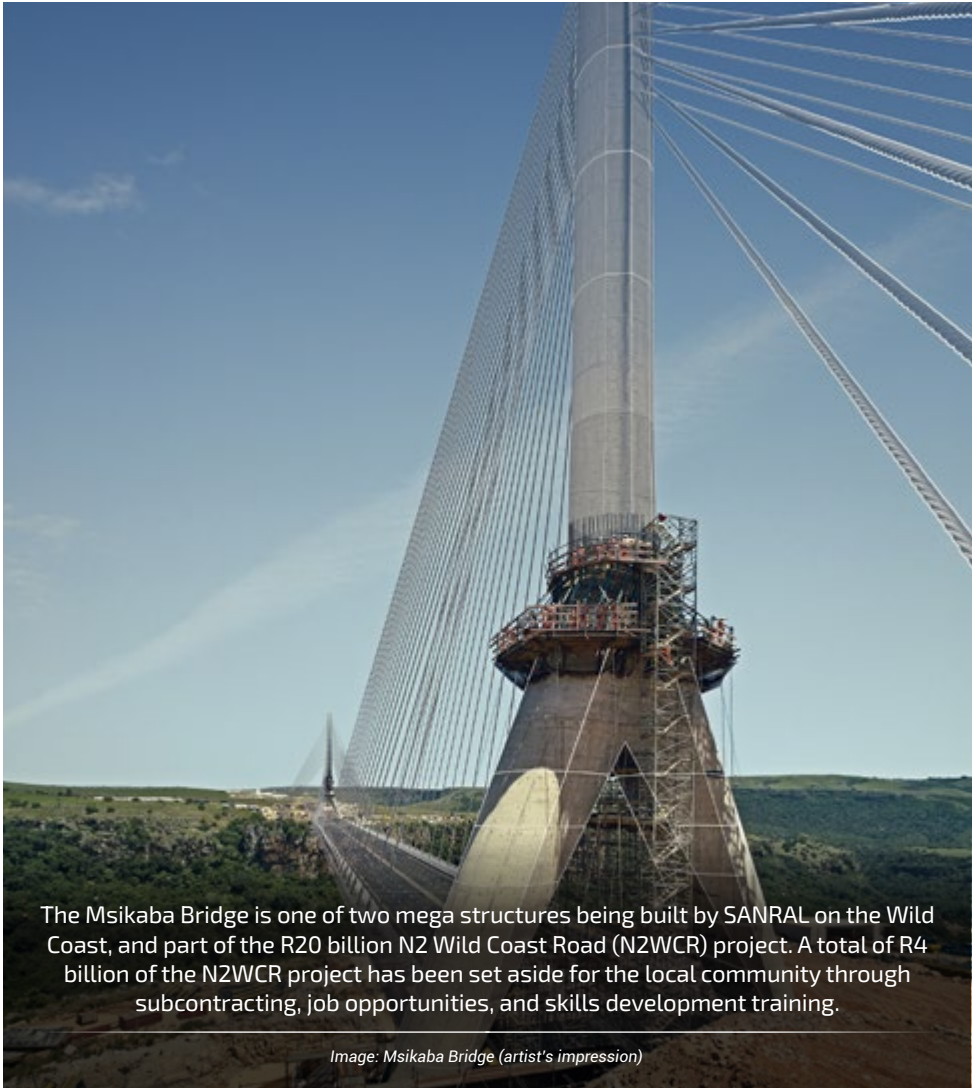


Vul'indlela

N2 WILD COAST

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The Msikaba Bridge is one of two mega structures being built by SANRAL on the Wild Coast, and part of the R20 billion N2 Wild Coast Road (N2WCR) project. A total of R4 billion of the N2WCR project has been set aside for the local community through subcontracting, job opportunities, and skills development training.

Image: Msikaba Bridge (artist's impression)



transport

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Province of the
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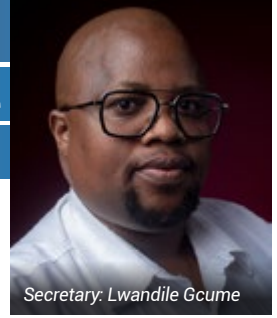
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N2WCR: WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESS FORUMS



Secretary: Lwandile Gcume



All eyes are on the progress of the two mega bridges under construction on the N2 Wild Coast Road (N2WCR) project. The South African National Roads Agency SOC Limited (SANRAL) is forging ahead to deliver on this massive presidential project on time. The Msikaba and Mtentu Bridges are an engineering feat and are making history on the continent and the Southern Hemisphere with their height and main bridge spans.

SANRAL is working closely with local business forums which represent local SMMEs, to demonstrate its commitment to develop emerging enterprises. N2WCR Business Forum Secretary, Lwandile Gcume, presides over a forum made up by three business formations from Ingquza Hill, Port St Johns and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipalities, representing the Wild Coast belt.

He says that since its inception the project has presented many direct and indirect opportunities across various sectors, even beyond the construction industry.

"The N2 development is unlocking a lot of investment opportunities that local businesses can tap into. It opens the economy, and gives

us a chance to grow and trade easily with the rest of South Africa, because there is no growth without opportunities."

A minimum of 30% of the R4 billion Mtentu Bridge contract is set to flow to SMMEs in the OR Tambo and Alfred Nzo District Municipalities. Gcume commends the training which SANRAL provides to SMMEs as a chance to learn about the construction industry, which has previously been dominated by big companies.

"There's a community development project happening at the Magwa/Mbotyi area in Lusikisiki. The road they'll be building passes through the Magwa Tea Corporation, giving local SMMEs an opportunity to learn more about the industry," Gcume says.

As one of the pillars of SANRAL's Horizon 2030 Strategy, stakeholder engagement is key and bearing fruit for this rural region. Gcume applauds SANRAL for heeding their call to open an office in Flagstaff for the Wild Coast belt, as Gqeberha (where the regional office is) lies 700km away.

"That office has helped with management of stakeholders and provided a platform to engage with SANRAL and its contractors. The quarterly stakeholder engagement sessions help us to interact directly and give immediate feedback."

Gcume cautions on challenges that could put a damper on the smooth progression of the project if left unchecked. He cites the lack of social facilitation before starting a project and interfacing with established main contractors for subcontracting.

"Interfacing with them is not easy, because we are inexperienced. As a government agency, SANRAL has the will to develop local businesses, but the vehicle they use does not. We urge SANRAL to have professional mentors to help SMMEs, so that they interface better with the main contractors," he concludes.

A better life for the people of Pondoland



Amid the green hills of the rural Eastern Cape, the R1.75 billion Msikaba Bridge construction project seems almost otherworldly. It is as if this engineering behemoth has been planted in this paradise to see whether the juxtaposition could make the scene any more spectacular.

The Msikaba Bridge is one of two mega structures being built by SANRAL on the Wild Coast, and forms part of the R20 billion N2 Wild Coast Road (N2WCR) project. Construction is expected to be completed towards the end of 2025.

This is just one of SANRAL's 700

projects around the country, with a total investment value of R43 billion. Nationally, 4,765 contractors have been engaged, with 39,000 jobs created.

The numbers on the Msikaba project are just as impressive. To date, R553 million has been spent on 157 targeted enterprises and 453 full-time jobs have been created. Significantly, 391 of those jobs went to residents of one of the poorest regions of the country. Also, what this bridge will mean for families in the event of an emergency is beyond measure. SANRAL Southern Region Manager Mbulelo Peterson said the area was

notorious for the number of people who die on the roads or have no way of reaching hospitals because of poor infrastructure.

While it is astonishingly beautiful, the area around Lusikisiki is blighted by collapsed and potholed roads. Taxi drivers are forced to wind their way between dongas, causing severe delays for work and school.

However, all that is set to change, as a few new tributary roads and upgrades also form part of the Msikaba Bridge project.

Peterson said people using the bridge could expect massive

savings in the years to come. "We estimate the annual saving on fuel on these rural roads will be R1.5 billion annually. If you use the N2 as it is now, you drive up to Kokstad, where you are 1.6km above sea level, compared to this route which is flatter. From an energy point of view, it is excellent because the route will be shorter by 85km, so vehicles will use less fuel, he explained".

Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga, who marvelled at the scale and ingenuity of the project, expressed her excitement that the bridge was being established in the "middle of nowhere".

"It is happening among the most rural people whose voices are never heard because they are not on TV, they can't write to newspapers. But here we are building such a mega project.

"For me it says South Africa is gaining some momentum. Things are happening in our country," she said.

Laurence Savage, project manager at Concor Mota-Engil Joint Venture, which is contracted to build the bridge, cannot overstate the magnitude of the project.

The four anchor blocks alone, which he describes as the "unsung heroes" of the undertaking, are each 17 metres wide and approximately six storeys deep, and each will contain 21,000 tons of concrete.

Once complete, the pylons on either side of the 580-metre wide gorge will stand at a staggering 128 metres in height.

"Taxi drivers, under the guidance of our local chief, work with us and the first thing they say is 'We're here to benefit, but we're here for the project to benefit,'" Savage said.

SANRAL's other mega project in the region is the R4.05 billion Mtentu Bridge.

The Agency has set aside billions of rands to create a mobility corridor in the Wild Coast region. Apart from the two mega bridges, SANRAL is investing over R10 billion on several road construction projects.

The process for construction of the new R2.5 billion road between the Msikaba and Mtentu Bridges has also begun, and is expected to be completed within the next four years.

SANRAL also plans to build seven other roads in the area. The local communities will benefit from skills development programmes to support their small businesses.

Communities in villages along the new R2.3 billion road planned for between Lingeni and the Msikaba Bridge will be able to tap into training for skills, which will assist them in developing businesses in agri-processing, farming, manufacturing, tourism and hospitality.

One of SANRAL's goals is to leave a legacy within the communities around the Msikaba and Mtentu Bridges.

The infrastructure left by the contractors once the projects are complete will also benefit the local communities for years to come. For instance, contractors' or engineering site offices and accommodation camps could be used as community halls, business hubs and tourist accommodation.



Msikaba bridge construction site



Woman-owned enterprise trains Mtentu Bridge SMMEs

Akhona Mdtshane, who grew up in rural Flagstaff and Bizana in the OR Tambo District Municipality, is the owner of On-Grid Training Development, a fully-fledged, accredited training provider on the Wild Coast belt.

"The company was founded by my late husband in 2018 while I was still a student. I guess that was how the business side of education got instilled in me – taking an interest in turning education into a business," Mdtshane says.

Taking a different approach from conventional businesses, On-Grid Training Development has no permanent staff and operates through accredited freelance specialists.

"They specialise in different fields, like business and community development, construction skills and health and safety programmes."

Mdtshane has been subcontracted to provide much-needed training to targeted enterprises (SMMEs) on the N2 Wild Coast Road's Mtentu Bridge contract.

"We specialise in legal requirements for construction contracts, how to work in the construction field, handling contracts, and business development for targeted enterprises," she explains.

"We are not new in the business, and I can confidently say that I work with the best assessors and moderators that there are in the industry," she says.

As the company extends its scope with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, Mdtshane says they want to register as a private Further Education and Training service provider.

N2WCR advances women-owned enterprise



Mtha Development Projects is a 100% black woman-owned construction company operating in the Wild Coast belt in the Eastern Cape, which was founded in 2005. It is owned by Belekazi Sikutshwa, who comes from a previously disadvantaged background and was driven to make a change for her family and community.

Her company is registered with the Construction Industry Development Body as a level 4 CE PE. It employs five people, four of whom are professionals and one general labourer.

As a member of the Mbizana Business Chamber and the Wild Coast Business Chamber, Sikutshwa has been close to discussions around SANRAL's multi-million rand N2 Wild Coast Road (N2WCR) project for a while.

When SANRAL took over the R61 section between Port St Johns and Port Edward from the Eastern Cape provincial government, it set out to implement emergency pothole repairs and special maintenance of the road. A portion of the work was set aside for emerging contractors. Mtha Development Projects was awarded the contract for pothole patching and maintenance along the R61.

