

War on tourist-unfriendly roads continues

Stefan de Villiers

MBOMBELA - After years of engagement, finally, for the first time ever, there has been an acknowledgement from the Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport (DPWRT) that tourism is a key economic driver in the province.

On April 5 KLCBT managed to secure a meeting with DPWRT. Neither departmental HOD arrived. Other officials were sent instead.

"The agenda that KLCBT is trying to get onto the table is that the conditions of our tourist (and other) roads are so bad that we face a crisis. This requires a realisation of this fact and that DPWRT cannot simply carry on with the 'business as usual' view. Serious intervention is needed to play catch up on our rapidly degrading road infrastructure.

"An option is to hand all our provincial roads over to Sanral (as Limpopo has done) as a more effective and skilled implementer of road maintenance and upgrading. The performance of Mpumalanga DPWRT is simply not up to scratch," said the KLCBT's Oupa Pilane.

Pilane recently condemned the provincial government for failing to maintain infrastructure. Following a recent article on in *Lowvelder*, DPWRT issued a statement in which it "realised the importance of tourism as a key economic driver".

"In spite of the limited resources, the province has invested in a number of roads that lead to tourism infrastructure. Our intervention on these roads is aimed at upgrading particular ones (from gravel to tar) and rehabilitation/reconstruction," said the department's David Nkambule.

In the statement, the department stated that some of the projects that have already been undertaken or planned include:

Rehabilitation (reconstruction) of the R36 between Bambi and Mashishing

- Phase 1 has been completed.
- Phase 2 is under way and at advanced stage.
- Phase 3 which is the final stage is planned to commence by the 2020/21 financial year.

Pilane hopes that this implies that the total 47-kilometre stretch of the R36 will be rebuilt to a quality sufficient to handle the heavy traffic that use this route.

"Given its state, why is it only going to be completed in 2020/21? Sanral offered to take over this road from the province and with their greater resources, would have been able to ensure its timeless reconstruction. Why did DPWRT not hand this road over to Sanral?" he asked.

Pilane further stated that the R536 between Sabie and Hazyview needs more than light rehabilitation, as planned by the department. "Designs will be made in this new financial year (2018/19) and construction is scheduled to commence in the 2019/20 financial year. The R536 between Sabie and Hazyview is in an appalling condition with many, many potholes, blocked drains, sinkage and collapse of some built-up road supports and an obvious lack of roadside maintenance. Unless these issues are attended to first, a light rehabilitation will be a complete waste of money as it will not solve the issues on this road," he said.

"The light rehabilitation and major

maintenance of the road between Graskop and Matibidi have begun, but it seems as if only parts are being attended to. The issue here is that it is all very well to repair the potholes, but the sheer volume that needs repairing renders the road surface very rough and bumpy. Post-pothole maintenance, this road also needs resurfacing. This is the premier section of the Panorama Route," said Pilane.

"Over R1 million has been invested on the R537 between White River and Sabie, and pothole repairs and grass cutting were done," the department said.

Pilane criticised the condition of that section of the road and said it is so bad that one wonders why the contractors were paid.

"There has been no quality check on the work that has been done there. The work is so poor that the road is in a worse condition than it was before the so-called repairs. The DPWRT has been ripped off as there is absolutely no value for money in the work done. This two-kilometre section of road needs to be properly repaired and resurfaced," said Pilane.

"The rehabilitation and major maintenance of the R538 between White River and Jerusalem/Masoyi near Hazyview which leads to both Numbi and Kruger Gates has recently been completed," said the department.

"Though this is appreciated, there is no mention made of work done or planned on the R533 (Graskop to Bushbuckridge). This includes Kowyn's Pass (in a dangerously poor condition) which is a key route from Hazyview to the Panorama Route.

"There has been no roadside maintenance (clearing of drains, etc) or pothole repairs there for a long time. The same applies to the R535 from the junction of the R533 to Hazyview," said Pilane.

