Igalelo

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From ZERO TOLERANCE To 100% COMPLIANCE •KZN

May/June 2006

Official Newsletter of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport

KZN plays key role in corridor development between South Africa and Lesotho

Main: Part of the Sani Pass road which will be upgraded.
Insert: Signpost showing the extreme altitude of the Sani Pass road.

"Sani Pass has major tourist and trade significance, providing important economic benefits"

The 33 kilometre gravel Sani Pass Road which runs from Himeville through to the Lesotho Border is set to become accessible to all types of vehicles soon.

The Sani Pass Road, also known as Main Road 318, has certain extremely steep and treacherous sections, particularly as it approaches the Lesotho Border. A section of the road is currently restricted to 4X4 vehicles only. However, both the governments of South Africa and Lesotho intend to make the exclusive use of 4X4 vehicles on this road a thing of the past. In the long term it is imperative that the entire length of the Sani Pass Road be upgraded to blacktop.

This mountain pass forms a vital link between South Africa and Lesotho and has international importance as it serves as a trade and economic conduit between the two countries. It is also the gateway to the 'Roof of Africa' scenic route that links the spectacular scenery of the Drakensberg with the mountains of northern Lesotho, and it is the only border post between KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho.

The Sani Pass provides the nearest market and health care services for the people in the Mokhotlong region of Lesotho. Their alternative to the Underberg area are the Free State markets that are almost 300 kilometres away.

KZN Transport Department head Dr. Kwazi Mbanjwa said: "The Sani Pass has major tourist and trade significance, providing important economic benefits to the area. There are at least three tour operators in Underberg who earn a living by transporting tourists to Sani Top and Lesotho. A vibrant taxi industry which provides a service to Lesotho also operates in the area, with residents commuting between these countries, via Sani Pass."

During the summer months this section of the Drakensberg experiences frequent and severe storms, with major snowfalls in winter. This results in the Pass being closed to traffic at least twice a year. Sometimes these closures can last for several days, such as on 27 December 2002 when the Pass was closed until 3 January 2003.

Discussions between South Africa and Lesotho regarding the upgrading of the Sani Pass Road have been in progress for several years, and a declaration of intent was signed in 2005.

The national Department of Transport has committed R85 million towards the upgrading of the road from Himeville through to the Lesotho Border and has proposed that the KwaZulu-Natal province provides the remainder of the required funding. The preliminary estimate for the upgrading and surfacing of the 33 kilometre stretch amounts to R160 million, but a proper design for the whole road needs to be completed before an accurate estimate is finalised.

This project has been divided into the following phases:

Phase 1: Himeville to the proposed new South African border post near kilometre point 14;

Phase 2: New South African border post through to the existing South African border post near kilometre point 26; and

Phase 3: Existing South African border post through to the Lesotho border at kilometre point 33.

It is envisaged that the design and much of the construction of phase one will be completed during the 2006/2007 financial year. The environmental investigations and design work for phases 2 and 3 will also be undertaken. Phase 1 serves existing tourist and agricultural facilities outside of the Drakensberg World Heritage conservation area, with requests and demands for the upgrading and surfacing of this portion going back many years.

KZN MEC for Transport, Community Safety & Liaison Mr. Bheki Cele said that the importance of this Pass must not be underestimated. "The primary task facing transport systems is the need to accommodate growing demands through population growth and migration, urban development and increased capacity in trade and commodity flows within limited boundaries," said Cele.

A sod turning ceremony was held at the Sani Pass Hotel Grounds on 18 July and various senior government officials from both countries were present.

KZN drivers proudly fly the South African flag overseas

Flying high the South African flag will be Roy Pather (38) and Veresh Sewrathan (50) as part of the KZN delegation to the International driver of the year competition.

The KZN Department of Transport continues to produce the best results in its campaigns that ultimately benefit the rest of the country. This time around, the Department has reason to be proud of two drivers from Pietermaritzburg who will represent the country at the international driver of the year competition to be held in Germany during October this year.

