

Pipeline delay leads to fuel hijacking from trucks

SYNDICATE: USED A SIGNAL JAMMER WHILE SIPHONING OFF FUEL

→ The R23bn pipeline is not expected to be online before June next year.

Amanda Watson

Transnet has denied its new multi-product R23 billion pipeline (NMPP) between Johannesburg and Heidelberg is non-functional.

The new pipeline is supposed to replace the existing 45-year-old Durban-to-Johannesburg pipeline. While the two pipes are run side by side, operating costs per Ml/km increased by 15.3%, according to the Transnet annual report for 2012/13.

The project was supposed to be completed in 2010. Last year, Minister of Public Enterprises Malusi Gigaba said the initial estimated cost of the NMPP was R9.5 billion. "However, as the project progressed, the estimated costs increased progressively from R9.5 billion to the current R23.4 billion and the project completion date was pushed from 2010 to 2013," he is recorded as saying.

"The pipeline would be the safest means of transporting petrol and diesel and is not yet fully op-

12 000

the number of jobs created during construction

555km

length of the trunk line from Durban to Gauteng

3 million

volume of litres to be pumped per hour once complete

95

the number of wetlands the NMPP cuts through

1.5 km

distance drilled under a busy Gauteng highway

49

the number of main rivers the NMPP crosses

erational. Up to R350 million has been lost in stolen fuel. Fortunately, three people involved in a blue-light fuel truck hijacking syndicate were arrested and it appears to have stopped completely," said Conrad van der Merwe of private

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When completed, Heidelberg will have:

- ▶ Three tanks for low-sulphur diesel, each capable of storing 20 000 million litres.
- ▶ One tank for ultralow-sulphur diesel, capable of storing 20 000 million litres.
- ▶ Three tanks for 93 unleaded petrol, each capable of storing 20 000 million litres.
- ▶ One tank for 95 unleaded petrol, capable of storing 20 000 million litres.
- ▶ Two tanks for jet fuel, each capable of storing 10 000 million litres.

investigation firm, Justicia Investigations.

While the trucks have sophisticated satellite tracking systems that detect when they have stopped, the hijackers outsmart them with signal jammers.

"The hijackers use a white unmarked vehicle fitted with blue lights to pull the trucks over between 150km and 200km outside Johannesburg. They have insider information from someone in Durban who lets the hijackers know when the truck is leaving, so they know when to expect it and don't have to hang around on the

highway waiting for it."

Once the trucks have stopped, the criminals, wearing traffic police or SA Police Service uniforms, ask the driver for his licence. "Then they tell him to exit the truck and once he is outside, he is stuffed into the boot of the criminal's car. They activate a signal jammer which is kept on while they dispose of the fuel."

He said while the pipeline was closed, there were up to 60 trucks a day on South African roads transporting fuel to Johannesburg. "Gauteng uses 65% of South Africa's fuel, and the majority is transported by road," said Van der Merwe.

Transnet spokesman Mboniswa Siqongela disputed the claim and said the pipe was fully operational. "I know why the trucks are running on the highway; it is because some mixed [fuel] products which do not have enough volume to run through the pipe."

He said upon completion of the terminal in Durban the network would be fully multi-product capable. "This will happen in the second half of next year and we have communicated this to the National Energy Regulator of South Africa. At the moment, we are able to fill all our orders and combined with the old Durban-Johannesburg pipe, we have enough capacity to carry even more fuel."