



Friends of the Choo-Tjoe

The Loop

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It has been a while since the last edition of the Loop. We have held off waiting for the announcement by Transnet of their plans for the line.

All our local members will be aware that Transnet's plans have now been made public and the George – Knysna line features prominently. For those further afield, up country and overseas we recommend that you read the full statement which is reproduced below.

This has been a long time coming and it is now up to us all to offer our support in whatever way we can. Spread the word that the Choo-Tjoe is on the way back.

Julie Jenkins

Media release issued by Transnet Freight Rail, 29 November, 2017

Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) shared its vision for rail rejuvenation in the Southern Cape with spatial development planners and officials at an Eden District Municipality meeting on Thursday, 23 November, 2017. The meeting between Transnet and Eden District Municipality included representatives of all the Local Municipalities that fall inside the control of Eden District Municipality and included Bitou, Knysna, George, Mossel Bay, Hessequa and Oudtshoorn.

The Transnet Freight Rail Branch Lines in the Southern Cape run through all the listed Municipalities and the current state of the network was shared with the Municipal planning officials. The main parts of the network from Klipplaat in the Eastern Cape, through Oudtshoorn to George, Mossel Bay and through Riversdale towards Swellendam and Worcester are all operational. Three of the branch lines are currently inactive, namely, the Narrow Gauge towards Port Elizabeth that runs in George Municipality, the Oudtshoorn to Calitzdorp line and the George Knysna Railway line.

The plan and vision that was shared includes the densification of the network that is not utilized to full potential. The vision is to use freight opportunities to increase the amount of freight that we can divert from Road to Rail. The movement of freight to the rail system will assist in reducing the number of highly pollutant road trucks that cause significant traffic delays and accidents on the roads and also support the tourist industry and economic growth in the area.

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Eden District Municipality is working towards the creation of a centralized land-fill site for municipal waste at a new site adjacent to PetroSA in Mossel Bay and the rail line between Mossel Bay and Worcester runs adjacent to this site. The proposal from Transnet Freight Rail is to form a collaboration with all the Municipalities in Eden to introduce a solution of moving the solid waste by rail to the land-fill site. Existing trains running on the line can be used and this will result in cost savings for the municipalities. The creation of intermodal transfer facilities at TFR stations will then assist to enable the loading of any container or swap body from road to rail and vice versa and make available rail freight opportunities to any company in the Southern Cape, even those without direct railway sidings.

Transnet shared the idea of using the railway line for shared services with trams and light trains where one could introduce a tram or Light train running between Mossel Bay, the Airport, George and Knysna with secondary services to Oudtshoorn and Heidelberg. This service can be integrated into the transport investments into Go George and other initiatives.

A third major focus area is the use of the railway line for tourist activities. This will include the expansion of the current activities like the Outeniqua Powervan and Diaz Express. Transnet with the help of private interests and funding is also in the process of converting the steam workshops in Mossel Bay to become the premier maintenance facility for steam locomotives as well as the training center to ensure young people from the area are trained in the skills required to enable steam trains to be a central part of the tourism offering.

Transnet shared its vision of expanding the tourist steam trains operating through Eden District Municipality. The current infrequent services must increase and the vision must be to offer a daily service that can be used to convince International tourists to stay another night in the Southern Cape and thereby increase the economic spin-offs for the area.

Transnet also announced that the process to obtain a solution to the re-opening of the George to Knysna branch line is on track. After a period of more than 4 years where Transnet encouraged the local interest groups to work together to develop a proposal whereby the line can be restored and the steam operations resume and this has now been formulated.

The private sector initiative developed a full proposal with a request for a concession on the line that will see the restoration of the line and the resumption of the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe. The private sector company will provide all funding and Transnet will support where possible in cascading material and by conceding the assets of Transnet on this line for a period of years to the concession company. The assets that will be conceded include the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe train sets. At the end of the concession, the line and all assets, many in an improved state, will revert back to Transnet.

Transnet cannot publically, at this stage, name the company and its shareholders but will do this after a due diligence. After this, the proposal will be submitted to the TFR Executive Leadership Team to support the awarding of the concession. The TFR Executive Leadership Team will then procure Group approval and Ministerial approval in terms of the Public Finance Management Act and finally enter into the concession agreement.

If everything goes according to plan, the possibility of running the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe over a smaller section of the line will be a reality in December 2018.

On 28 October, 2018 Transnet and the region will be celebrating the **90th anniversary of the opening of the original George to Knysna Railway Line** and the aim is to get the first services operational on this date.

-End -

Issued on Behalf of Transnet Freight Rail by: Mike Asefovitz

Voorbaai works

One of the points highlighted in the above statement was the investment in the workshops at Voorbaai. There are very few places in the country now that can carry out major overhauls.

Bobby Rudman and his team, some skilled and some previously unskilled, have brought back to life three locomotives for Ceres Rail. This is no mean feat when you consider that the works had been closed up for a good few years and recommissioning took a little time.

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Despite this, the team has to be congratulated on what they have achieved. Just think what a difference a bit of investment would make.

The first locomotive to be repaired was class 19D 3321 “Jessica”. This locomotive has been performing in Cape Town and Ceres and has been joined by two further locomotives. Jessica was returned to Voorbaai for an intermediate overhaul and has since returned to Ceres and presumably another of the fleet will take it’s place in due course.



Jessica gets a final paint and polish



Awaiting the call



Early morning light up



Some final adjustments

On Wednesday 29th November, Jessica was taken for a running in turn from Voorbaai to Grootbrakrivier. This meant an early start at 4.30 to get the loco in steam. Some minor adjustments were carried out and then the loco was hooked up to two vehicles to provide a load and to carry the staff and some tools, just in case. Following a slow run, an examination was carried out at GB and everything was fine. The run back was a little faster and once again, no problems.

As is becoming the norm now, Ceres rail organized a trip over four days to come and collect Jessica. If you get the opportunity, you really should get on one of these trips. Rovos rail it aint, but none the worse for that. Every trip is an adventure and facilities are improving every trip.

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As it turned out, Dominique, the train engine, developed a fault on the way to Voorbaai and the decision to leave it behind on the run back was taken. At least, it is now in the right place for repairs to be carried out.



Hooking onto the train



Approaching Grootbrakrivier



Examination at Grootbrakrivier



Coupling up for return trip

Colin Jenkins

As more details emerge concerning the George Knysna line, we will keep you posted. You will also be able to follow progress on Classic Rail's website, www.oudeniquachootjoe.com

Hopefully, we should be seeing some progress in the New Year but in the meantime, have a very Merry Christmas.

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