

SANRAL proposes Huguenot Tunnel refurbishment and upgrade

Cape Town, 8th September 2015 - Construction of the second bore at the Huguenot Tunnel has become essential due to safety concerns and a steady increase in traffic volumes over the years.

Speaking at a media briefing at the tunnel today, Mr Tiago Massingue, Project Manager at the South African National Roads Agency (SOC) Ltd (SANRAL) in the Western Cape, said the rise in traffic volumes has become a major challenge and the development of the north bore to allow for a dual carriageway, is becoming urgent.

“The tunnel is one of the Western Cape’s most vital economic assets and it is SANRAL’s mandate to maintain the tunnel in such a state that it functions optimally and in the best interest of road users.”

The 4 km tunnel reduces the distance between Paarl and Worcester by 11 km and eliminates a climb of some 500m over the steep Du Toitskloof Pass. During 27 years of operations the tunnel has provided a safe passage for over 75 million vehicles. The tunnel contributes significantly to the national economy in terms of a reduction in travel time, saving on fuel, vehicle operating costs and a reduction in accidents.

Massingue pointed out that the existing safety equipment in the tunnel has reached the end of its life cycle and its replacement has become more urgent. While the average

traffic volume has increased for all vehicles, heavy vehicle traffic has risen in the order of 5% to 18% per year, which significantly increases the risks of accidents and fire hazard.

Citing tragic incidents of tunnel fires from around the world, Mr Massingue cautioned: "We don't want to sound melodramatic but it is important for the public and the authorities to know the risks we face if works on the tunnel are delayed or do not proceed."

He said extensive improvements would have to be made to the current safety and firefighting equipment including the installation of jet fans to improve airflow; the installations of mechanical controlled dampers in the tunnel ceiling; and the replacement of switch-gear and ventilation by-pass doors.

A period of six to eight months is required to carry out the refurbishments and because of the nature of the work, no traffic could be allowed in the tunnel during this time.

"But to re-route traffic over the Du Toitskloof Pass for such a long period is just not a viable option. Scaffolding will have to be erected to carry out the work and a stop-go control is not recommended as it would increase the risk of accidents. The only viable option is to construct the North Bore and once it has been completed, to divert traffic to the 'new' tunnel. The existing South Bore systems can then be improved."

Mr Kobus van der Walt, Regional Manager for SANRAL

in the Western Cape, told the briefing that the socio-economic benefits of a second tunnel should not be underestimated and it would have a major positive knock-on effect for the economy of the Western Cape.

Van der Walt said the refurbishments of the existing tunnel and the upgrading of the second bore would be funded as part of the N1-N2 Winelands Toll Highway Project.

He said a twin-tunnel operation also makes maintenance easier, vastly reduces the impact of an incident or a fire, and allows for better traffic control.