

**EXECUTIVE STATEMENT ON THE HORRIFIC SHAKA'S HEAD ROAD CRASH THAT  
KILLED 16 PEOPLE TABLED BY THE MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY  
AND LIAISON, MR. T.W. MCHUNU, AT THE KWAZULU-NATAL LEGISLATURE,  
THURSDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2015**

- Madam Speaker, Honourable Lydia Johnson;
- The Premier, Honourable Senzo Mchunu;
- Deputy Speaker, Dr. Meshack Radebe;
- Members of the Provincial Executive Council;
- Honourable Members of the House;

Madam Speaker, I rise in terms of Rule 100 of the Standing Rules of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature to table the executive statement on the horrific accident that claimed the lives of 16 people in Shaka's Head, in KwaDukuza, on Monday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2015.

**Brief background**

At around 16h30 that day, in my capacity as the MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, I received a disturbing report on the horrific crash that had just taken place. It involved a minibus taxi and a train on the N2 along Shaka's Head railway bridge.

On the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2015, together with the leadership of the KwaDukuza Local Municipality and Ilembe District Municipality, we visited the scene of accident. We then proceeded to inspect the wreckage at the police station, visited the accident survivors at Stanger hospital, and finally met with the bereaved families to console them.

We do this each time major accidents, mainly those involving five or more victims, occur. We go through this process to share in the pain of the affected families, convey government's support including with funeral arrangements and counselling.

At the request of the families, a joint memorial service was held on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2015, at the Groutville in KwaDukuza.

**Summary of the investigation**

The preliminary investigation revealed that the driver of the minibus taxi failed to stop at the intersection, went over the guardrail, and landed on the railway track. An approaching train then crashed onto the minibus taxi, almost destroying it completely.

There were 15 people who died on the scene, and one person later died in Stanger Hospital. The SAPS Collision Unit, the Department's Road Traffic Inspectorate, and KwaDukuza Traffic personnel attended the scene and worked together on the investigation.

Given the initial report and the magnitude of the accident, the Department of Transport immediately commissioned the services of a private forensic accident investigator. The summary of the report of the private investigator found that there were several mechanical defects. These defects includes the following:

- Several new components had been fitted to the vehicle (steering rack, pinion and shock absorbers)
- The gearbox has been changed and was not the standard Hi Ace gearbox. The speedometer could not be connected
- The engine has been removed and refitted.
- The left side engine mounting was perished
- The rear gearbox was perished
- The rear brake drum diameter was over the normal size

The right front brake pins and bushes were worn to excess. This would result to unstable braking on the front axle.

- The rear axle "U" bolts were loose. This would also result in an unstable vehicle.

The investigator concluded that the braking system was in an unroadworthy and dangerous condition.

### **E-Natis report**

Madam speaker, Honourable members; the report from our E-Natis system revealed that this minibus taxi was recently tested in Gauteng and issued with a roadworthiness certificate.

It is concerning that a vehicle from KwaDukuza will go as far as Gauteng to obtain a roadworthiness certificate. We are therefore investigating this.

It was also reported that two accidents had happened in the recent past years on the same spot at Shaka's Head. This prompted me to assign a team of engineers to go and inspect the road and make recommendations on improving safety measures.

*The initial report from the Engineers revealed the following:*

- The accident happened during a sunny, cloudless day and in dry conditions;
- No visible signs of any emergency braking;
- No visible deficiencies on the road network system that could have possibly contributed to the accident;
- Strong indications are that the minibus driver did not stop at the STOP sign; and
- The driver was probably driving at a high speed.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members; in brief, the accumulative effect of the engineer's report is that the driver did not stop at a stop sign, was speeding, and the minibus taxi possibly had brake failure – or a combination of these factors were at play.

The engineers were emphatic in that the condition of the road could not have been a contributing factor to this unfortunate accident.

### **Engineers' recommendations**

The engineers further recommended that:

- A section of Road P339 that is over the bridge deck should be resurfaced;
- Speed limit on P339, at 500 metres before the bridge on both sides and in both directions, should post a 60 kilometres per hours sign;
- The concrete barrier on the northern side of the bridge is shorter by say 2 metres than the opposite side and could be extended towards the ramp to cover the impact point of this accident – much stronger than the guardrail;
- Guardrails end-treatment connecting to the bridges concrete barrier is missing almost all the bolts (which were possibly stolen) and this should be rectified; and that
- Rumble strips should be installed.

### **The rise of accidents in KwaZulu-Natal**

Madam speaker, Honourable members; the rise of accidents in KwaZulu-Natal is not isolated from the scourge of the road deaths happening in various parts of the country and region.

Last weekend, our nation woke up to the sad news of the Eastern Cape road accidents on Saturday. One was a bus accident on R408 between Butterworth and Willowvale. Another was a minibus taxi accident on the R61 between Cradock and Graaff-Reinet. According to the RTMC report, 37 people died in the Eastern Cape alone last weekend.

During the same weekend, we all received the news of the unfortunate death of scores of maidens travelling to the annual Reed Dance in Swaziland's major highway between Manzini and Mbabane. The Swazi government has put the death toll at 13.

We extend our condolences and sympathy to the people of the Eastern Cape and the people of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Furthermore, we note that these accidents come shortly after our own province recorded four major carnages recently, which claimed 37 lives.

These accidents are devastating both socially and economically, killing the young and old, breadwinners and heads of families.

In many instances, the investigations on the causes of crashes and accidents point to a disturbing failure by road users, mainly drivers, to respect and strictly adhere to road traffic rules. According to a 2010 Road Traffic Management Corporation's survey, among the human factors causing the accidents in KwaZulu-Natal are high speed, drinking and driving, not fastening seatbelts and indeed the failure to respect road traffic rules.

It has also been established that many of the accidents occur between 18H00 PM and 06H00 AM, which has necessitated an increased focus of law enforcement on the night shift.

The other accidents happened in:

- **Nkwezela, Bulwer** on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2015. This was a head-on collision involving a white Toyota Minibus and a Volvo horse and trailer truck. It claimed the lives of eight people and injured nine.
- **EMnambithi, N11** on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2015, which also was a head-on collision, involving a Toyota Cressida, and a rigid truck, at the N11/ Driefontein T-junction. There were six occupants including the driver of the Toyota Cressida who died on the scene. One survivor was taken to Ladysmith Provincial Hospital with serious injuries.
- **Sizwe Mdlalose Road, KwaDabeka**, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2015. The driver of a minibus taxi allegedly lost control due to brake failure and crashed into Muziwamandla School. There were five occupants including two minors who died because of injuries sustained. One survivor, the driver, was taken to hospital with serious injuries.

### **Interventions by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport**

It is to be noted that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport has over the past years been implementing a number of interventions to reduce accidents. Notably, the Department had begun to see a steady decrease in road crashes, accidents and fatalities between the years 2010 and 2013, which was recorded at about 33 percent. The decrease

was also in keeping with the country's move to fulfill its commitment to meet the UN Declaration as part of the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011-2020), to reduce road accidents by 50 percent.

However, during the latter part of 2013, the Department began to see an increase in road crashes, accidents and fatalities. Of note are the two horrific accidents that occurred at the beginning of September 2013.

These are the Nkwalini bus accident which claimed the lives of 11 people including nine maidens from the annual Umkhosi WoMhlanga as well as the Pinetown (off M13) accident involving a heavy truck that crashed onto four minibuses and a light motor vehicle, killing 24 people.

The rise in the rate of accidents in the province is also seen in the statistics which show that in 2013 there were 615 fatalities out of 536 crashes; which increased to 639 fatalities out of 574 crashes in 2014.

Already, in 2015 the statistics record an alarming 714 fatalities out of 629 crashes as of the end of August.

These are disturbing figures that require the Department to implement aggressive measures covering education and awareness, effective law enforcement, continuously improving the road engineering and monitoring and evaluation programmes.

Among the Department's interventions implemented are the following:

- Advocating for the introduction of national legislation that would ensure severe punishment of traffic rules offenders, changes in the training of drivers before they obtain licences and regulation of the Driving School industry.
- The implementation of the demerit system as part of the now promulgated Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offences, the rollout of which is expected to commence in April 2016. Already the Road Traffic Infringement Agency is undertaking roadshows preceding the commencement of AARTO – and KwaZulu-Natal roadshow is set for the 21 and 22 of September 2015.
- The Department has developed regulations for the Driving Schools industry and made proposals to the National Department of Transport on amendments to the National Road Traffic Act, Act 93 of 1996. As part of the provincial regulations, a programme to train driver instructors has been initiated.
- The Department is currently establishing an Accident Management and Reconstruction Unit. Already there are 16 staff members of the Road Traffic Inspectorate who have undergone training from the South African Police Service, in a programme that is going to be accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority.
- The Department has also developed a draft policy framework to regulate the transportation of learners, and takes into account the Executive Council's resolution to transition to legal vehicles from bakkies.
- A number of M13 interventions that include the introduction of limitations of tonnage carried by trucks, further restriction of hours in the morning and evening within which

trucks cannot pass through the route, increased integrated law enforcement as well as the installation of cameras which monitor traffic.

- The Department has increased the number of traffic officers following the absorption of 90 new trainees who have just completed their training. The Department is working on a plan to recruit a further 90 trainees.
- Annual and specific Reed Dance law enforcement plan is being developed and implemented since the occurrence of the Nkwalini accident.
- The “Operation Valingozi” campaign continues to run and features prominently in all platforms and events of the Department as well as messages that are aired across radio stations at high traffic holiday seasons including the Easter, Durban July Weekend and Festive Season road safety campaigns.
- The Department’s “Road Safety is Our Collective Responsibility” message underscores the “Operation Valingozi” campaign, and will continue to run and escalate across all levels of government, business, labour movement, as well as stakeholders including public transport (buses and taxis), the general public and addressing individual road users (motorists, bikers, cyclists, passengers and pedestrians).
- The Department has embarked on a massive public awareness and mass media campaign (billboards) and other forms of communication campaigns.

Honourable Members, we are very clear that it is only when we work as a collective that we will be able to turn the tide and end the road carnage.

This is not the time for breast-beating and political grandstanding. It is a dire situation that calls for joint efforts from all stakeholders and communities, led by this House, and working together to put a stop to road accidents.

I thank you.