



BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT FOR THE PROPOSED PHASE 2 UPGRADING OF SANI PASS (P318): ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this Background Information Document (BID) is to provide Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) with background information about the proposed project and introduce the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process to be followed. It also aims to inform IAPs on how to fully participate in the EIA and encourages active attendance at meetings and response to documents distributed for review.

What is proposed?

The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Transport (DoT), in association with the National DoT, proposes to continue with Phase 2 of the upgrading of the existing Sani Pass road (P318), situated in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (World Heritage Site) close to Underberg, KZN. See Map 1 on Page 3.

Phase 1, the upgrade of the lower section of the Sani Pass road (km0 – km14), has already been approved and is currently under construction. In addition, a separate EIA process for the relocation of the border post from a position at km25 to km14 is currently in progress.

This EIA considers Phase 2 of the road upgrading, which covers a 19 km-section of P318 from km14 to km33, which is from just past Good Hope to the summit and Lesotho border.

The proposed Phase 2 upgrading entails the complete regrading and resurfacing of the road from a gravel to a hardened surface and includes road widening, re-alignment of short sections, new bridges, stormwater control and attenuation systems, bank and slope stabilisation and road servitude rehabilitation. Refer to Page 4 for further technical information.

DoT has appointed ARCUS GIBB (Pty) Ltd as the independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) to undertake an EIA process for the proposed project.



The Sani Pass – Main Road (P318)
Phase 2 = Km 14 (Approx 100m from Good Hope) to Km 33(The Lesotho Border)

Road P318

Why is an Environmental Impact Assessment Required?

In terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No.107 of 1998) [NEMA] and associated EIA Regulations published in April 2006, an environmental authorisation must be obtained from the relevant decision-making authority prior to the commencement of certain listed activities that may result in potential negative impacts on the environment. The proposed Phase 2 upgrade involves a number of activities which are listed in the EIA Regulations. An EIA must therefore be undertaken in order to obtain the required environmental authorisation from the National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), the decision making authority for this project.

The proposed upgrade of the Sani Pass (P318) involves, *inter alia*, the following listed activities, as per Government Notice No. R. 387 of NEMA:

Activity Number 2: Any development activity, including associated structures and infrastructure, where the total area of the developed area is, or is intended to be, 20 hectares or more.

Activity Number 5: The route determination of roads and design of associated physical infrastructure, including roads that have not yet been built for which routes have been determined before the publication of this notice and which has not been authorised by a competent authority in terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations made under section 24(5) of the Act and published in Government Notice No. R. 385 of 2006, where –

(b) it is a road administered by a provincial authority.



The Motivation for the Proposed Upgrade of Sani Pass

- ✎ To address the road's current state of degradation
- ✎ To ensure that the P318 is sustained for future use
- ✎ To serve as an significantly improved trade route and link between South Africa and Lesotho
- ✎ To provide safer access to tourists
- ✎ To provide people living at Mokhotlong in Lesotho, with more convenient and safe access to Underberg, their nearest market and health care centre

Note: Need and Desirability of the proposed project will be assessed as part of the EIA.

Structure of the Environmental Impact Assessment Process

The EIA is a legislative tool used to ensure that the potential impacts that may occur due to the proposed development are avoided or mitigated. In South African legislation the environment includes, social, economic and bio-physical aspects that the EIA should assess equitably.

The EIA process is divided into two phases, the Scoping Phase and the Impact Assessment Phase. This proposed development is currently in the Scoping Phase of the assessment.

Scoping Phase

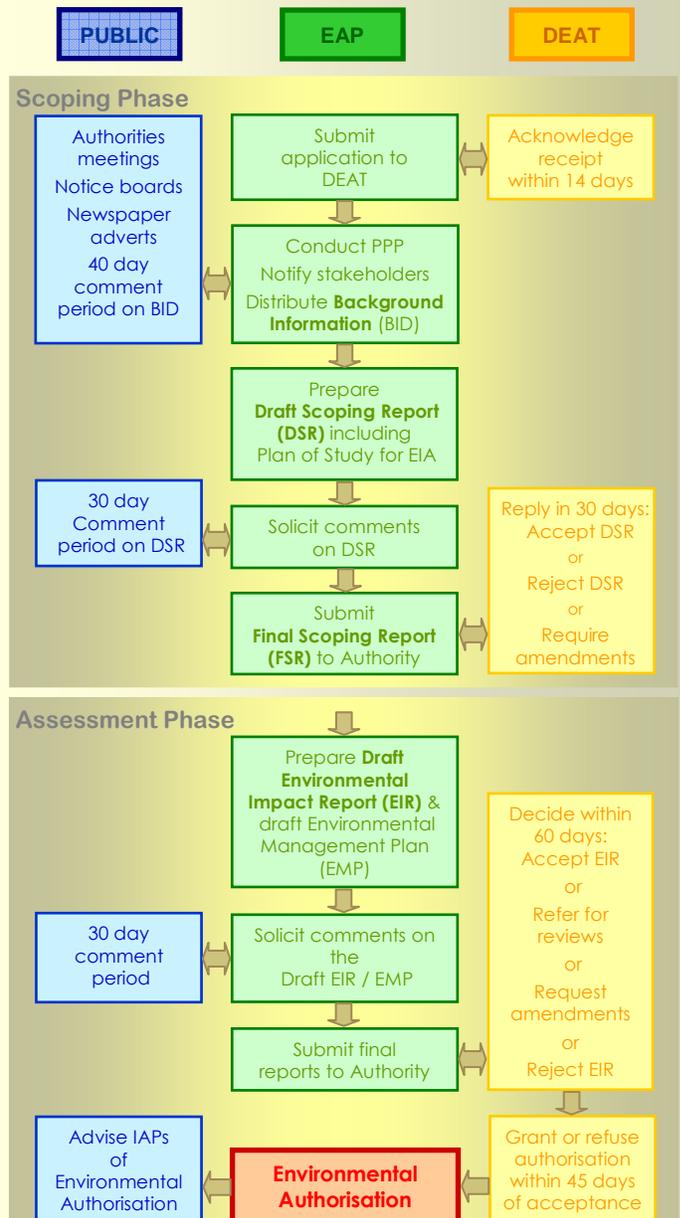
The Scoping Phase aims to:

