

**MERCURY - PERSEUS 400 kV TRANSMISSION LINE
TOURISM REPORT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report deals with the identification and assessment of impacts on tourism associated with the proposed Mercury-Perseus 400kV electricity transmission line.

Within the study area, there are game farms, conservancies, private nature reserves and state-owned nature reserves. These were categorised according to their Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs (DTEEA) protected area status. This status could change in future based on the NEMA Protected Areas Bill, which is outlined.

It is recommended that intersection of the transmission line alignment with protected areas Categories 3 and 4 (Nature Reserves and National Parks) be avoided. Categories 1 and 2 (Game Farms and Conservancies) represent locally protected areas that may be intersected by the transmission line, but only in the event that landowners are adequately consulted, and negotiations with Eskom include costs of relocating animals and infrastructure. It is recommended that construction within the Bothaville area not take place during the annual NAMPO Festival, and that the annual Witblits Festival be taken into consideration as well.

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1. Introduction

The proposed 400kV Eskom transmission line will connect Mercury, located near the town of Vierfontein, and Perseus, near Dealesville, in the western Free State, and supply electricity to Greater Cape region, south of Bloemfontein.

The study area is situated within the Lejweleputswa region within the western Free State, an area previously known as Free State Goldfields. Although this area was once targeted primarily for gold mining and maize cultivation, the emphasis of the new national and provincial government includes tourism as part of strategic planning for this region.

This area of the western Free State, rich in both cultural and agricultural history, has the potential to contribute to the growth of tourism in South Africa, and in particular the Free State. This report aims to identify this tourism potential and key tourist attraction sites within the study area, and to investigate future tourism development plans, which will inform proposals for alignment of the transmission line through the area. Once the impacts have been described, recommendations will be made to minimise negative impacts on tourism.

2. Background and Brief

The growth of tourism in South Africa is seen as a key mechanism in the alleviation of poverty and in the creation of employment opportunities. Tourism is seen as the means to sustainable income generation, particularly in rural areas, such as the western Free State. SATOUR estimates that 480,000 jobs are directly and indirectly created by tourism. Tourism is the fourth largest earner of foreign exchange in South Africa. 51% of tourists are arriving to enjoy the scenic beauty of South Africa, according to SATOUR (1996), and therefore conservation and tourism can be mutually beneficial.

The ecotourism market in the western Free State is largely untapped. In fact, in the 2003 DEAT Economic Strategy, the Free State holds less than 2% of the national tourist market. According to the SA Domestic Travel and Tourism Survey (April-May 2001), the “Visiting Friends and Relatives” (VFR) segment is the largest segment of the Free State domestic tourism market.

3. Study Approach

Relevant legislation was reviewed. The trends for tourism development for the study area were identified from the draft Lejweleputswa District Municipality IDP documents. Individuals involved in tourism development within the study area were interviewed. Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs (DTEEA) lists of game farms, conservancies and nature reserves were verified through consultation with Department officials, and local landowners. A map depicting these protected areas was compiled using this information, and each was rated in terms of conservation value based on discussion with DTEEA officials. This list requires further verification, as DTEEA officials are updating their lists. In many cases, landowners have sold their game farms or conservancies, and this information is yet to be captured by Free State DTEEA.

Internet research provided information on the major tourist attractions in the area, as well as tourism strategies adopted by national and local authorities. The Bothaville Tourism office was contacted and the following web sites were of use:

- SATOUR (www.satour.org)
- Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (www.environment.gov.za)
- Free State Tourism Department (www.freestatetourism.gov.za)
- Mangaung Web Site (www.mangaung ofs.gov.za)
- STATS SA (www.statssa.gov.za)

Based on this information, the tourism potential of the area is described and possible impacts of the proposed development on this tourism potential are

identified. Nature reserves, conservancies and game farms were delineated on the attached map from a list obtained from Free State DTEEA, and in conjunction with corrections suggested by landowners during the public consultation process.

4. Review of relevant policies and legislation

Policy and legislation governing tourism in South Africa emphasises the concepts of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism development. Tourism in South Africa is legislated in terms of the Tourism Act no. 72 of 1993, which was amended as the Tourism Amendment Act no. 105 of 1996 and the Tourism Second Amendment Act no. 70 of 2000. The 1996 White Paper on Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa introduces the concept of “responsible tourism”, tourism with a responsibility towards the environment, through sustainable use of resources, involvement of local communities, and commitment to safety and security of all concerned. Taking this further, the drive towards “sustainable tourism” development emphasises the optimisation of benefits relating to tourism, without compromising future benefits.

