

Media Release

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UPDATE ON SWAZILAND RAIL LINK (SRL) PROJECT

Plans are well underway to see one of Transnet's ambitious railway projects, the Inter-Railway initiative between Transnet Freight Rail and Swaziland Railway realised. The two-country partnership will see the construction of a 150km railway line from Lothair (Mpumalanga) to Sidvokodvo (Swaziland).

The new line will be 50km long in South Africa and 100km in Swaziland and will also require the revamping of adjacent existing lines to align and provide support to the new link.

The FEL3 feasibility phase has been completed. Preparation works are currently underway, and this involves graves relocation, acquisition of servitudes and the resettlement planning. The feasibility study report received a green light from both companies to proceed to the next phase.

The project has been packaged as public-private partnership (ppp) and the process of finding suitable partners is underway.

The project's primary objective is to reduce rail and road traffic congestion based on a realistic and achievable system capacity. The outcome of a project of this magnitude will accommodate up to 26 tons/axle, 2.5km long/200 wagons trains and provide capacity for 12 trains per day. This will result in a dedicated General Freight Business Corridor for Transnet, while providing necessary additional capacity for Swaziland Railway.

This expansion will add to the current capacity of 12 trains of 81 wagons per day traversing both direction on the current Swaziland Railway Komatipoort-Golela Line, thereby doubling the traffic volumes.

Consequently, the Swaziland Rail Link project will increase capacity on general freight business, decongesting the coal line and unlocking capacity on the eastern mainline and the North-South Corridor.

The line has been designed to carry trains with 150 General Freight Business wagons and will operate seamlessly without stopping at the border.

This project has already created opportunities on both sides of the border of the two countries. Approximately 3000 and 6500 jobs will be created in South Africa and Swaziland respectively

during construction of the railway line. Business opportunities to the value of R894 million in South Africa and R1.7 billion in Swaziland will be created. Many more indirect job opportunities will be formed through the project.

The detailed planning phase is underway and comprises of; land acquisition, graves relocation, resettlement planning activities and completion of the engineering designs.

Recent developments include the following on the Swaziland side:

- The highlights of the feasibility report (FEL3) shows that 500 graves will be relocated and 235 households will be resettled in Swaziland. To date all 500 graves have been relocated.
- Successful acquisition of land
- A structure at grass roots level comprising of project affected people (PAPs) is in place to address all resettlement issues. A participatory process to relocate graves in Swaziland has been concluded.
- A robust consultative process with traditional authorities and other stakeholders like the Manzini Regional Administrator, Chiefs and Government ministries is ongoing.
- Complete adherence to regulatory and statutory requirements lies at the core of the entire project.
- The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland is in full support of the project as evidenced by its mention in the 2017/18 Government of Swaziland budget speech.

Progress on the South African side

Significant amount of work has been done also on the South African Side:

- The Socio Economic Assessment in the Mpumalanga area to determine the level of skills available, types of small businesses available to boost local employment and business opportunities.
- The purchasing of 506 hectares has been approved and negotiations with the land owners are being finalised in order to purchase the impacted land.
- Furthermore, approval for exhumation and relocation of over 120 affected graves has also been obtained. The affected families have been identified and engaged in this process.
- The plans to resettle the affected households are also in progress.
- The feasibility studies of the Greenfield are complete and the authorities in South Africa and Swaziland have granted both teams the necessary environmental permits.
- Feasibility studies of the existing lines that need to be upgraded, that is, Ermelo to Lothair as well as Golela to Nseshe are also in progress.
- Engagements are being conducted on a continuous basis with the existing customers and potential customers to ensure maximum viability and sustainability.

Construction

Construction will commence as soon as the funding is finalised. However, some of the enabling works, such as acquisition of land and the relocation of affected households are ongoing.

Acknowledgements

Special gratitude is extended to His Majesty's Government and the Government of South Africa for their continued support, the Manzini Regional Administrator for always creating time for the project, Traditional Leaders, affected Communities for their unwavering support. Last but not least the zealous and positive role that the media has played thus far in promoting the project, has not gone unnoticed.

Editor's Notes:

- The Swaziland Rail Link project (SRL) is a seamless project running across two countries, South Africa and Swaziland. The project is collaboration between two companies, namely, Swaziland Railways (from Swaziland) and Transnet Freight Rail (from South Africa). The project entails the construction of a 150 kilometre new railway line from Lothair in South Africa to Sidvokodvo in Swaziland and revamping two existing lines, the first from Ermelo to Lothair in South Africa and the other one from Sidvokodvo in Swaziland to Richards Bay in South Africa.
- South Africa and Swaziland signed the project MoU in 2012
- The SRL will also serve as back-up to the Coal Line
- The Swaziland Rail Link will enhance the capacity of the eastern seaboard GFB system
- The line has been designed to carry trains with 150 GFB wagons and will be operated as a seamless service without stopping at the border.

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