

THE POTHOLE SCOURGE



Having lived in Johannesburg all my life, I have never seen our roads deteriorate to the extent they have over the past few weeks. Some sections of roads look so bad that one would be excused for thinking Johannesburg does not have a Roads Agency – or, if it has one, that the people who work there don't give a hoot about doing their job. This is not true – but we'll get back to that.

Having driven around a number of suburbs to inspect the damage, I came across sections of roads ranging from totally undrivable to others which were fine for a



CRY THE BELOVED ROADS

VIDEO REEL

Potholes on View

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FleetWatch Editor
on the road

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During the recent heavy rains which fell over Johannesburg, former easy to drive roads turned into a minefield of potholes which caused many thousands of Rands damage to tyres and rims. All road users suffered as the Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) found it impossible to keep up with repairs. There is, however, a plan for the road ahead writes Patrick O'Leary.

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couple of hundred metres and then, out of nowhere, a huge pothole would appear. It was the latter that represented more danger than the former as it was these 'hidden killers' that vehicles were hitting at night. Then there were the older roads in suburbs like Greenside – well built at the time but now peppered with cracks from which grass is growing. It's only a matter of time before that tar starts lifting.

On these pages, I have documented - via photographs and videos - a representative sample of the various roads I inspected. Have a look at them and you will understand why I arrived for a press conference at the Johannesburg Roads Agency in an angry mood. It was beyond comprehension that the JRA would have let our roads deteriorate to such an extent. Not only were they posing a threat to people's lives, but the whole economy was being slowed down as vehicles crawled at a tortoise-like speed as they weaved

their way through the minefields. Some, especially at night, also incurred thousands of Rand damage to tyres and rims as they hit these hidden killers.

The first comfort I got on arrival was seeing that the JRA is now headed by Skhumbuzo Macozoma as MD, a man who used to work at the Department of Transport and did some sterling work on the overloading scenario. His reputation as a no-nonsense man who wants action rather than words precedes him and this came through as he outlined the situation from the JRA's point of view. What I found encouraging was that he had his whole team of players at the table with him making everyone accountable for their words and deeds.

As Macozoma went through the details, it became obvious that this department was admitting past faults yet was also being realistic about recent events which had ▶ 10



▲ These pictures show the extent of damaged roads around the Johannesburg area. In some provinces, roads have been like this for ages due to maintenance neglect. Tyre impact fractures are the danger here as can be seen in the photograph on the left – taken from inside a pothole - which clearly shows what a tyre has to go through when it hits a pothole. Hit it at speed and you could end up dead from a blow-out.

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A Killer hole

This pothole on Hendrik Potgieter Road (M47) was responsible for taking out a number of cars on just one night. See accompanying pics. The real danger was a tyre blowout which could have resulted in a head-on collision and death. It was a killer pothole. Patrick O'Leary saved a few cars away but it was too dangerous (see video). He reported it to Wayne Minnaar that night who in turn reported it to the JRA. It was fixed. Well done guys.

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► exacerbated the problems – specifically the extensive and heavy rainfall that had fallen almost non-stop over Gauteng for three weeks – and was making no false promises in terms of providing overnight solutions.

It is well known that while rain is a good friend to mielie fields, it is an enemy of roads and the JRA has a full scale war on its hands in fighting this enemy. This is evident by the fact that as a result of the rain, Macozoma said the JRA is working seven days a week repairing 12 703 potholes and 37 545 patchings while also clearing, unblocking and performing minor repairs on some 887 storm water drains. In addition to this, the JRA is



also responsible for ensuring that the city's 2114 traffic signals are working across the city.

Macozoma said the cost of repairs to the damaged roads infrastructure is estimated at R23-million while another R37-million has been targeted at repairing and rehabilitation of bridges and culverts. He added that the heavy rains had pushed forward the city's agendas and in line with this, nine bridges have been prioritised for reconstruction and upgrades.

This is aside from the R1.8-billion announced in October last year by the executive mayor of the City of Johannesburg earmarked for a three year project aimed at giving Johannesburg's road infrastructure a facelift.

One of the problems we are seeing all around the country is shoddy – or no work – done on roads by contractors who are neither skilled nor equipped for the job. How they get these jobs is anyone's guess – but I think we all know the answer to this.

On this point, Macozoma said the JRA had brought in a number of new engineers to add to the JRA's skills base. He also spelt out in no uncertain terms that the JRA will operate on ethical and honest terms. In other words, corruption would be a 'NO-GO' area. Now that's a big YES-YES!

All this served to dissipate my anger and give hope that there are committed people in the JRA. Yes, the roads are in an awful state at the moment – and FleetWatch contends that apart from the rain, a lot of this is due to shoddy maintenance practices in the past (patches on patches) but there is a plan. With Macozoma leading that plan, I think we can have hope. ☐

◀ The sign above Skhumbuzo Macozoma, MD of the JRA, is apt. Here's looking at you Mr Macozoma.

View more
potholed
roads



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DIY

Locals take to the roads

Throughout the country, local residents like Paul Nucci, MD of Arrow Coaches (middle left) and Peter Da Luca (bottom left), owner of Casalinga Restaurant, took to the streets to do their own pothole fixing in their areas while entrepreneurial locals (top right) filled potholes in the hope of getting tips from passing motorists. Bottom right is Da Luca's response to the suggestion of phoning President Zuma to help.



N14 - a BEE-G mess!

The N14 highway running between Pretoria and Johannesburg should always be in tip top condition given that, according to Gauteng Roads and Transport MEC Ismail Vadi, a three year maintenance contract was issued last year by his department to a BEE company, Big Eye Investment 210 CC, to maintain the road on the Krugersdorp side of the highway. The contract was valued at around R122-million over the three year period. However, when Vadi recently visited the road and found huge potholes and general maintenance neglect, he was not a happy man. *The Star* quoted him as saying: "These big potholes had been here for the past four months. It is clear no maintenance was conducted on this road." According to *The Star's* report, Vadi threatened to terminate the company's contract and possibly blacklist it. Yeah! We agree. If they aren't doing the job, get 'em out - but please get the money back as well. When *FleetWatch* editor Patrick O'Leary visited the site Vadi was referring to, he found road maintenance crews hard at work repairing the road. They had already repaired some huge potholes on the north-bound lane and were busy on the south-bound lane. Some of those were absolute monsters – see accompanying photographs. Good to see that the MEC is pulling no punches when it comes to the performance of road contractors. Now if only all Provincial Roads & Transport MEC's would follow Vadi's example and demand top-class performance from all roads contractors around the country. The Free State, where many millions of Rand have been squandered on useless contractors, would be a good place to start.