Flying high the South African flag will be Roy Pather (38) and Veresh Sewrathan (50) who work for Bakers Transport and Amalgamated Beverage Industries (ABI) in Pietermaritzburg respectively.

The driver of the year competition is an annual programme initiated by the Department of Transport to encourage road safety awareness amongst the drivers of heavy motor vehicles. It also helps them improve their driving skills. This competition is open to both male and female drivers.

These champions came first in the regional and provincial stages, and then won the national competition which qualified them to participate on the international stage. Sewrathan won the truck and trailer category whereas Pather excelled in the articulated category.

"I'm grateful to the Department of Transport that I will be flying the South African flag overseas. I'm not saying I don't deserve it but I didn't expect it. I have been driving for the last 16 years and I never thought of this as a career that could take me to the other side of the sea. I really appreciate this," Pather said.

Sewrathan, who says he has been driving for ABI for the past 26 years, has also represented South Africa in Croatia last year and was placed in the top 15.

According to the Department of Transport's Pietermaritzburg Regional Manager, Wally Bennet, apart from competing in driving, drivers are also educated about road safety and HIV/AIDS issues in order to decrease the number of HIV/AIDS infected drivers as well as the number of road accidents.

To enter this competition, an applicant must have a valid driver's licence as well as a Professional Driving Permit (PrDP). Drivers must pass a theory and practical test where they drive through different obstacles.

The Pietermaritzburg Regional Competition took place on 8 & 9 July at the Mkondeni Testing Station in Pietermaritzburg.

For information about the competition in other regions of KZN please contact the road safety directorate on (033) 355 8065.

DOT's bridge building contest encourages learners to become civil engineers

A bridge building competition that encourages school learners to pursue a career in civil engineering and promotes an interest in science and technology has been well received by numerous schools.

This is in line with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport's commitment to create a platform to encourage youth to actively pursue job opportunities in the field of engineering.

The South African Institute of Civil Engineers (SAICE) is the main host of the annual school Model Bridge competition. The aim of the competition is to construct a timber bridge having the least weight and carrying the heaviest load.

According to Kobus Burger - SAICE regional organizer, invitations are sent out at the beginning of each year to all secondary schools within the greater Pietermaritzburg region to participate in the competition.

Burger explained: "Each school may enter two teams and they have two weeks to construct their bridges."

This year's competition was held at Howick High School recently where the KZN Transport Department's Technology Transfer Centre's Training division manned an exhibition stand which highlighted some of the Department's achievements and programmes as a means of encouraging students to study engineering.

The Department also sponsored prizes in the form of airplane tickets for the winners who will take part in the annual national competition in Johannesburg later this year.

Gabriel Khwela, Mxolisi Mthembu and Cornelius Grobler from Domino Servite Secondary School near Kranskop jointly won the first prize with their model of a timber bridge, which although weighing only 160 kilograms could resist a force of 79 kilograms.

Correction

On page 9 of the April/May 2006 edition of Igalelo, it was stated that Zibambele members earn R480-00 a month. The correct figure is R380-00 per month.

We regret any inconvenience caused as a result of the error.

Traffic law enforcement gets a major quality boost

Seen here with their awards are traffic officers at the recent passing out parade held at the YMCA hall in Pietermaritzburg on 30 June.

South Africa's traffic policing profession is set to undergo a major status and quality boost with effect from next year.

This was revealed during the passing out parade for KwaZulu-Natal's newly qualified traffic officers' held in Pietermaritzburg on the 30th June 2006.

Delivering the keynote address, KZN MEC for Transport, Community Safety & Liaison Mr. Bheki Cele said that with effect from January 2007, the traffic officer's diploma course will be accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the duration of the course will be extended from the current six months to approximately twelve months.

As from January 2007, the following entry requirements will apply before a person will be considered for a career in the traffic policing profession:

- Matric/grade 12 certificate or equivalent;
- Code B driving licence (manual transmission);
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) certificate on the fundamentals for the above qualification;
- No criminal record;
- Medical certificate as proof that a person may do strenuous exercise;
- Private people may be allowed on the course; however preference will be given to people who are already employed by local and provincial authorities; and
- Applicants may not be older than 40 years of age.

Cele also said that he was particularly pleased that out of the 74 students who enrolled for this traffic officer's course, 28 were women. Sixty three (63) were from the provincial Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) and 11 from various local municipalities. "I am particularly proud to report that 28 female traffic officers were part of this intake. We must ensure that the recruitment of more female traffic officers is accelerated."

The overall top student for this course was Sifiso Mthokozisi Kubheka from Dundee RTI who scooped awards for being the overall top student as well as the top student on dangerous goods.

"It's only dedication and knowing what I wanted that enabled me to achieve these awards. I vow not to be involved in any illegal activities and I have the traffic officer's Oath of Honour to guide me," Kubheka said.

MEC Cele did not forget to reinforce his 100% compliance message to the new recruits: "Let me remind you that the law enforcement fraternity has no place for corrupt officials, so please stay away from any form of temptation of being involved in any act of bribery and corruption. Rest assured, you will be caught and punished."

The staff at the Traffic Training College managed to achieve an 89% pass rate, and 11 students passed Cum Laude.

Department of Transport empowering youth to become entrepreneurs

As South Africa commemorated its 30th anniversary of the June 16 uprisings in honour of young people who took to the streets in protest against apartheid policies in 1976, the KZN Department of Transport is steadily improving its youth empowerment initiatives.

Since the commencement of the Vukuzakhe emerging contractor programme a few years ago, the Department is accelerating the involvement of all previously disadvantaged groupings, including the youth. Some of the road construction projects are well known for having empowered local young people in various skills.

Igalelo recently visited the Main Road 296 project at Osizweni, Newcastle, and spoke to young people involved in the Vukuzakhe programme. What Sithembile Radebe is doing is evidence of how some youth are prepared to use government programmes to their benefit. The 26 year old Stage 1 (b) Vukuzakhe Contractor owns Nomalanga Construction and is currently laying culvert pipes on main road 296.

He says that since he joined this programme he has learnt a lot about the industry and the policies of the Department, including gender equity. "I have employed local people comprising six women and five men and I have a very good relationship with both groups," the confidently speaking Radebe said.

From Newcastle, we visited the John Ross Highway upgrading project between Empangeni and Richards Bay, where young people who have just completed their studies in Civil Engineering are employed.

Ndumiso Nxele (23) from Eshowe is one of the youth involved in the project. When Igalelo interviewed him, he had only two days experience working as a vibrator operator and according to his manager Vernon Volker, he is a very promising young civil engineering technician.

Nxele said: "I completed my Civil Engineering Diploma course last year at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). I have always been looking for an opportunity to serve my community; so getting this permanent job is one step forward in that direction."

He added: "I have seen how the Department of Transport has changed peoples' lives for the better and turned job seekers into successful business people in our communities. I also have a dream to have my own business which I will run through the skills I am already getting from this project."

Apart from this, Volker also says that they have employed young people and set up a nursery where they keep plants that are uprooted during excavation. These valuable plants will be replanted once the road construction is completed. "This has even helped raising environmental awareness amongst young people as they get proper training on conservation with the help of the Department of Environmental Affairs," Volker said.

"I have seen how the Department of Transport has changed peoples' lives for the better and turned job seekers into successful business people in our communities.

Sithembile Radebe of Newcastle working on Main Road 296.

ABOUT IGALELO

Igalelo is produced by the KZN Department of Transport

Letters to the Editor as well as general comments can be forwarded to:
Igalelo Editor, KZN Transport Department,
Private Bag X9043,
Pietermaritzburg, 3201.
Tel: 033 - 355 8624
Fax: 033 - 355 8632
E-Mail: Logan.Maistry@Kzntransport.gov.za
Website: www.kzntransport.gov.za

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KwaZulu-Natal's Zibambele programme to be rolled out nationally

The KZN Transport Department's widely recognized Zibambele road maintenance programme is soon to be seen in other parts of the country.

