

MINUTES OF MEETING



ARCUS
GIBB
ENGINEERING & SCIENCE

CLIENT : KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport
PROJECT : Sani Pass Road Upgrade – Phase 2
PROJECT No : J27344
PURPOSE : Project Meeting No. 3 – WESSA
PLACE : Sani Pass Backpackers Lodge
DATE & TIME : 07 April 2008 10h30 – 14h00
MINUTE TAKER : Sanusha Govender

NAME	REPRESENTING	E-MAIL ADDRESS	DISTRIBUTION
PRESENT			
Di Dold (DD)	WESSA	Conservation@wessakzn.org.za	1
Eddy Gademan (EG)	SSI	eddyg@ssi.co.za	1
Simone Suchet (SS)	Sani Lodge Backpackers	info@sanilodge.co.za	1
Russel Suchet (RS)	Sani Lodge Backpackers Local WESSA Rep	info@sanilodge.co.za	1
Mike Clark (MC)	UFA/ Phulela Biosph	N/A	1
Stephen Piper (SP)	Pied Piper Expeditions	vulture@telkomsa.net	1
Kobus van der Berg (KB)	Southern Drakensberg Community Tourism Organisation (SDCTO)	chairman@drakensberg.org	1
N.Ntombela (NN)	Ndizani Civil Works	nombulelo@ndilanicivilworks.co.za	1
Russell Stow (RMS)	Arcus GIBB (Pty) Ltd	rstow@gibb.co.za	1
Gisela Fechter (GF)	Arcus GIBB (Pty) Ltd	gfechter@gibb.co.za	1
Rashieda Davids (RD)	Arcus GIBB (Pty) Ltd	rdavids@gibb.co.za	1
Sanusha Govender (SG)	Arcus GIBB (Pty) Ltd	sgovender@gibb.co.za	1

APOLOGIES

None

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

None

Minuted by: Sanusha Govender

Approved by: Russell Stow

Item No.	Comment By	Comment	Response By	Response	Action
1.	OPENING DISCUSSIONS				
1.1.	DD	Welcomed and thanked all for attending and noted that the meeting will be conducted informally.			
1.2.	RMS	<p>Opened by thanking everyone for their attendance and for Di Dold's efforts in arranging the meeting and noted that it was the first interaction between the local residents and interest groups and the environmental consultants for Phase 2 of the Sani Pass Road Upgrade. He further highlighted the importance of local residents and tour operators in this assessment process acknowledging their combined local knowledge of the area as well as the possible impacts that the proposed development may have on them and the environment.</p> <p>He then explained that the purpose of the meeting was to introduce the proposed project, discuss any ideas and thoughts as well as to voice any initial concerns and issues.</p>			
2.	PROJECT BACKGROUND				
2.1.	RMS	Provided the background to the project noting that Acer Africa had been the Environmental Consultant for Phase 1 of the Sani Pass Upgrade. Phase 1 comprised the section of the Road from km0 to km14 and was currently under construction. Arcus GIBB had been appointed to be the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) for this proposed development i.e. Phase 2 which extended from Km14 to the summit on the Lesotho border at km33.			
2.2.	RMS	<p>Explained that, as part of the process, Arcus GIBB was trying to get the key stakeholders involved early in the design stages of the process.</p> <p>He noted that the processes for the Phase 1 and 2 were different as they were being undertaken under different legislation and had different requirements i.e. Phase 1 was under the Environment Conservation Act and required only a Scoping Phase while Phase 2, under the National Environmental Management Act, involved a Scoping and Impact Assessment Phase.</p> <p>He further highlighted that the Scoping Phase would only describe the proposed development and identify and describe the potential impacts which determined the scope of study for the Impact Assessment Phase. It would not include solutions / results from the assessment.</p>			

Item No.	Comment By	Comment	Response By	Response	Action
3.	PROJECT DISCUSSION				
3.1.	KB	Where do we stand with regard to the Record of Decision (ROD) for Phase 1?	RMS	The ROD for Phase 1 of the project has been issued by the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (DAEA) in terms of the Environment Conservation Act. He further noted that Phase 2 is legislated in terms of National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), which has a different process to that of Phase 1.	
3.2.	RS	Noted that the issues associated with Phase 1 of the Upgrade and Phase 2 will be very similar.	RMS	Arcus GIBB has the Phase 1 Scoping Report and noted that many of the issues would overlap. However, considering the significant difference in the nature of the environment in Phase 2 compared to Phase 1, there will be various new impacts to assess.	
3.3.	SP	Noted that the EIA for Phase 1 did not understand the issues presented and this would reflect on how Phase 2 would go ahead.	All	Noted	
3.4.	RS	Raised the concern that there had been no communication about the Phase 1 project until a sod turning ceremony took place before the environmental assessment had been undertaken.	RMS	Noted that it was very presumptuous to assume that the project would go ahead.	
3.5.	MC	The Phase 1 had shown a lack of foresight in terms of planning and therefore was a waste of money.	EG	Noted that it would be inappropriate to comment on the previous project.	

