

## **DOT UNDERTAKING EXTENSIVE AUDIT ON ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE FOLLOWING DEVASTATING FLOODS IN KZN**

The Department of Transport in KwaZulu-Natal is currently undertaking an extensive audit of the impact of the recent floods, some dating as far back as 2008, on its ability to deliver the road infrastructure network as spelt out in its budget for 2010/11 financial year.

These floods, including the recent ones that hit uMzinyathi district, flattening major roads infrastructure, taking away several lives of neighbouring communities and in the process causing massive disruption in the construction programmes, remain a cause for concern in the Department.

Just to give a brief background, the floods that hit KwaZulu-Natal in June 2008 caused a devastating damage on the provincial road network, destroying roads and bridges and causing damages to the tune of R1.1 billion.

Further to that the department suffered heavy blows when its infrastructure was hit by the November 2009/January 2010 floods which caused damages to the tune of R312 million.

In a briefing to the joint Transport and Finance Parliamentary Portfolio Committees last year, the Head of Department Mr Chris Hlabisa, indicated a projected shortfall of R874 million needed to fix damages caused by floods.

Given the state of affairs painted above, the department has been forced to re-prioritize on its expenditure on its road infrastructure delivery.

A thorough audit of the state of the provincial road infrastructure that had been recently conducted by our engineers, points to a need to review our infrastructure delivery, paying more attention to the most immediate needs brought about by the impact of flooding in the province.

The audit from our engineers points to an urgent need to focus on the maintenance of the road infrastructure in order to preserve what we already have.

While this study is still underway, it however, suggests that we may have to delay the completion of some of the current construction projects in order to attend to these new urgent needs.

Some of the realities that have emerged from this exercise are the need for the department to speed up the delivery of pedestrian bridges to allow pupils and communities to be able to cross flooding rivers.

In a bid to ensure that in particular learners are able to reach schools in the rural part of the province, we have set ourselves a target of delivering 15 new pedestrian bridges.

Already 12 have been completed with three set to be completed before the end of the current financial year in March.

Given the ravage caused by the floods on our road network, the department has also been forced to re-prioritize the construction on bridges on the routes that are critical for the functioning of the provincial economy.

More than 1500km of rural roads that were ravaged by floods were prioritized for the betterment and re-gravelling as some of these roads were impassable.

In this regard, a total of five new vehicle bridges have been identified for construction. Two of these have already been completed while the other three will be completed before the end of the current financial year.

It is however important to note that no constructor has not been paid and the Zibambele programme is not affected by this audit process.

While the Department has been forced to shift its focus as a result of these unforeseen pressures put on us by floods, it is however, still fully committed to meeting its infrastructure delivery targets spelt out by MEC, Willie Mchunu, in his 2011/12 financial year budget speech.

**“The Department is still very much committed to fulfilling the social contract it entered into with the people of this province. While this re-prioritization and shift of focus might represent a minor delay, the department is ready, willing and committed to meeting all the infrastructure targets of the current financial year,”** said HOD Hlabisa.

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