National Environmental Management Protected Areas Bill

The National Environmental Management Protected Areas Bill is set to change the definitions and status of conserved areas in South Africa. This Bill is relevant to this study as it could give new status to protected areas along the planned corridor.

There are to be 4 categories of protected areas, given in order of priority:

- Special Nature Reserves
- National Parks
- Nature Reserves
- Protected Environments

Each of these categories exist for specific purposes, which will be briefly outlined. The future protected area status in the study area will impact on future developments. The Bill has currently reached the first phase of the parliamentary process, and the Act is to be promulgated in early 2004. For the purposes of rating sensitivity of protected areas within the scope of this project, the new categories will be used.

Special Nature Reserves

Special Nature Reserves are to be areas of highly sensitive, outstanding ecosystems, species, geological or physical features, and will be declared to make the area available primarily for scientific research or environmental monitoring.

National Park

Areas to be declared National Parks are those previously designated “parks” under the National Parks Act (Act 57 of 1976) or “Lake Development Areas” under the Lake Areas Development Act (Act 39 of 1975), or those areas now declared national parks by the Minister. These areas will be protected as areas of national or international biodiversity significance, or those areas that represent a sample of South Africa’s natural systems or scenic areas. The ecological integrity of these areas will be protected, and exploitation or occupation will be prevented. Such areas will provide spiritual, scientific, educational, and recreational or tourism opportunities, that are environmentally compatible.

Nature Reserves

Nature reserves will exist to supplement the system of National Parks in SA, and in order to protect areas with significant features, species, habitats, biotic communities, or sites of scientific, cultural, historical or archaeological interest. These areas will be those in need of long-term protection and maintenance of biodiversity, and which provide a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet the needs of the local community. Declaration

of such areas is aimed at enabling a variety of traditional competitive uses and to provide nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities.

Protected Environments

Areas to be declared protected environments will act as buffer zones for Special Nature Reserves, National Parks or Nature Reserves, in order to prevent undesirable development, and to enable landowners to take collective action to conserve biodiversity on their land or to seek legal recognition. These areas will be those that are sensitive to development due to biological diversity, natural characteristics, and are of scientific, cultural, historical or archaeological value. The key function of protected environments is to protect specific ecosystems, which are not Special Nature Reserves, National Parks or Nature Reserves, to ensure sustainable use of natural resources and to limit land use in the area if it has been earmarked for future declaration as a Nature Reserve or National Park.

5. Study Area

The study area, shown on the attached map, includes a number of types of protected areas, ranging from private game farms to state-owned nature reserves. Free State DTEEA manages each of the types of protected areas differently, and each type is rated from 1-4 accordingly, in terms of conservation value. Category 1 has the least conservation significance. Category 4 has the highest significance.

Game Farms, Conservancies and Private Nature Reserves

Where owners of game farms have approached Free State DTEEA for listing as a conservancy, DTEEA sets certain conditions, including the erection of suitable game fences and introduction of indigenous plants and animals. Should the owner fulfil these conditions and be listed as a private nature reserve, he is then able to obtain game at a cheaper price, which is an incentive for game farm owners. In some cases, DTEEA will approach the owners directly for inclusion as private nature reserves. State-owned nature reserves also occur in the area.

Within the study area, there are both rural and urban conservancies, which for the most part, are areas maintained and managed by local communities, with some help and guidance from the Free State DTEEA office. Many of the original conservancies have been in existence for a long period, and have recently been verified by Free State DTEEA. According to Mr Christo de Meyer, few of these original conservancies remain, as farmers have sold most of these properties. DTEEA encourages the establishment of conservancies, as they represent a form of co-operative management of the environment. DTEEA connects conservancies in the area, in order to facilitate the exchange of information. Conservancies are reliant on the voluntary participation and support of the local communities.

In one instance, the community set up an urban conservancy, collecting funds for the building and maintenance of a wildlife refuge amongst townhouse developments. Through the fund, fences were erected, waterholes were dug and wildlife from the local zoo was introduced. The local municipality became involved in the conservancy when it came under threat from a new housing development. The conservancy was relocated with the help of the local council, and re-established in a larger, more suitable area.

The categories used for mapping and impact significance ratings are shown in Table 1. Conservation areas were divided into two: confirmed with DTEEA and unconfirmed with DTEEA.