- ✎ Investigate and gather information on the proposed site, in order to establish an understanding of the area
- ✎ Establish how the proposed development activities will potentially impact on the environment
- ✎ Identify IAPs and relevant authorities by conducting a PPP (Refer to Page 3)
- ✎ Identify potential environmental impacts through investigation and PPP
- ✎ Describe proposed and potential and the alternatives

Impact Assessment Phase

During this phase, all issues and proposed alternatives identified in the Scoping Phase are assessed and are rated in terms of their significance. Where necessary, mitigation measures are recommended to reduce the significance of potential impacts. An Environmental Management Plan will also be compiled that will prescribe environmental specifications to be adhered to during the construction phase of the project. As with the Scoping phase, PPP are an integral part of the Assessment Phase.

EIA Process Flow





Public Participation Process:

The purpose of PPP

The PPP aims to inform a wide range of Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) about the proposed project and the environmental process to be followed.

It is a tool to allow the public to exchange information and to express their views and concerns on the proposed development for which the EIA is being conducted. All contributions from IAPs must be fully documented, evaluated and responded to in the EIA.

The PPP assists in identifying potential issues that will help focus and enhance decision-making.

The EIA will be open and transparent to the public through this process.

All registered I&AP'S will be continuously updated on events & activities throughout the EIA process.

Activities of the Public Participation Process

The public will be invited to register as an I&AP and take part in the PPP through:

- Media Notices placed in the Sunday Times, The Mercury and Mountain Echo South Drakensberg News between 11 May and 16 May 2008
- Site display board notices
- Distribution of BID
- Distribution of a comments form
- Stakeholder meetings
- Distribution of Draft Scoping Report (DSR) for public comment
- Public open day and meetings
- Distribution of draft EIA Report for comment
- All information available on request



Potential Impacts Identified to Date

Impacts identified to date are associated with:

- Traffic and transportation
- Tourism
- Taxi operations
- Transport trade route
- International relations and linkages with Lesotho
- Bio-physical environment (Fauna, Flora, Habitats, etc)
- Social environment
- Materials management
- Hazardous substances
- Waste management
- Safety
- Border control
- Water resources
- Erosion
- Sense of Place
- World Heritage Site



Engineering Process and Progress

In 2007 DoT appointed an engineering consortium to design the proposed road upgrade and, if authorised, manage the construction thereof.

They have since completed a survey of the road servitude and commenced with the engineering conceptualisation phase. This phase will continue throughout scoping to allow consideration of identified issues and challenges. Design concepts will then be taken forward into a set of preliminary design alternatives, which DoT will review before detailed design.

Provided environmental authorisation is granted, contractors will be appointed for the construction of the road as soon as detailed design is completed. The engineering consortium will manage and monitor the construction.

Design and Construction Specifications

DoT provided the engineering consortium with the following Terms of Reference for the proposed design of the road upgrade:

- Provide an all-weather hardened surface road
- Provide a two-way road, thus one lane in each direction with road surface width of:
 - 7 m between km14 and km25 (lower section)
 - 6 m between km25 and km33 (upper section)
- Allow for a safe traffic speed for a short-wheel-based truck or bus of:
 - 50 km per hour between km14 and km25 (lower section)
 - 30 km per hour between km25 and km33 (upper section)
- Remain within the existing DoT road servitude and retain the current road alignment where possible, but adjust the alignment where necessary to achieve the abovementioned design specifications
- Widen the road through appropriate cut, fill, retainment and bridge structures
- Make use of the approved borrow pit from the Phase 1 project

How to Register as an Interested and Affected Party

IAPs may forward their written comments by **20 June 2008** along with their, name, contact details and an indication of any direct business, financial, personal or other interest which they have in the application by post, fax or email to:

Ms Sanusha Govender

Email: sgovender@gibb.co.za
Tel: (031) 267 8560
Fax: (031) 266 3310

Post:

ARCUS GIBB
P O Box 1365
Westville
3630



Design and Construction Challenges

Through their initial investigations and consultations with various stakeholders, the engineering consortium has identified a number of engineering challenges which would need to be considered in their design and construction specifications. These include the following, in no particular order of priority:

- The Sani Pass traverses a **World Heritage Site** and is an **eco-tourism route and attraction**
- **Extreme weather conditions** with very hot and very cold (below freezing) temperatures, severe storms and drought, heavy downpours and flashfloods and regular snow and ice in winter
- **Minimising impacts on pristine ecological and heritage features** such as water falls, vegetated slopes, rapture nesting sites, etc.
- The road **traverses many drainage lines** which channel significant amounts of water during heavy downpours and flashfloods
- **High rate water erosion** along most of the route
- **Rock falls, rock slides and potential avalanches** along most of the route
- **Steep terrain and narrow working space**, which present a significant safety risk and difficult construction and operation working conditions
- **Unstable geological structures** along certain sections and particularly the upper sections of the pass
- **Certain geological features present restrictions and obstructions** which would require controlled cut, fill and blasting
- Identifying, selecting and designing the required structures and features to be **technically sound while at the same time blend in** and do justice to the characteristics of a wilderness area
- **Keep the road reasonably accessible** for road users during construction