

## Lephalale military strip eyed as airport

Limpopo is considering converting the Lephalale military airstrip into a full civilian airport, provincial transport officials said on Monday.

The transport department was also lobbying national government to upgrade Hoedspruit into an international airport, spokesman Thesan Moodley said.

He said the department would conduct a feasibility study to determine whether there was a need to have a commercial airport in Lephalale, given infrastructure development and the creation of a new city in the area.

"We are going to do a feasibility study on the establishment of an airport in Lephalale. The airstrip was previously used by the SA National Defence Force," said Moodley.

The border town lies between South Africa and Botswana and is about 300km north-west of Polokwane. It is home to the multi-million rand Medupi power station which is currently under construction. The coal-rich town has seen strong development since Eskom began building Medupi a few years ago.

### **Passenger traffic: Lephalale holds most potential**

According to the Limpopo aviation strategy and implementation plan, Lephalale military airport is currently being rented out for use by a private company.

"There may be an opportunity to transport some specialised mining equipment to the area with unscheduled private planes, and some courier-type cargo as the economy of the area develops," according to the study commissioned by the department last year.

"From a passenger perspective, Lephalale holds the most potential. Passenger demand is mainly driven by tourism demand, which will veer towards the areas with the most tourism potential."

On the possible upgrading of Hoedspruit airport, Moodley said about 48 000 passengers departed from and arrived at the airport between 2008 and 2010.

"With the current flights and aircraft used on the route from Johannesburg to Hoedspruit, the airport has the capacity to handle an additional 10 000 to 11 000 passengers."

Moodley said the planned development would boost the local economy.

Source: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge