

Light at end of Durban logistics corridor

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TRANSPORT Minister S'bu Ndebele has given the clearest indication yet that the government will opt to transform Durban's old airport site into a multibillion-rand dug-out port.

He told *The Mercury* that the task team set up to deal with the airport site would present him with a final report before the end of the month. He was briefing the media on behalf of the cabinet's infrastructure development cluster.

The task team was looking into the possibility of transforming the area into a "dug-out port" linked to a transport corridor that would include Cato Ridge in KwaZulu-Natal, Harrismith in the Free State, and City Deep in Johannesburg.

The team comprised representatives from the departments of Transport and Public Enterprises, as well as corresponding departments from the KwaZulu-Natal government and the premier's office.

Ndebele would only add that the team was expected to come with a "firm plan" and not simply a menu



Questions about the future of the old Durban International Airport site seem close to being answered.

of possibilities. "No, no. We commissioned this thing last May already. We can't go into another May without having a clear plan," he said.

Transnet has expressed strong interest in buying the land from the Airports Company of South Africa following the opening of the new King Shaka International Airport last May.

However, Ndebele's mention of linking a dug-out port in Durban to the major logistics corridor to Joburg has lifted the veil slightly

on the government's bigger plans.

Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Andrew Layman said Ndebele's statement signified the direction of thinking in the government's bigger infrastructure plans.

"We as the chamber would support a dug-out port as it would contribute significantly to the economic growth of the KZN and South African economy," he said.

Linking the port to the N3 corridor to Joburg no doubt made economic sense because it was a

major economic and strategically important logistics route.

Durban mayor Obed Mlaba said the city fully backed a dug-out port plan.

"Discussions are now at an advanced stage... And the city, as part of the task team with provincial and national government, will be meeting with the minister on the plan soon," he said.

"We have supported the dug-out port plan as far back as the mid-1990s to boost Durban's position as the busiest port in Africa. Over the years the current port has shown consistent growth, but expansion has been constrained," said Mlaba.

"For us a new dug-out port in a greenfields site will allow for the latest design and technology. It would be able to handle larger volumes and bigger ships. But most importantly it will have major economic and job creation spin-offs for Durban and that's the most important thing for the country," he said.

Mlaba said the Durban-Joburg corridor was the busiest in the southern hemisphere and was the backbone of SA's freight transportation network.