

# Mozambique roads tarred for safety

The Portuguese are busy tarring their roads because it is much more difficult to lay mines in tarmac than in earth. Starting with only 850 tarred miles they want 7,000 miles within 10 years.

MOZAMBIQUE is a road-builder's dream: with an area of 303,770 square miles, mostly savanna and coastal plains, and a maximum length of 1,220 miles, this territory looks like an elongated shrimp forking out in two directions on both sides of Malawi. Still, in 1965, Mozambique had only 850 miles of tarred roads. In 1967, only a further 51 miles were built.

In the meantime, the war brought an increased urgency to road-building in Mozambique. As any newcomer to the art of guerrilla war will say, one cannot easily hide a mine in an asphalted surface. . . . In 1971 the pace increased to 350 miles of tarred roads a year and with the ambitious 1971-79 road plan (total estimated cost: \$375m.) picking up speed, the Mozambique authorities are thinking in terms of a network of some 7,000 miles of tarred roads within less than 10 years.

The first stage (1971-75) of the plan, for which tenders were closed on December 31, 1971, will comprise the construction of 600 miles of tarred roads and 14 bridges.

The first stretch of the axial thoroughfare between Lourenco Marques and the Tanzanian border was scheduled to be completed in February. The two main cities in the territory, Lourenco Marques and Beira, will later be connected by an

all-weather road which comprises a 950-yard bridge over the Save River.

The tenders now closed also included the tarring of parts of the 23-ft. wide Vila Paiva de Andrada-Lurio River section (625 miles). Vila Paiva de Andrada is situated on the Beira-Salisbury road and the Lurio is less than 200 miles away from the Ruvuma, which forms the natural border with Tanzania.

Beside the bridge over the Save, work is near completion on the \$1.8m. bridge over the Zambezi at Tete, and plans are ready for a 2,600-yard bridge over the Zambezi, but further downstream, at Vila Fontes.

So far so good and things look hopeful for Portuguese Mozambique, at least on paper. However, the Lourenco Marques-Beira connection has little strategic value and its economic future is arguable. The port of Beira has been limping along since the enforcement of economic sanctions on Rhodesia. With the improvement of the Rhodesian economy following a possible settlement with the UK, the port will undoubtedly pick up some more traffic but there will be little overflow of cargo and passengers left for the land route to Lourenco Marques.

As concerns the roads north of the Beira-Salisbury axis, the Portuguese have yet to prove that they will be able to build them. According to an official spokesman the first phase of the 1971-79 road plan will cost some \$40m., and at least 40% will have to be financed by external sources. With the Mozambique balance of payments under heavy stress because of the Cabora Bassa dam and the security situation still causing concern, Mozambique will clearly have great difficulty in obtaining the required external financing, but without which the ambitious 1971-79 plan will never materialise.

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