3.6.	MC	The whole project is a political decision that has already been made.	RMS	<p>Explained that that did not make Phase 2 a <i>fait accompli</i>. This proposed development would be assessed in an objective manner, in order to determine the overall sustainability of the development. There is, however, a political push for it to be accomplished. He further noted that the road was currently not a sustainable state, and would continue to degrade until it would have to be closed. There must be some form of upgrade and maintenance to preserve to road.</p> <p>The more important question to ask was “How will project progress?” and whether value would be given to the public participation process, the ecology and the environment. He indicated that IAP input was critical to finding a suitable solution and achieve an optimal engineering design. He further noted that it would be a worthless exercise if the design was not practical and suitable, hence the need to involve the local IAPs.</p>	
3.7.	GF	Noted that the engineers were still in the initial stages of design.			
3.8.	SP	<p>SP highlighted that the Sani Pass is the very important in terms of its botanical diversity and was therefore ideal for botanical tourism.</p> <p>He noted that the Pass road is currently an engineering disaster and requires some form of upgrade to maintain it but safeguarding the ecology for the future is more important. The Sani Pass has endemic species as well as an ethos that is unique like no other and is the highlight of most foreign tourist trips to South Africa.</p> <p>How do you preserve this ethos and not change the ecology? The solution to achieve a balance is a compromise with regard to the specifications from the DOT, the tourism component, the Government and the local interest groups.</p>			

3.9.	RS	Will people (Basotho's) across the border be involved in the EIA process.	RMS	Confirmed that the Lesotho Government and people between the Border post and Maseru would be consulted, however, due consideration would have to be given to the fact that SA legislation does not apply in Lesotho.	
3.10.	MC	<p>Provided insight into the history of the Pass noting that it was formed by a series of bridal paths and that the Basotho people using picks to maintain the road in a reasonable state. The Natal Parks Authority (EKZNW) later used borrow pits to create a proper road and also created drainage issues with no maintenance of the road or the drainage.</p> <p>He disputed that the "tar" road which is proposed, would withstand the climate conditions without continuous maintenance, and noted that a section of tourists (Germans) have stated that they will not return to Sani Pass if the road is tarred. A tarred road may destroy tourism in the area.</p>			
3.11.	FB	Pointed out that Sani Pass is a known brand name and is a draw card for foreign spending.			
3.12.	RS	<p>Commented that the dirt road nature of the road gives the Pass its appeal and overall attraction. The area would lose its sense of isolation if the Pass is tarred.</p> <p>Noted that the people of Lesotho did not want a tarred road as it would also impact on community tourism development in Lesotho where tourists want to experience local living condition and traditions in such remote areas. KZN Tourism supports community tourism development in Lesotho and was therefore against anything which would impact on them. Proof should be provided to illustrate how tarring the road would benefit tourism and social upliftment.</p>			
3.13.	RS	There are a variety of studies that have carried out in this area and which have included constant consultation with the local residents. The Phase 2 EIA should encapsulate all this information and not recreate it.	RMS	Agreed that the information is important to the Phase 2 EIA and that Arcus GIBB would look to the IAPs to assist with providing information they thought might be relevant to the project.	

