

PARLIAMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF THE WESTERN CAPE

QUESTION PAPER: WRITTEN REPLY

THURSDAY, 20 MARCH 2025

16. Mr D J Wessels to ask Mr T A Simmers, Minister of Infrastructure:

With regard to the status and management of the gravel road network in the Western Cape:

(a) (i) What is the current status of the province's gravel road network, (ii) how many kilometres of roads in total are being maintained and (iii) what are the details of any recent assessments conducted, (b)(i) what are the key challenges experienced in maintaining and upgrading gravel roads, particularly in rural and high-traffic areas, and (ii) what are the proposed solutions to address these challenges and to improve the condition and sustainability of the gravel road network and (c) what specific measures and interventions has his Department already implemented to enhance the quality and accessibility of gravel roads?

RESPONSE:

(a) (i) What is the current status of the province's gravel road network

The Western Cape's gravel road network is a vital link for rural communities, agriculture, and service delivery, but the network continues to face challenges due to aging infrastructure and constrained maintenance budgets. Severe flooding in 2023 and 2024 caused significant damage, cutting off access in several areas and placing additional pressure on the network. The Department of Infrastructure is actively working to repair the affected roads as funding becomes available. Although the department has a mature and well-established asset management systems in place, the extent of recent damage and the current condition of many roads emphasise the need for sustained investment and adaptable maintenance strategies to protect and restore critical connectivity.

(a) (ii) how many kilometres of roads in total are being maintained

The Department of Infrastructure is responsible for the proclaimed provincial road network within the Western Cape, which includes 24 865 km of unpaved roads.

(a) (iii) what are the details of any recent assessments conducted

The condition of the gravel road network, based on the 2023 visual assessment, is illustrated in the figure below:



Figure 1: The condition of the unpaved road network (2023)

(b) (i) what are the key challenges experienced in maintaining and upgrading gravel roads, particularly in rural and high-traffic areas

The maintenance of unpaved roads is challenged by several key constraints, including the limited supply of gravel wearing course in the Western Cape due to strict environmental, mining, land use and land expropriation legislation, difficult geology, and high costs associated with commercial sourcing and long-haul transport. Water for compaction is also scarce in arid and drought-prone areas, reducing the effectiveness of maintenance. In addition, inconsistent and insufficient funding hampers the planning and execution of routine and periodic maintenance and upgrading of gravel roads, leading to faster

deterioration and increased long-term costs. These issues are further intensified by high traffic volumes, especially from heavy vehicles, which accelerate rutting, corrugation, and gravel loss.

(b) (ii) what are the proposed solutions to address these challenges and to improve the condition and sustainability of the gravel road network

The Department recognises the challenges impacting the maintenance and sustainability of the gravel road network and is committed to addressing them through practical and sustainable solutions.

Efforts are being made to optimise the use of approved borrow pits, while processes to secure environmental and land use approvals, and land expropriation for additional sources are ongoing. The Department is also exploring options such as in-pit crushing, in-line crushers, material blending, and the use of alternative materials to improve the quality of gravel wearing course.

To respond to water constraints, possible interventions include the identification of shared water points and the use of water-saving additives, particularly in drought-prone areas.

While funding remains a constraint, the Department is working towards secure improved maintenance planning, budget prioritisation, and exploring potential partnerships, inter alia with agricultural organisations, to support long-term sustainability.

High-traffic routes are being reviewed to assess the need for upgrades or additional maintenance, improved drainage is under consideration to minimise damage.

(c) what specific measures and interventions has his Department already implemented to enhance the quality and accessibility of gravel roads?

The Department has undertaken several targeted measures to enhance the quality and accessibility of gravel roads. These include the ongoing utilisation of Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) approved borrow pits to reduce environmental delays, and

the investigation of new borrow pits and obtaining DMRE and land use approvals and expropriating land for these borrow pits, to ensure the availability of gravel wearing course material and within reasonable hauling distances.

Basic regravelling and blading activities continue as part of routine maintenance programmes, with available resources allocated to ensure maximum coverage.

In areas with high maintenance needs, road sections have been prioritised for upgrading to surface standard, based on traffic volumes and socio-economic importance.

In some regions, pilot projects involving inline crushing and material blending have been introduced to improve material quality. Furthermore, Road Asset Management Systems (RAMS) are being used to collect road condition data and inform maintenance planning. Training and support have been provided to district-level teams to strengthen in-house capacity and improve the responsiveness of local maintenance operations.

TERTUIS SIMMERS

MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE

DATE: