</b>			
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**ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION**  
 None

**Approved by:**

Russell Stow

Item No.	Comment By	Comment	Response By	Response	Action
<b>1.</b>	<b>OPENING DISCUSSIONS</b>				
1.1.	RS	<p>RS welcomed all to the workshop and briefly described the project and Arcus GIBB's role in the project.</p> <p>RS then discussed the structure of the meeting and delivered the Power Point Presentation which detailed the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) currently being undertaken for the upgrading of the Sani Pass (Phase 2). He further described the Scoping Phase currently in progress and explained the outcomes of this Phase.</p> <p>RS emphasised that the project is still in the early stages and there are therefore, no definite or clear-cut solutions to the problems and issues faced by the project at this stage.</p>			

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<b>2.</b>	<b>PROJECT DISCUSSION</b>				
2.1.	RS	<p>RS observed that the comment questionnaire mentioned shows a clear misunderstanding of the project and pointed out that a 'hardened surface' does not necessarily imply 'tar / asphalt'.</p> <p>He further noted that the questionnaire asks the direct question "Do you want the Sani Pass tarred?" which creates the assumption that 'tarring' is the only option being considered for the upgrading of Phase 2. This is not accurate.</p>			
2.2.	KvdB	<p>Stated that not enough emphasis has been placed on the fact that the Sani Pass is an established international brand.</p> <p>Destroying this brand would be detrimental to tourism in the future in this region.</p>	RS	Noted the comment but pointed out that if nothing was done to upgrade or protect the road in some way, the Pass would degrade to a state where it is no longer safe as a road and was causing environmental damage to the point that it would have to be closed permanently. There is no dispute that the upgrade is essential, however, it must be decided on what is the best way of achieving this goal with limited impacts (including environmental, social, tourism, economic)	
2.3.	GL	Requested clarity as to whether the road up to the 14km mark will be asphalt and thereafter may not necessarily be asphalt but a hardened surface of some sort.	RS	Confirmed the understanding to be correct and noted that there are other alternative surfaces that are being investigated by the design engineers.	
2.4.	GL	Questioned if these alternatives are considered from the environmental perspective.	RS	Stipulated that the engineers are cognisant of the fact that the Pass road (P318) transects a World	

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				Heritage Park and, as such, environmental aspects are key.	
2.5.	GL	Commented that an engineer at a meeting for Phase 1 stated that the tarring of the road is part of a larger plan to tar all provincial roads with asphalt specify mentioned.	RS	Responded saying that it had been established by the project engineers that tarring the entire road may not be the best option for this project. He noted that, regardless of previous statements made, the proposed development is subject to approval by the Department Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and is therefore not <i>a fait accompli</i> .	
2.6.	KvdB	Noted that previously in public gatherings the DoT had stipulated the entire road would be tarred.			
2.7.	RB	Noted that there are numerous examples of tar roads degenerating, as tar is not always the most appropriate surface in the harsh environmental conditions on mountain passes such as the Sani Pass.	SP	Responding reiterating that the project engineers had stated that tar may not be the most appropriate surface on various parts of the road. Investigations were still under way.	
2.8.	KM	Observed that the degeneration of the tar roads in Lesotho was due to the fact that two different contractors were used of which were foreign and did not have any understanding of the environmental conditions.			
2.9.	GM	Questioned whether the road would be upgraded to allow for up to 7 tonnes vehicles to travel on the road.	RS	Confirmed the query and further responded that the design would take into account the challenges posed by the physical environment in order to allow any vehicle within the 7 tonnes limit up the Pass.	
2.10.	GM	There had been a miscommunication with regard to the motivation for the upgrade of the road which claims that the upgraded road will link South Africa and Lesotho. In actual fact, most of the people who use the road only do day trips and then return down to South Africa.	RS	Indicated that the motivation as stated is correct but is not the only motivation, but also noted that there is a political driver in this project. The motivation would be addressed in the EIA.	
			KM	Highlighted that importance must be placed on the future prospects that upgrading the road may bring as it is an international link. The diamond mining companies may opt to use this route too, as the current transportation route is expensive. The Sani Pass Road is an important trade route.	
2.11.			KM	Commented that the local people have cultural and heritage ties to the Pass and have been moving between the two countries for many generations using the Pass. As such, the weight of the local input should not be considered less important because they do not use the road as often as the tourists and tour operators.	

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2.12.	SP	Highlighted the two types of users of the road, namely eco-tourists and commercial traffic.			
2.13.	SP	Questioned whether KM was implying that should the road be upgrade, then the volume of commercial traffic on the road would increase?	KM	Agreed that was the intent of his statement.	
2.14.	EM	Questioned whether concrete was one of the alternate surfaces suggested as concrete cracks in the snow can result in potholes and consequently closure of the road.  Noted that maintenance of the road will be very important.	RS	Confirmed that concrete is one of the options under consideration. The engineers are aware of these challenges and are investigating similar situations overseas where road surfaces exist in similar physical and environmental conditions.	
2.15.	RB	Queried whether the taxi operators would be content with the road if it was reasonably maintained as dirt road?	RS	Stated that the road needs to be easily accessible to everyone not only the taxi drivers and 4x4s and therefore cannot be a 'reasonably maintained dirt road'.	
2.16.	RB	Commented that possibly the DoT did not maintain the road in order to acquire the motivation for completely upgrading the road and noted that poor maintenance had resulted in the environmental damage.			
2.17.	RB	Pointed out that the tar roads in Europe are often closed for months and require very expensive equipment to clear them and questioned whether South Africa had sufficient resources to undertake such maintenance.			
2.18.	KvdB	Noted that since the Kruger Park roads had been tarred many animals have been killed.			
2.19.	GM	Stated that, when questioned, many tourists advised that should the Sani Pass be tarred they would not visit the area again. These results were illustrated in the WESSA questionnaire handed out to tourists.			
2.20.	KM	Noted that, as someone who has frequently travels the road he has never seen the questionnaire.	RB	Responded the questionnaire was available in both languages and placed in a box at the border post.	
2.21.	KM	Questioned the authenticity and independence of the questionnaire, stating that the questionnaire cannot represent all the people travelling the road.	RS	Noted that the questionnaire gives the assumption that the road will definitely be tarred and that this can be construed as biased as it does not tell the whole story.	

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2.22.	SP	Commented that it would be important to note what may change after the road is upgraded. For example, there would be no bird watchers on the road due to the speed limit.			
2.23.	GM	Commented that at the recent Tourism Indaba, it was noted that the tourists come the Southern Drakensberg only to travel the Pass and not to see the mountains, which can be seen from numerous other points.			
2.24.	MC	Questioned whether the baboons had been considered in the project, as the increased noise and the tourist activity may cause the baboons to become aggressive as has occurred in other similar areas.	RS	Point noted.	
2.25.	RB	It is important to note the amount of tourists who use the pass as opposed to taxis users.	KM	It cannot be stated that because more tourists travel up the Pass that they will have a higher priority or importance than people who travel up in taxis.	
2.26.	SP		The border post should have the exact data as all the passports are stamped. The taxi drivers and the tour operators need to build a better working relationship.		
2.27.	UKN	Queried as to how much influence EIA process has in the road being upgraded.	RS	Explained that Arcus GIBB is an independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) and as such, has no interest in the outcome of the decision. The purpose of the EIA is to provide the decision-maker, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) with adequate and accurate information to make a decision on the project. The EIA does not make any decision but does provide recommendations which the DEAT may chose to enforce or ignore in the conditions of approval.	
2.28.	KM	It is however inevitable that the project will go ahead.	RS	The upgrade will, in all probability, go ahead due to the current state of the Pass which everyone agrees needs to be fixed. However, how the upgrading occurs, what it looks like and what it is made of, is very dependant on the conditions of the Record of Decision issued by the DEAT. Noted that there must also be an understanding that the political decision to upgrade the road has already	

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				been made.	
2.29.	RS	Further explained and described the design challenges put forward by the engineers.			
2.30.	RB	There is propaganda surrounding the project, as people in Lesotho believe, that the new upgraded road would result in service provision.	RS	Our project has not considered the provision of services to Lesotho and as such has never implied such.	
2.31.	RS	Explained the purpose of the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) and the Environmental Control Officer (ECO).	KvdB	Suggested that using public observers from the community may be the best option to fill the role as ECO to ensure that the conditions of the ROD are maintained.	
2.32.			RS	Responded that the ECO needs to be someone with experience in understanding and managing construction projects.	
2.33.	RS	Noted that there are other control measures too assist with effective environmental control work such as the community voicing any concerns to the ECO or project engineer who will have to document any comments or complaints in a complaints register kept on site.	KvdB	Requested that there needs to be assurance that the concerns are acted on. There should be a feedback system in place.	
2.34.			RS	Agreed stating that the feedback system would be included in the EMP.	
2.35.	GM	Question why the World Heritage Site status will be lost if the road is not upgraded?	RS	Responded stating that the condition of the road is causing significant environmental damage to the World Heritage Site which has to be conserved and protected. Failure to do so allows its continued degradation and would eventually be in such a bad state that the site would lose its value and therefore its status.	
2.36.	RS	Explained the public participation process thus far.			
2.37.	RB	Commented that the Sani Pass is important to the tour operators, not only because of business but because it is part of our heritage as South Africans.	RS	Noted the comment but pointed out that many of the comments received had been very emotive which is understandable, but cannot be quantified which made trying to assess such issues very difficult.	

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2.38.	GM	Clarified that she was not stating that the road should not be upgraded but stating that it should be done to a reasonable level that best met the requirements of as many stakeholders as possible (compromise).	RS	Agreed but noted that retaining the gravel state of the road required suitable materials to continuously be dug up (from borrow pits) and brought to the site to repair the road. This material had to come from somewhere. Problems with this included finding suitable material and the unsustainability of the whole concept – digging up one place to fix another indefinitely. These problems are being faced by Phase 1 which is why it is taking so long to construct.	
2.39.	RS	Ideally the EIA is scheduled to be concluded by the end of the year however this is dependant on a number of factors as well on the DEAT. It will then take up to 3 years to construct.			
2.40.	RB	Noted that blasting would affect the fauna and flora.	KvdB	Responded stating that there are many ways to blast and minimise the noise level and surrounding damage.	
2.41.			RS	Unfortunately blasting will have to have to happen if the upgrade goes ahead. It is unavoidable.	
2.42.			SP	Explained that blasting methods have become more advanced and can be very controlled, thereby limiting the impact.	
2.43.	GM	Questioned whether the road will be closed or at least reasonable accessible during construction?	RS	Responded by stating that the DoT had requested that the road remain open during construction however there are safety issues that need to be considered and this is also just not practically possible. He further noted that no work can be done in wet conditions and hot and cold conditions which limits the construction time substantially. If the road is closed for periods of time, the upgrade construction could be completed in a much shorter time. In addition, structures like bridges take time to build and there could be no access during these times.	

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2.44.	AM	Questioned if it were possible to upgrade the road only to a certain level?	RS	Responded by noting that the cause of the state of the road is uncontrolled or unmanaged drainage and the associated erosion. Resolving these issues requires that substantial upgrade and repair work be undertaken. A lesser detail or quality of upgrading would not solve the cause and result in the same impacts occurring.	
2.45.	GL	The traffic increase may lead to higher impact on the tourism activities on the road.	RS	Noted.	
2.46.	GM	Provided the example of the Swart Berg Pass as a perfect gravel road.	KvdB	Queried whether that road had the environmental conditions as the Sani Pass such as rainfall and snow and heat and traffic?	
2.47.	RS	Conveyed the point that the stakeholders most at risk from the proposed development i.e. the tour operators, are also the group which can most influence the conditions of the final decision by voicing not only issues and concerns but by providing solutions which work to their advantage.			
2.48.	SP	Encouraged the more established tour operators which bring greater heritage value i.e. Thaba Tours and Major Adventures, to get together and come up with a holistic vision.	KvdB	Agreed that the tour operator community should give a combined comment.	
2.49.	RS	Noted that in the evaluation process of all comments and issues submitted, that all emotive content had to be removed as it cannot be measured objectively. For effective input into the process, comments needed to be substantiated with grounds and examples. He further emphasised that solutions to issues and concerns were just as important.	RB	Highlighted his contentment that the environmental consultants understand the issues discussed in the meeting.	
The meeting was concluded at 3:30pm					