Table 1: Categories of protected areas in study area

Category 1	Game Farms
Category 2	Conservancies
Category 3	Nature Reserves
Category 4	National Parks

6. Local Tourism Development Plans

Provincial tourism development

In the 2003 DEAT Economic Strategy, there is a focus on specific target markets, including bird watching, hiking and those wishing to enjoy the scenic beauty, 4X4 trails and fishing. The DTEEA Strategic Plan for 2003/4 and 2005/6 states that between R12-13 million is to be invested in marketing the province and in tourism development in the Free State before 2006.

Local tourism development

Local government is responsible for the planning, development, and maintenance of the local tourism product. Relevant local municipalities include Nala Local Municipality (including the districts of Bothaville, Wesselsbron), Tswelopele Local Municipality (Bultfontein, Hoopstad) and Tokologo Local Municipality (Boshof, Hertzogville, Dealesville).

Lejweleputswa Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

The Lejweleputswa District Municipality Planning, Implementation and Management Support System Centre (PMISS-Centre) has recently compiled the draft IDP document for the region, and submitted it to the provincial IDP Co-ordinator for review. The document is currently being reviewed.

The IDP goals for the region include:

- To develop and implement the District tourism strategy
- Provide entrepreneurship advice and training
- To have a tourism awareness campaign
- To host an African Eve Cultural Festival
- To have tourist exhibitions
- Twinning of cities
- Tourism signage, and
- Promotion of mining agri-eco for tourism

The business plans related to specific tourism development projects will be drawn up by Lejweleputswa District Municipality.

7. Major Tourist Attractions in the area

Bothaville is regarded as the centre of the Free State Maize Route, and is the venue for the annual NAMPO Harvest Farm Festival held in May. The NAMPO festival is currently the 2nd largest agricultural show centre in the world. It was started in 1967, as a way for local farmers to compare the products of various manufacturers. In 2003, the show attracted over 16 000 exhibitors from all over the world. The show is held at NAMPO Park, about 20km north of Bothaville. Bothaville also plays host to the annual Food and Witblits Festival in October. Within the Lejweleputswa area there are arts, craft and tavern tours, the Goldfields Tourism Route, Game and Nature Reserve Tours, the Friendship Tavern Crawling Tour, underground wine cellar and mine tours, and the Phakisa Freeway Tour.

8. Impact Assessment Methodology

Nature of the impact

This was an appraisal of the type of effect the construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed Mercury - Perseus 400 kV transmission line would have on the affected environment. This description included what would be affected and how.

Extent of the impact

The specialist described whether the impact will be: local - extending only as far as the transmission line servitude; or limited to the site and its immediate surroundings; or will have an impact on the region; or will have an impact on a national scale.

Duration of the impact

The specialist indicated whether the lifespan of the impact would be short term (0-5 years), medium term (6-10 years), long term (>10 years) or permanent.

Intensity

The specialist established whether the impact would be destructive or benign; this was qualified as low, medium or high. The specialist study quantified the magnitude of the impacts and outline the rationale used.

Probability of occurrence

Each specialist described the probability of the impact actually occurring and rated this data as improbable (low likelihood), probable (distinct possibility), highly probable (most likely) or definite (impact will occur regardless of any prevention measures).

Status of the impact

Each specialist determined the negative, positive or neutral aspects of the impacts (“cost – benefit” analysis). The impacts were assessed in terms of their effect on the project and the environment. For example, an impact that was positive for the proposed transmission line could be negative for the environment. It was important that this distinction was made in the analysis.

Degree of confidence in predictions

Degree of confidence was stated (low, medium or high) for the predictions based on the available information and level of knowledge and expertise.

Based on a synthesis of the information contained in the procedure described above, the specialist was then required to assess the potential impacts in terms of the following significance criteria:

- No significance – the impact does not influence the proposed Mercury - Perseus 400 kV transmission line and / or environment in any way;
- Low significance – the impacts will have a minor influence on the proposed transmission line and / or the environment. These impacts do not require modification of the project design or alternatives modification.
- Moderate significance – the impacts will have a moderate influence on the proposed transmission line and / or the environment. The impacts can be ameliorated by modification in the project design or implementation of effective mitigation measures.
- High significance – the impacts will have a major influence on the proposed transmission line and / or the environment. These impacts could make it necessary to apply the “No-go” option on portions of the proposed development regardless of any mitigation measures that could be implemented.

In order to assess impacts that relate to more than one element of the environment (e.g. visual quality and land use), certain specialists required information obtained from other specialists or from the lead consultants. A study team workshop was held to ensure that all specialists and the Proponent had a common understanding of the environment. This ensured that issues relating to the project were addressed in a synergistic manner.

For each of the two main project phases (construction and operation), the existing and potential future impacts and benefits (associated only with the proposed development) were described using the criteria listed above – for example: extent (spatial scale), duration, intensity, etc. The impacts were then assessed in terms of their significance (low, medium, or high) etc., and the degree of confidence for the assessment was stated.

For the sake of consistency in the impact assessment it was suggested that all potential impacts to the environment (or component of the environment under review) be listed in tables. The assessment parameters used in the tables were applied to all of the impacts and a brief descriptive review of the impacts and their significance was also provided in the text of the specialist reports and subsequently in the EIR.

9. Assessment of Impacts on Tourism Potential

Tourism potential of the study area could be directly impacted, should tourism infrastructure be destroyed or relocated, or indirectly, through impacts on bird life, aquatic resources, vegetation and fauna. (Table 2) These impacts have been detailed in the relevant specialist studies. The visual impact of the transmission line is detailed in the Visual Impact Assessment, but it is noted that the transmission line could have a significant negative impact on the visual character and ambience of the area, and thus negatively impact on the numbers of ecotourists visiting the area.

Impacts on flora and fauna, noise impacts and visual impacts have indirect impacts on tourism in the area. These impacts have been covered in the following sections: Ecological Impact Assessment, Visual Impact Assessment, impact on bird life and Impacts on Aquatic Resources.

Impacts of Construction Phase

Analysis of impacts on tourism is outlined in Table 2. The majority of these impacts are indirect (impacts on visual landscape, noise levels and flora and fauna), and are detailed in the relevant specialist reports. Site and timing of construction are crucial factors in minimising negative impacts.

Impacts of Operational Phase

Operation of the transmission line will impact on safety, in terms of the risks associated with operating a high voltage transmission line in areas birding activity. Future plans for hot air ballooning and for fly-over tours will be impacted on by the proposed development.

Table 2: Analysis of impacts on tourism

	Activity	Nature of Impact	Extent of impact	Duration of impact	Intensity of impact	Probability of impact	Significance	
							WOM	WM*
Construction and Operational Phases	Construction of the line on high-potential ecotourism or conservation land	Negative - reduced biodiversity and interference with ecosystem function	Regional	Short-term	Medium	Probable	High	Medium
		Negative – devaluation of land under the line	Regional	Short-term	High	Highly Probable	High	Medium-High
	Construction of the line adjacent to potential or existing ecotourism sites	Negative - relocation of water points , fences and infrastructure	Local	Short-term	Medium	Probable	Medium	Low
		Negative – diversion of game paths, bird migration routes	Local	Short-term	Medium	Probable	Medium	Low
		Negative - costs of relocation of animals	Local	Short-term	Medium	Probable	Medium	Low
		Negative - reduced numbers of foreign and local visitors	Regional	Long-term	Medium	Probable	Medium	Medium
	Operation of the 400 kV line	Negative – safety hazards for small aircraft, hot air ballooning tours	Regional	Permanent	Medium	Highly Probable	Medium	Low
		Negative - change in visual character of area	Local	Permanent	High	Highly Probable	High	Medium

WOM Without mitigation

WM* With mitigation

10. Recommendations

It is recommended that intersection of the transmission line alignment with protected areas Categories 3 and 4 (Nature Reserves and National Parks) be avoided. Categories 1 and 2 (Game Farms and Conservancies) represent locally protected areas that may be intersected by the transmission line, but only in the event that landowners are adequately consulted, and negotiations with Eskom include costs of relocating animals and infrastructure.

Bothaville is the centre of tourism in the area. It is recommended that construction within the Bothaville area not take place during the NAMPO Festival (18 – 21 May 2004). This festival attracts the majority of domestic and foreign tourists, and construction of transmission line would have a significant impact on visitors. During October, Bothaville becomes the venue for the Witblits Festival, and this should be taken into consideration during construction.

Corridor 4 intersects the lowest number of Category 3 and 4 protected areas. Where the proposed transmission line will cut through Categories 1 and 2, landowners have to be notified, and negotiations with Eskom will allow for compensation strategy to be finalised.