The programme is already being rolled out in certain provinces, especially those dominated by rural areas. As pioneers of the programme, the KZN Transport Department recently hosted a workshop to provide delegates from the various provinces with a proper understanding of the Zibambele programme.

The discussions focused on how the selection process and community consultation worked, the selection of infrastructure allocated to Zibambele participants, how beneficiaries are recruited, how Zibambele contractual agreements are structured and the question of safety measures for participants on the road.

The Department's General Manager: Strategic Planning, James Mlawu said: "The selection process of participants and infrastructure needs to be planned and implemented efficiently and effectively as this determines the success of the programme."

As for community consultation, Mlawu said that community involvement plays a vital role in community based programmes. "By monitoring the programme and providing feedback, communities can play a major role in protecting the programme," he said.

"Political high-jacking and the manipulation of the programme to gain power can only be addressed if the programme policies and procedures are communicated to the communities in a clear and concise manner. The community needs to be informed about the details of the programme so that they can play an active role," said Mlawu.

"The selection process of infrastructure is informed by the fact that sometimes authorities could concentrate on infrastructure serving communities such as roads, parks or other community facilities. The type, intensity and duration of the activities must be tailored for the targeted beneficiaries. Safety factors are also taken into consideration. Appropriate tools necessary to carry out the maintenance are issued and their condition is monitored," Mlawu said.

Mlawu added that the recruitment of beneficiaries is guided by the fact that not all needy individuals of a community will become beneficiaries and therefore the selection process must be seen to fair and transparent. "Surveys and means tests are undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that all beneficiaries are still eligible for the programme. Turnovers due to death, sickness, pregnancy or life improvement are always expected and the authority has to ensure that replacements are carried out efficiently and transparently. A formal contract is entered into between the beneficiary and the Department which details the duties of each party," said Mlawu.

It is now common knowledge that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is an inspiration to other government departments with regards to its numerous innovative programmes. The Department's flagship Zibambele poverty alleviation has proved to be yet another outstanding example of this.

Delegates from various provinces at a site visit in KZN.

General Manager: Strategic Planning, James Mlawu addressing delegates at the workshop. Seated next to him is Philadi Kadiaka - Manager: Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

Vuk'uphile to create more jobs

Government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is intended to draw significant numbers of the unemployed into productive work so that workers gain skills while they work, increase their capacity to earn an income, as well as create additional work opportunities for a minimum of one million people (at least 40% women, 30% youth and 2% disabled) in South Africa between 2004 and 2009.

Delegates from all over the country who are involved in the EPWP gathered at the KZN Transport Department's head office in Pietermaritzburg recently to map out interventions to problems being experienced in the implementation of the programme by certain provinces, to review the 2006/7 project list and training data, to table the programme's third quarter report, as well as to evaluate how the respective provinces fared in the programme during the past year.

The Provincial Transport Department in KZN was responsible for the coordination of yet another national exercise which was also aimed at information sharing with the rest of the country on the department's exemplary and widely-acclaimed Zibambele road maintenance and Vukuzakhe emerging contractor programmes.

The two-day gathering gave delegates an opportunity for a site visit to Main Road 399 at Vulindlela just outside Pietermaritzburg where they received first hand experience of how the EPWP, Zibambele and Vukuzakhe is implemented on the ground, particularly in terms of the unbundling of contracts and how labour intensive methods are used on the road to benefit emerging contractors.

Igalelo had an opportunity to establish that the EPWP was not exactly a duplication of certain existing KZN Transport programmes, but is part of a broader government intervention towards addressing the challenges of the informal, marginalized and unskilled or 'second' economy in the country.

The EPWP emphasises the development of skills in the context of productive work opportunities and is located within an array of initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between South Africa's advanced economy, which is based on skilled labour, and the 'second' economy, and more broadly government's programme of action to address unemployment and alleviate poverty.

The programme is not the responsibility of a single-line-function department. The implementation of the EPWP cuts across several departments and departmental budgets.

The EPWP is not only about infrastructure programmes, as its implementing sectors include government-funded infrastructure projects that place emphasis on increasing labour intensity, public environmental programmes, public social programmes (such as home or community-based care and early childhood development) as well as economic interventions such as learnerships.

Central to the structure of EPWP is the provision of learnerships to previously unemployed beneficiaries, and Vuk'uphile, the recently announced new name for the EPWP Contractor Learnership Programme, is one of its flagship programmes. The name was selected from a host of submissions from learners involved in the programme, as part of a competition aimed at finding a name that will convey special significance about the two-year programme.

Vukuzakhe contractors now able to buy their own plant

Manzolwandle Mazibuko of Osizweni Township in Newcastle standing proudly in front of his own construction plant.

Twenty years ago he promised himself that one day he will own one of the biggest emerging construction companies in the province and many people thought that he was just day-dreaming. This was probably because he had just been retrenched from his job where he was a foreman for eleven years. But these people did not realize that this was only the beginning of a successful journey for the visionary Manzolwandle Mazibuko of Osizweni Township in Newcastle.

A common challenge for most emerging contractors, under the KZN Department of Transport's black empowerment initiative known as Vukuzakhe, is difficulty in purchasing their own plant for road construction. Therefore, they always have to rely on hiring plant, usually from established plant hire companies.

There has been an outcry from emerging contractors since the inception of the programme, that while they appreciate the economic opportunities offered by government, a major stumbling-block is that a considerable amount of money is spent on the hiring of equipment as they cannot afford to buy their own.

Although it is rare to meet an emerging contractor who has his or her own equipment, Igalelo managed to track down Manzolwandle Mazibuko who says, as a Vukazakhe contractor, it is not impossible to buy your own plant.

"I was retrenched by Grinaker Construction in 1986 and had to make up my mind quickly as to how my family will survive. I bought one truck for the sale and delivery of sand to my local community. I played my cards right and in 1988 I was able to purchase the second truck.

"After working as a sub-contractor for a local municipality, I bought my first grader for R95 000 cash. During 2002 I joined the Department of Transport's Vukuzakhe programme and was awarded a contract at Umsinga. This enabled me to buy my own excavator. In 2004 I was contracted to work on St. John's Road in Dundee and bought a smooth roller. From there, I worked on Main Road 296 and bought one more grader.

"I make specific mention of all these things in order to emphasize that with proper planning and fiscal discipline, you can ensure that from the income you derive from each project you are able to pay for a machine. Look, all this plant I have just mentioned, including a water tanker, are fully paid up. I now only pay to maintain the plant," Mazibuko explains.

The challenge of other contractors being unable to have their own plant has worked to Mazibuko's advantage as he now hires out his machines. He says contractors have a tendency of not asking when they don't know.

"I think most people abuse black economic empowerment and waste large sums of money on fancy cars. In order for your business to be sustainable, you need to invest properly."

He says in most cases contractors do not come out to the sites regularly and workers become inefficient, resulting in plant being hired for longer periods and contractors' paying more than what was initially budgeted for.

Mazibuko and his family love construction. He has inspired his son Linda who already owns a stage one company Isigqiki Somkhovu Construction, as well as a bakkie and truck which is used to sell sand to local residents.

His daughter, Lungile who is already a qualified civil engineer, is gearing herself for a management position in the family business. She presently works for Stuart Scott in Pietermaritzburg and is in charge of the main road 399 upgrading project.

KZN road builders building better communities

Road construction workers busy on a road upgrading project.

Sports fields, community halls, bursaries and free maths and science tuitions are just some of the additional benefits that road construction companies in KZN are ploughing back into previously disadvantaged communities of KwaZulu-Natal.

These exciting community development initiatives were spelt out at an African Renaissance Roads Upgrading Programme (ARRUP) workshop held in Pietermaritzburg recently. The main aim of the workshop was to evaluate the progress of ARRUP and to improve relationships between the KZN Transport Department, emerging and established road construction contractors as well as other relevant stakeholders.

