

SCOPING AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORTING (S&EIR) PROCESS FOR THE PROPOSED SKYWALK PROJECT AT GOD'S WINDOW

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT (BID) AND INVITATION TO COMMENT



AUGUST 2013



PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to provide all interested and affected parties (I&APs) with information about the proposed skywalk project - God's Window. In addition, the document also aims to:

- Introduce and explain the Scoping and Environmental Impact Reporting (S&EIR) process, including the public participation process (PPP0) that will be followed for the proposed project, in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, (Act No.107 of 1998), (NEMA) as amended and the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, (Act No. 59 of 2008), (NEM: WA); and
- Invite all I&APs to comment on the proposed project by raising issues of concern and/or suggestions for enhanced benefits/alternatives on any aspect related to the proposed development.

To register and for more information on the project please contact the following person(s):

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Introduction and Background

Strategic Environmental Focus (Pty) Ltd (SEF), as independent environmental practitioners has been appointed by the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (hereafter referred to as the IDC) on behalf of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) to undertake to S&EIR process for the proposed Skywalk project.

The IDC, set up as a limited liability company, is a self-financing national development finance institution whose primary objectives are to contribute to the generation of balanced, sustainable economic growth in Africa and to the economic empowerment of the South African population, thereby promoting the economic prosperity of all citizens.

The IDC is funding the MTPA to establish the a proposed skywalk project at God's Window located on the ridge of the Blyde River Canyon, within the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality (TCM), in the Ehlazeni District Municipality, Mpumalanga Province.

The MTPA is a creature of statute established in terms of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency Act of 2005, Act No. 5 of 2005, and listed as a Schedule 3C Public Entity. The objective of the agency is to provide for the sustainable management and promotion of tourism and nature

conservation in the Province and to ensure the sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

The Blyde River Canyon is the world's largest green canyon and the third largest overall. The Canyon is a unique natural environment, with dramatic views across the world's deepest green canyon and dramatic rock formations. Views from God's Window extend down to the lowveld, across to the distant Kruger National Park. The viewpoint is already a popular part of the Panorama Route which comprises a small number of relatively undeveloped, but highly impressive beauty spots.

The canyon, and many of the attractions within it, is operated by the MTPA in association with the various communities along the edges of the canyon.

The skywalk project represents the core component of the development at God's Window. However, in the future there could be potential to supplement this attraction with the addition of a 'Skylift' and/or an observation tower. The Skylift concept would involve a vertical drop by a hoisting system into a series of suspended walkways in the forest below.

Project Motivation

The MTPA has a long-term vision to upgrade all of the major attractions along the Panorama Route. In order to market the area as a major tourism destination, there is an opportunity to package the route as a whole, with an entry pass providing admission to all of the attractions along the ridge of the Blyde River Canyon

Being the first project of its kind in South Africa (SA), and Africa as a whole, the skywalk project will advance SA's position in global tourism. The project is expected to greatly boost the economic growth of the Mpumalanga Province through the massive growth in regional tourism, which will also have a positive impact in the South African economy. Blyde River Canyon is the second biggest tourist attraction in Mpumalanga, which provides the reason for a need to utilise its full potential in opportunities.

Location

The proposed site for skywalk is situated at God's Window, on the ridge of the Blyde River Canyon (Figure 1). The site falls within Farm De Houtbosch 503 KT and Portion 2 of Farm Lisbon 531 KT. The project site lies 5km north of Graskop, which together with Sabie and Hazyview, forms a triangle of key towns along the tourist route

The site has the following SG Codes:

- TOKT0000000050300000; and
- TOKT0000000053100002.

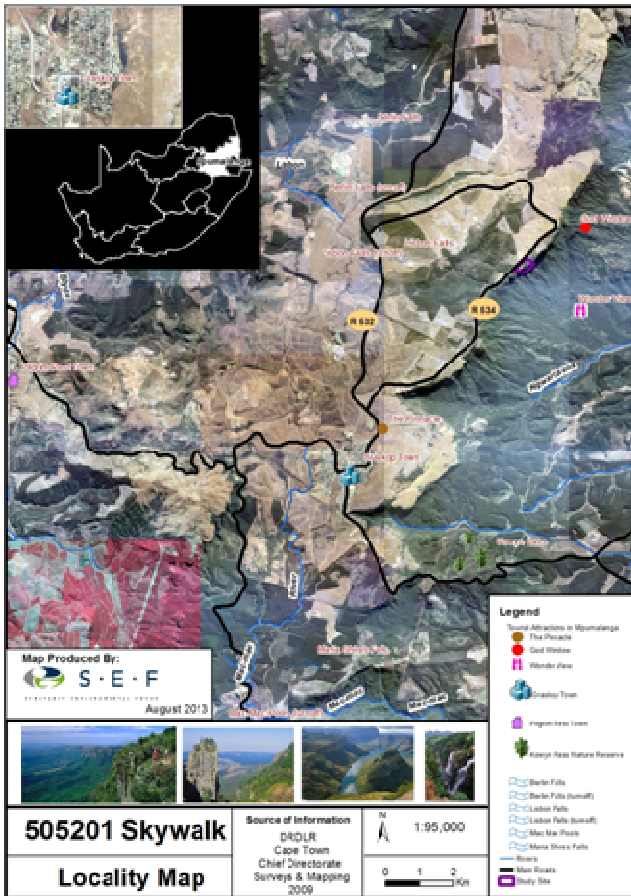


Figure 1: Locality Map for the proposed God's Window



Figure 2: Proposed Location

Description of the proposed project

Infrastructure

The skywalk at God's Window is envisaged to be a cantilevered glass walkway, extending some 12 metres from the Canyon's edge, giving a 360° panoramic view creating the feeling of being suspended or hovering in the air, with a 700 metre vertical drop below, as well as a main building which will house a cafeteria and gift shop. This will be achieved by large glass panels on the floor and sides of the walkway that is suspended off the edge of the cliff. The structure will be made of both metal (for strength and rigidity) and glass (for transparency). The skywalk will be designed with a single access and exit route channelling visitors in one direction. In the centre of the walkway, there will be provision

for a Skylift platform which will be positioned under the main structure and will be largely out of site. The whole structure will be anchored on top of the cliff using rock anchors and concrete blocks for counter weight.

The skywalk will form part of a larger redevelopment of God's Window, including an enhancement of the existing walkways, viewpoints and car park (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Proposed Skywalk Concept

The site itself does not have clearly defined boundaries, however it is estimated that the main area of the God's Window site (car park, ablution facility and area up to the ridge) to be around 25 000 m² (2.5 ha) in size. The area between the existing car park and the ridge is considered as a 'disturbed area' (Figure 2) due to prior environmental degradation. The site currently therefore entails a car parking area, visitor's entrance and retail area for local craftspeople that currently trade from stalls at God's Window. The proposed project will also entail a new visitor centre and enhanced retail area for local craftspeople that currently trade from stalls at God's Window.

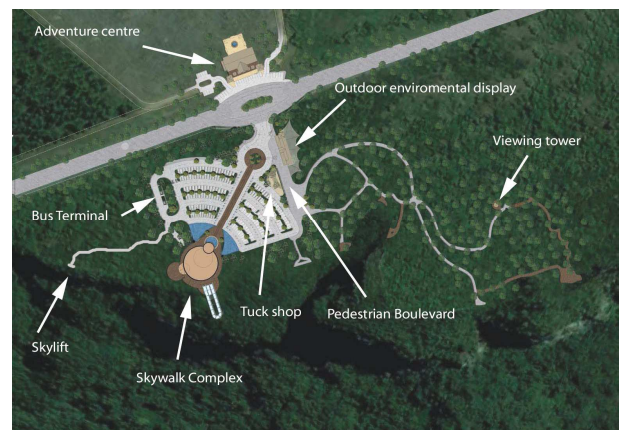


Figure 4: Gods Window Site Plan

However, in the future, there could be potential to supplement this attraction with the addition of a 'Skylift' and/or an observation tower. The Skylift concept would involve a vertical drop by a hoisting system into a series of suspended walkways in the forest below. This concept opens up the possibility and access to the little known

hanging forests of the cliff face areas below or adjacent to Gods Window. This experience would be a world first, and limited to a small number of people a day, under the supervision of well qualified guides.

Services

Power/electricity will be supplied by the MTPA.

Water will potentially be extracted from groundwater, rivers and streams adjacent to the site. The volume that will be extracted is 20 000 litres per month.

Waste management: For waste management, the full waterborne sanitation is currently being used on site. The proposed project has considered two onsite waste management systems and will be investigated/ assessed during the Environmental Impact Reporting (EIR) phase of the proposed project. These include the following alternatives:

- Flushing toilet with conservancy tank; and
- Lilliput Sewerage Treatment System

Legal Requirements of the S&EIR

In accordance with the requirements of the NEMA and the NEMWA, the IDC, on behalf of the MTPA requires prior approval i.e. Environmental Authorisation (EA) and Waste Management License (WML) from the Competent Authority, in this case the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) to undertake the proposed project.

For the purpose of this development the following listed activities are anticipated to be applicable to the proposed development:

Environmental Authorisation:

GN Regulation 544 (Listing Notice 1)

- Activity numbers 9, 11, 18, 37 and 40

GN Regulation 546 (Listing Notice 3)

- Activity numbers 12, 16

Waste Management License

GN No. 718, Category B

- Activity Number 5, 7 and 11

Water Use License

Due to water resources identified on site (i.e. non perennial rivers), and the close proximity of the Blyde River, the proposed development may trigger the following water uses listed in Section 21 of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998) (NWA).

- Abstraction of water;
- impeding or diverting the flow of water in a watercourse;
- disposing of waste in a manner which may detrimentally impact on a water resource; and
- altering the bed, banks, course or characteristics of a watercourse.

Preliminary Issues for Investigation

The following potential anticipated impacts will be investigated during the S&EIR process:

- Impact on rivers and wetlands
- Impact on soil

- Impact on local biodiversity (Flora and Fauna including Avi- Fauna)
- Visual Intrusion
- Social and Economic Impact
- Pollution and Waste Management
- Traffic Impact
- Noise impacts

Specialist Investigation

The following specialist studies will be executed as part of the S&EIR process:

Specialist Study	Appointed Company/Specialist
Visual	SEF
Ecological	SEF
Heritage	SEF
Traffic	WSP SA Civil and Structural Engineers
Geo-technical	ARQ Consulting Engineers
Geo-hydrological	Aurecon

SEIR Process

Box 1. What is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

An EIA is a good planning and decision-making tool. It is able to identify the environmental impacts of a proposed project, and helps to ensure that the project, over its life cycle, will be environmentally acceptable and integrated into the surrounding environment in a sustainable manner. The EIA process is based on the principle of sustainability and aims to assess the impact on the social, economic and environmental spheres.

A S&EIR process typically has four phases as illustrated by Figure 4 below.

How can I get involved?

Please send us your comments/views so that we can address them during the S&EIR process. Once you register, SEF will keep you informed of the availability of Scoping and EIA Report and invite you to any public consultation meetings. Your comment is important to us!

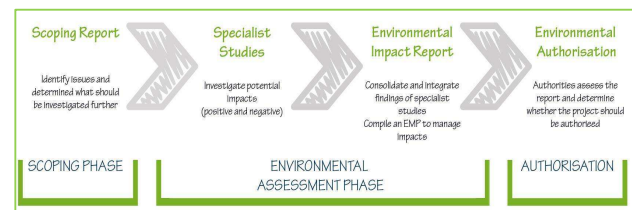


Figure 4: Four Phases of an EIA Process

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