

# Sanral starts Eastern Cape N2 upgrade

🕒 JULY 17, 2015

**Publication:** SouthAfrica.info

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Along the road between Port Elizabeth and East London. (Image: Wikimedia Commons, Abubiju)

The South African National Roads Agency Limited (Sanral) has started work on its R900-million Southern Region construction project.

The national road network is the economic link between Port Elizabeth and East London, and is the west-east link between Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

In the first phase, it has begun upgrading a 47km stretch of the N2 highway between Grahamstown and the Fish River pass, in Eastern Cape.

The project comprises upgrading a single carriageway through the mountainous region, and construction is in three phases. It is not without its challenges, among which are saving the protected *Oldenburgia grandis* trees indigenous to some places along the route, limiting delays to road users during construction and keeping the impact on adjoining property owners to a minimum.

A large amount of rock has to be blasted, and the design also has to tie into the existing Fish River Bridge.

Rock blasting is planned for today, 15km outside Grahamstown towards Peddie, according to Sanral. The upgrade of 16.7km of the N2 included geometric improvements, realignment, widening of existing cuttings and fill embankments, the roads agency said.

## Grahamstown to King

In total, the project is expected to take six to seven years. It is part of a long-term strategy to improve roads around and between Grahamstown and King William's Town and comprises geometric improvements to portions of the national highway.

Climbing lanes to improve the level of surface will also be added.

“The existing road was built in the 1960s and currently does not meet Sanral’s desired alignment and safety standards,” said the agency. An increase in traffic volumes, particularly heavy vehicles, had prompted the need for the upgrade.

Improved sight distance for drivers was expected to cut road accidents and reduce vehicle operating costs, while travel times were expected to be shorter.

In media reports, Sanral has that the project will improve and prepare the N2 to support increasing volumes of motorists on the national road over the next 25 years, while enabling lower fuel consumption on the upgraded road, which will also reduce carbon emissions.

Regarding the rare *Oldenburgia grandis*, which only grows on quartzite outcrops, Sanral collaborated with Rhodes University, in Grahamstown, and funded a study and transplant programme for these plants. The project is being overseen by a postgraduate botany student.

## **N2 Wild Coast toll road**

In other road news, the construction of the N2 Wild Coast toll road was expected to start in September 2016, said Gugile Nkwinti, the rural development and land reform minister.

He was speaking in his capacity as the chairman of the Presidential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Committee (PICC) on 9 July at a public consultation meeting in Bizana, Eastern Cape.

The PICC oversees bulk infrastructure projects and manages 18 strategic infrastructure projects (SIPs). Nkwinti is responsible for SIP3, which targets the South-East Node and Corridor Development. This includes the N2 Wild Coast Highway, new dam at Mzimvubu with an irrigation system.

He received a Sanral report on the status of the project earlier last week. "We have made a decision. What we want to know now is where we are going to relocate people who have to make way for the road. In case of graves, we want people to indicate where the graves will be relocated. We are left with 13 months before construction starts."

The department said that if court processes against the construction of the toll road persisted, the project would start in 2017.

"Before construction resumes, houses, graves, animal veld, and mealie-fields will be relocated to suitable alternative land. A survey commissioned by Sanral about the proposed new route for the N2 along the Wild Coast indicated an almost unanimous level of support for this development."