



What's next for the Outeniqua Choo Tjoe?

24 Wed, Oct 2012

The Outeniqua Choo Tjoe, stranded since seasonal floods severely damaged the railway line six years ago, can only really start its road back to recovery when a multi-stakeholder partnership is formed, preferably involving Transnet, tourism authorities and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC).

The Choo Tjoe service from George to Knysna, a popular Garden Route tourist attraction, was terminated following the 2006 floods and resultant line damage.

Alan Winde, Western Cape Minister of Finance, Economic Development and Tourism, says: "A successful outcome can only be reached once a multi-stakeholder partnership is formalised, as combined resources and effort will be needed to reintroduce the Outeniqua Choo Tjoe as part of a whole iconic tourism experience in the Southern Cape."

He says the Western Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism is having ongoing talks with all potential stakeholders who might contribute to the revitalisation of the Choo Tjoe, which remains Transnet's property. The ultimate outcome will depend on Transnet's position on the Choo Tjoe.

"The next step is for Transnet to respond favourably to a possible multi-stakeholder partnership which ideally would include the National Department of Tourism and IDC." Decisions around cost estimates and operational matters can only be made once an agreement has been reached with Transnet, says Winde.

Mboniso Sigonyela, Spokesperson for Transnet, says Transnet is exploring various options regarding the line's future. "This may include engaging with potential investors from the private sector and other parties. We'll make an announcement on the outcome of this exercise after all consultation and governance processes have been concluded."

Since the Choo Tjoe's inception in 1993 it carried an average of 40 000 passengers per year on daily trips between George and Knysna. This number grew to approximately 115 000 passengers, travelling annually, of whom about 70% were foreign tourists. Ticket prices varied between R132 and R186.

Riana Geldenhuys

Tourism Update