This opportunity has empowered her company and built their capacity. Her company will advance to being a grade 6 CE PE at the end of this contract, allowing her to bid for bigger projects going forward.

Mtha Development Projects had employed general labour with no skill in the field to work on this contract, and these personnel have been given the opportunity to learn and to gain new skills.

Sikutshwa looks forward to securing more projects and being part of changing the economic landscape of the Wild Coast belt.



Mzekelo
Mathe:

BRIDGING SUCCESS IN CIVIL ENGINEERING

Mzekelo Mathe (29) is a dynamic young civil engineer who was recently promoted to the role of engineer on SANRAL's Msikaba Bridge project.

Mathe, who hails from Matatiele, matriculated from the Central Technical College in Durban in 2011 before pursuing his engineering diploma at Durban University of Technology. After completing his studies in 2015, he worked with Element Consulting Engineers and Mid Africa Consulting Engineers. In 2017 he furthered his studies, obtaining a BTech in Transportation Engineering. His journey took a significant turn when he joined Concor-Mecsa Construction JV, the contractor for the Msikaba Bridge, in July 2021.

"When I started working at Msikaba, I was employed as a candidate engineer in training to become registered with the Engineering Council of South Africa. I later joined the Msikaba graduate mentorship programme

from February 2022, and completed it in January 2024."

Despite having faced challenges, Mzekelo appreciates the positive impact the support of his parents had on his life.

"Initially I wanted to become a doctor. My interest in engineering was sparked during my schooling years. I was in boarding school and travelled from Matatiele to Durban by taxi, and could never find anyone to explain how bridges were built. I became more curious over the years. In Grade 10 I realised I was interested in the design of structural bridges," Mzekelo explains.

He credits one of his brother's friends, who is a project manager in the government sector, for providing guidance and solutions during challenging times.

Transitioning from being an intern engineer to the role of engineer was challenging, but guidance from mentors like Samkelo Khumalo, Laurence Savage (Msikaba Bridge Project Director)

and David Middleton played a crucial role in his journey.

As an intern, supervising older foremen and managing the labour force during strikes was tough, but he was able to overcome challenges through effective communication and planning.

Mzekelo attributes his successful transition to his project management, construction planning, supervision, time management, and quality control skills.

He is currently working at the bridge's anchor blocks and will now have additional responsibilities, including construction planning, monitoring, quality control, technical reporting, contract administration, and procurement.

His advice to aspiring engineers is that they need hard work, discipline, and dedication. He urges graduates to persevere in the face of a challenging job market, and says that communication skills and a genuine passion for the work are key to a rewarding career.



FAQs

What is the budget spent to date on local SMMEs on the Msikaba Bridge contract?

The project is valued at R1.75 billion (excluding VAT and CPA). So far, over R553.2 million has been spent on 157 targeted enterprises, which include suppliers, service providers and subcontractors.

How many job opportunities have been created on the Msikaba Bridge project?

To date, 453 full-time equivalent jobs have been created, with 391 of these occupied by local persons. This translates to R92.8 million spent on wages of local targeted labour, which is 108% of the 5% contract participation goal.

How many jobs are anticipated from the N2 Wild Coast Road project?

Construction work will create approximately 8,000 direct full-time equivalent jobs, with a wage bill of roughly R750 million and between 21,300 and 28,100 indirect jobs. Once the road is completed, ongoing operational work is anticipated to create 900 direct jobs and up to 18,900 indirect jobs.

What budget has been spent on the N2WCR project so far?

At the end of September 2023, R1.4 billion (70.44%) (excluding VAT and CPA) had been spent on construction of the project.

What major milestones have been achieved on the Msikaba Bridge project?

Both the North and South bank pylons have exceeded the halfway mark. Construction of the Msikaba Bridge South pylon is 81% complete at 84.2 metres (out of a total height of 126.7 metres), while the North bank is a month behind, at the 73% completion mark at 69.4 metres high.

The following other project milestones have been achieved:

- Completion of all major stormwater structures.
- Completion of pedestrian underpass structures.
- Four anchor blocks that secure the cable stays of the bridge are complete.
- Installation of deck segment zero (the very first one) has been completed. There are set to be 38 deck segments in all.

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