



MEC:
Transport KZN
Minister S'bu Ndebele

It is particularly pleasing that, despite heightened political tensions, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport was still able to retain its development agenda and to reach its targeted service outputs.

Our mandate, as Government, is to deliver a better life for all but particularly for those so unjustly disadvantaged during apartheid. There can be no doubting the fact that the mandate to create a better life for all does require commitment to develop policies and to implement programmes that create wealth and opportunities among the poor.

Each year the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport has been able to record further achievements as an innovative service provider and as a creator of substantial and sustainable new work and entrepreneurial opportunities within disadvantaged communities. We have gone from concept, in the Road to Wealth and Job Creation Initiative (1998), to implementation in a very short space of time.

Although our Zibambele programme was only piloted in 2000, 14 800 Zibambele contracts had been awarded by the end of March 2003. Our Vukuzakhe programme has grown from a zero budget to a contracts value of more than R370 million in 2003/2004. We anticipate that contracts awarded to Vukuzakhe contractors will, in turn, create some 30 000 new jobs.

It is, I believe, indicative of strong community support that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport has been able to implement its development agenda despite political tensions and despite serious attempts to sideline it. Our Zibambele, Vukuzakhe and Labour Intensive Road Construction programmes continue to be geared up to provide massive new opportunities for poor people who, with appropriate organisational inputs, can further benefit from SETA and CETA learnerships and create the foundations to move towards knowledge based production. In the coming years the co-ordination of the Road to Safety Strategy and the Taxi Recapitalisation programme will prove critical in ensuring that the public has access to safe and affordable public transport.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport has made significant progress in tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic both within the Department as well as the taxi and freight transport industries. We are currently conducting research to ascertain the likely impact of HIV/AIDS on the infrastructure and mobility needs of rural communities. This study forms part of our African Renaissance Road Upgrading Programme.

The growing capacity of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport to deliver services that reverse the spatial inequalities and injustices of apartheid society and, at the same time, create significant new work and entrepreneurial opportunities does appear to buck the trend of a worsening social crises in KwaZulu-Natal.

Report of the Executive Authority

It is well documented that KwaZulu-Natal is host to an increasing and disproportionate share of South Africa's poor and unemployed. The recently released Census 2001 indicates that KwaZulu-Natal has the second highest unemployment rate (48,7%) of all provinces in South Africa and that the majority of unemployed concern the black population. Clearly our annual growth rate in KwaZulu-Natal has not been able to create sufficient new jobs to arrest an unemployment rate which has worsened since Census 1996. Census 2001 draws further attention to the fact that the majority of unemployed are less than 40 years of age and that, increasingly, our demographic profile is characterised by high levels of unemployment among both the educated and uneducated youth.

Such high unemployment rates have profound implications for our government's initiative to push back the frontiers of poverty in KwaZulu-Natal. Although considerable progress has been made in KwaZulu-Natal since 1994 in providing a wide range of services specifically designed to improve the quality of life of poor people, poverty in itself limits the ability of the poor to access these services. It is precisely for this reason that we must commit our Provincial Government budgets to assisting the emerging business sectors to develop and grow. In the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport this commitment is further evidenced by the formation of Taxi Associations and Vukuzakhe Associations into Provincial Councils that will undoubtedly strengthen the capacity of these important economic sectors to become powerful lobby groups.

The KwaZulu-Natal economy derives its strength from the fact that we are a Gateway Province to the rest of South Africa and our northern neighbours and we are considered to have a comparative advantage over other provinces, particularly in the manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and transport sectors. Despite the fact that we are the critical route in South Africa's global supply chain and that we handle some 80% of the value of South Africa's imports and exports, we have failed to fully capitalise on our favourable position.

It is therefore of critical importance that KwaZulu-Natal moves forward decisively to create the conditions for sustainable economic growth levels that will, in turn, create massive new income opportunities among the poor.

It has been clear for some time now that investments in an efficient freight transport infrastructure will create an improved environment to sustain growth in the KwaZulu-Natal economy. However, investments in an efficient freight transport system must necessarily look beyond the upgrading of KwaZulu-Natal's ports of Richards Bay and Durban and the creation of the Dube Trade Port. While the long term planning objective is to increase rail's market share of transport, we must be mindful of the fact that currently 80% of people and goods in KwaZulu-Natal are transported by road. Increased investment levels in our provincial road network are critically important to realise the full development potential of our province.

It is a truism in development that developing countries cannot possibly develop unless they are prepared to invest in transport infrastructure. Transport is considered integral to all service provision as well as the supply and marketing of commodities. While initial capital expenditure on road infrastructure is considerable, expenditure does decline in later years as maintenance requires less resources.

For several years now our budget allocations have been guided by this thinking. It is therefore pleasing to report on how budget increases this financial year have been utilised and to note the increase in budget allocations to transport and transport infrastructure over this MTEF strategic planning period. These will continue to be allocated in support of the Provincial Policy Priorities, namely:

- Reducing poverty and inequality
- Addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS
- Re-engineering service delivery in government
- Investing in infrastructure
- Strengthening of governance
- Human capability development

Our Annual and MTEF budget allocations indicate a continued commitment to the objectives of providing improved road infrastructure access – especially for isolated communities – and ensuring that the public has access to safe and affordable public transport. In the process of ensuring improved access infrastructure and transport mobility for all we will continue to socially and economically empower disadvantaged communities. We will continue to play our role in the transformation of the KwaZulu-Natal economy and society.