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NEWSFLASH

Classic Rail. Media release. 14 June 2016

Track repair begins on George-Knysna railway line

A team of specialist contractors has moved into Knysna to repair the George-Knysna railway line in preparation for the opening of a new tourist train service.

The line has been out of commission since 2006, when flood damage forced the closure of the popular Outeniqua Choo Tjoe steam train between Knysna and George.

Now, however, Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) has appointed Knysna-based Classic Rail as its preferred branch line concessionaire for a period of twenty years.

The company received beneficial occupation of the line on 16 February 2016.

The team on site includes Classic Rail's consortium partners, MechMobility, Global Civil Solutions, and Afri-Jero Track Engineers.

First phase

While it will take some time for steam to return to the Garden Route, Classic Rail CEO Alan McVitty hopes to have the Knysna Dinner Train running between the Knysna Station and Keytersnek by December, 2016.

The first phase of the development (the restoration of the line between Knysna and Keytersnek, near the Rheenendal turnoff on the N2), will also include the restoration of four dining carriages and two freight cars, which will be converted to open viewing carriages.

“We have all the engineering and equipment in place to transport the rolling stock to Knysna by road as soon as the track is ready. This includes both the carriages and our 100-ton classic Class 32 diesel locomotives - the first diesels used in South Africa,” said Mr. McVitty.

Meals for the Knysna Dinner Train will be prepared in a new restaurant that will be created in the Knysna Station, and that will incorporate the historic Governor Generals' Private Saloon (which was built in 1931, and which is currently standing alongside the station platform).

“Once Knysna’s up and running, we’ll begin work on the second and third phases of the project, which will include reopening the line to George for the New Outeniqua Choo Tjoe, as well as for other tourist trains and, ultimately, freight trains by 2020.”

100 year plan

Mr. McVitty stressed that the project has got this far only because, “Transnet - and a whole lot of other good people - have brought their enormous good will to the party.

“With so many people so excited about what we’re doing, we’re not looking at this as a 20-year project.

“Rather, we see it as a 100-year plan that will preserve an important part of our heritage, and that will create opportunities for the local economy, for training and skills development, and for locals and visitors alike to once again enjoy the experience of what is probably the most scenic steam route in the world,” he said.

An announcement about on-line booking facilities for the Knysna Dinner Train will follow.
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