3.14.	RS	Queried the purpose of the road noting that its purpose would determine the form and surface/design. Everyone agrees that the road needs to be upgraded, but questioned whether a tarred road is the best form?			
3.15.	MC	Indicated that the Basotho do not want to formalized road as it would increase crime.			
3.16.	MC	Commented that currently the road is available all year. However, in the winter months with snow and ice, the upgraded road could be closed for up to 3 months - how could this be then used as an alternate transport through route to Durban from Maseru?			
3.17.	RS	Further pointed out that the route between Maseru and Durban may be shorter but not cheaper, and it would still be more efficient to go around. He further disputed the point that commercial traffic would use the P318 as a through-road to KZN. He further noted that that the roads in Lesotho are still gravel and that tarred roads fall apart very quickly if not maintained effectively and can be far more damaging to vehicles e.g. potholes than gravel.			
3.18.	RR	The upgraded road would degenerate at rapid pace unless there is continuous maintenance which would require a maintenance plan. This could create jobs.	EG	Agreed that the proposed upgrade would require maintenance, and this would be considered in the design.	
3.19.	FB	The Government must be able to ensure that the maintenance plan is complied with.	EG	Suggested that maintenance of the road could be privatised.	

3.20.	SP	Commented that currently bird watchers are able to stop at any point on the Pass but would not be able to do so when the Pass is upgraded. Queried how the speed of the road would be managed considering this?	EG	<p>Agreed that this needed to be considered in the reviews in the design. EG further discussed the design speed of the road which denotes the speed at which vehicles may travel safely on a particular road depending on the steepness, bends and the road surface itself. He added that the construction turning circles will be formalised viewpoints</p> <p>He pointed out that there are many challenges from the geotechnical perspective and noted the soft rock at the bottom of the Pass and the basalt on the higher reaches.</p> <p>Various options have been considered such as vertical cut faces which have a rock "drop zone". He noted that there are a host of possible solutions but also noted that there is no one solution with each dependent on the receiving environment.</p> <p>EG described issues related to drainage and explained that the way to manage water is to let it flow and not to impede it by allowing pipes to be large enough to allow rocks to flow through them. Ice, underground activity and water movement, and types of surfacing all still needed to be considered in the design.</p> <p>He highlighted further construction and safety issues such as oil spillages and vehicles falling over into the valley.</p> <p>He further noted that the project team are considering using the existing Border Post as the site camp.</p>	
3.21.	GF	Commented that there are areas of the route which could have significant visual impacts and which needed to be considered in the design.	EG	Agreed stating that standard grey concrete retaining walls would not be suitable in a world heritage site.	
3.22.	MC	Will the same alignment be used?	EG	Confirmed yes, but indicated that on some sections the turns are too steep to achieve the required speed and that these corners may have to be realigned and the existing corners used as view points. This is still under discussion at this stage.	

3.23.	SP	Will you be raising the road in certain areas?	EG	Yes, certain sections may have to be raised.	
3.24.	SP	Any idea on the total cost of the project?	EG	Rough estimate cost is approximately R300-350 million	
3.25.	RS	What will the road servitude be?	EG	30m wide servitude but road base width of 10m	
3.26.	DD	Will there be borrow pits?		No, there will no borrow pits in Phase 2 as the intention is to use the borrow pits from Phase 1 as these are already permitted.	
3.27.	SP	Indicated that the tour operators would not allow the road to be closed for a whole day and would get a supreme court interdict to prevent that from happening if necessary.			
3.28.	RS	Questioned if a dirt road was not an all weather road, thereby meeting the specifications set by the DOT.	EG	Assured RS that the point would be discussed with the DoT, however, a dirt or gravel road is not considered an all weather road. Leaving sections of the road gravelled may be an option to consider.	
3.29.	RS	Queried whether a dirt road can be built which does not impact on the environment.	EG	Responded saying Yes and no and that the problem with gravel on this road is that it has a steep gradient and the gravel would wash into the pipes and block them causing more damage.	
3.30.	KB	Noted that a smooth surface would increase runoff.			
3.31.	MC	Highlighted that the Basotho people in the early days used to maintain the road in a sustainable way and had drains that went over the road (over the surface).	EG	Noted that the DOT wanted the drainage to go under the road.	
			RS	It would be a loss to the Sani Pass experience if the water (and rivers) were directed under the road.	
			SS	Noted that traction on a rough surface is far greater than on a smooth surface.	
3.32.	SS	Questioned whether salt will be used to prevent black ice?	EG	Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is opposed to salt being used on the Pass. Gravel may be used as an alternative.	
3.33.	MC	Highlighted that a dirt road is more of an all weather road than a tar road, noting that only the drainage needed to be managed.			
3.34.	SS	Woody vegetation on the side of the road will be lost when the road is widened.	KB	Vegetation helps to prevent the erosion.	
3.35.	DD	The road needs to be upgraded but it should not lose its sense of place.			
3.36.	RS	Pointed out that the width of impact would be at least 14m taking into the account the loss in vegetation on the sides of the road.	EG	Noted the point and indicated that all input is valuable as engineers cannot see all the perspectives.	

3.37.	RS	Noted that this is a world heritage site and the uKhahlamba World Heritage Park could lose its status if the road is not upgraded properly.	All	Agreed	
3.38.	MC	MC questioned whether a public road is allowed to go through a heritage site.	RMS	Respond saying he was unsure of the exact designation of the Pass Road but would confirm.	
3.39.	KB	There are areas of the road that belong to two different owners, but not DOT KZN.	RMS	Noted and indicated it would be investigated.	
3.40.	DD	A form of search and rescue should be looked into for the plant re-vegetation.	RMS	Agreed and noted that, in addition, due consideration must be given to the fact that different biomes occur at different altitudes along the length of the road.	
3.41.	SP	<p>Affirmed that he was satisfied with the communication thus far and felt that he had been listened to.</p> <p>He suggested that the written document be compiled with various titles, in order to comment on the issues in a more structured manner. Topics suggested are as follows; Biological, Social, Rehabilitation, Cost, Scheduling, Engineering, Design, Tourism etc. These comments can be sent by email to Arcus GIBB.</p> <p>He further noted that there is a need for the client to be educated on what tourism means in the long term for South Africa and to achieve this, the environment must be preserved. Tourism is people intensive and is growing.</p>			
3.42.	DD	A study should be conducted relating to the economic value of the site as a resource.	GF	Noted and commented that in addition, the assessment must equally consider environmental, social and economic aspects.	
3.43.	RMS	Highlighted that this is not a once off meeting and that there will be more opportunity to discuss the issues in the near future.			
3.44.	SP	SP thanked the consultants and DD for arranging the meeting and stated that he was very impressed with the attitude of the consultants, having felt listened to.			

3.45.	RMS	Raised the query as to how the road can be constructed in the most efficient and effective way for all from a closure perspective?	RS	Commented saying people need to use the road daily and it is therefore unacceptable to close the road for a whole day. Traffic use is at certain times and one option may be to close the road for a few hours between peak times. This can be managed in consultation with the users.	
3.46.	RMS	Pointed out that there are time constraints and element factors which need to be considered such as winter snow, ice, and summer rain and heat, and various other issues;. Accounting for all of these, there are very few months in the year to work.	RS	Responded saying that if the road was closed for a long period tourism would die, as it is fuelled by 'word of mouth'.	
3.47.	SS	It was noted that some people in Lesotho are supported by the South African tourism activities.		Point noted	
3.48.	RS	Suggested that there should be a daily schedule for the road closures with extended border post opening and closing times to accommodate the users.		Point noted	
3.49.	RMS	Questioned taxi operations on the Pass?	RS	The Lesotho taxis take the passengers from Lesotho down Sani Pass, through the border post to Good Hope store (km14) where they then transfer to SA taxis which transport them to Underberg and further to Pietermaritzburg. He indicated Lesotho taxis operators do not want a tarred road because they have the monopoly on 4x4 taxis while the SA taxi operators want to be able to transport passengers from the existing border post and are therefore happy for the section to the border post to be tarred.	
3.50.	RMS	Commented that an important consideration is the people who need to travel the Pass daily.			
3.51.	RS	Commented that no maintenance would take place if left to the local Roads Department and a private maintenance company should therefore be sought.	EG	Noted the comment and indicated that a maintenance plan could be included in the Environmental Management Plan (EMP).	
3.52.	RS	Queried whether a tarred road would be a long-term solution, given that currently there is no mud on the road and there is good material to use for a gravel road on the Lesotho side? A gravel road may be a more sustainable long term solution.	RMS	Noted that other alternatives would be evaluated, however nothing is defined as yet the engineering investigation is still in the early stages.	
			EG	Noted that a gravel surface option has been tabled as something to be considered.	

3.53.	SS	Commented that accessibility to the environment is very important for tourism and that this would not be achieved to the same degree with a tarred road. Fauna and Flora spotting on the road verges would happen anymore and the Protea trees and sugarbirds may be a lost attraction.			
3.54.	RS	Explained that a questionnaire had been compiled by WESSA and left at the border post for passers-by to fill in. The questionnaire asked readers to indicate whether they wanted the road tarred. 600 questionnaires have been received but had not been evaluated as yet.	RMS	Requested that the correlated data be conveyed to Arcus GIBB when available.	