The various civil engineering consulting firms and Vukuzakhe emerging contractors responsible for specific ARRUP projects reported on the progress of each project. Specific emphasis was placed on how they had formed meaningful partnerships with the various communities they were working in, and were not merely only building roads. In almost every ARRUP project there is something significant that the road construction companies have given back to the respective communities, ranging from sports fields to computers. This integrated development approach to road construction in KZN is certainly making a significant contribution towards reversing the inequalities of apartheid and improving the lives of the majority of the citizens of the province.

One such project is the upgrading of Main Road 68 between Highflats and Umtentweni in southern KwaZulu-Natal. A representative from Emzansi Consulting Engineers, Mr Martin Rundle said that his company is part of this road upgrading project that will serve seven tribal authorities with approximately 20 000 people who stand to benefit by way of job-creation and other economic spin-offs.

"Within a radius of five kilometres of Main Road 68, there are 61 schools accommodating 29 000 learners and 750 educators and we have already built play grounds for them. There is also one provincial hospital and five clinics that people are now able to access easily," Rundle said.

According to James Mlawu, the Department's Strategic Planning General Manager, these workshops are designed to engage the contractors who are changing the history of road construction in the province and to receive feedback from all relevant stakeholders. "We need to get together and share our experiences and differences in a meaningful manner. At the end of the day we have to make sure that we improve the quality of life of the majority of the citizens of our province," he said.

He further encouraged contractors to intensify programmes which empower learners who study Maths and Science to become engineers and to offer them employment opportunities.

"I must emphasize that when we build these roads we provide opportunities for different skills, including labour intensive activities such as block paving of access points, removal of alien vegetation, road beautification and the use of local resources and stores for supply of materials," he added.

The Department also presented awards to various contractors for outstanding performance. Mr. Robert Mngoma of Robert Enterprise, Ms. Thatheni Zondi of Thatheni Construction and Mr. Peter Fynn of Fynn Construction were among the recipients of awards.

MEC Cele delivers 97 bicycles to rural school pupils

Learners at Amahlubi Secondary School near Estcourt could not contain their excitement when KZN MEC for Transport, Community Safety & Liaison Mr. Bheki Cele handed over 97 bicycles to pupils at the school recently.

The six speed mountain bikes with helmets will make life easier for the school children who travel 20 kilometres and more to and from school everyday. Representatives from the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) moved with empathy when they watched a television news programme and saw school children walking long distances, tired and unenthusiastic to go to school.

ACSA manager Thulani Manqele said: "That is where the idea of bicycles came from; we thought it was very unfair for children to suffer like this when some of us have experienced what those children are going through. We appeal to other private companies to extend their hands to other schools."

One of the recipients of the bicycles, a grade eleven pupil, said she was very excited because the bicycle is going to enable her to give more attention to her studies as she will have more time to rest and be fresh for her classes that start at 7:30am daily.

"I was worried because I was not sure if us girls will receive bicycles too; but now I'm over the moon because I received one and I know how to ride," she giggled.

The handover ceremony was attended by various representatives including parents, the school governing body, Department of Education, Department of Transport and ACSA.

A spokesperson for the school governing body said: "We are thrilled because most of the time we are gathered in this fashion for events such as a memorial service and so on, but today we have all the provincial government representatives with us for an exciting celebration," he said.

The Amahlubi Secondary school choir composed songs for the Department of Transport and ACSA which were sung in such a manner that even MEC Cele and Thulani Manqele were inspired to join in the singing and dancing.

The school principal said: "It is an unusual thing for our school to receive gifts and we are very grateful to the sponsors. I hope this is only the start of better things to come."

The Department of Transport's Road Safety officers will visit the school to teach the children about road safety, especially when riding a bicycle.

"It is an unusual thing for our school to receive gifts and we are very grateful to the sponsors. I hope this is only the start of better things to come."

Transport, Community Safety & Liaison MEC Mr. Bheki Cele seen with ACSA Manager Thulani Manqele during the handing over of the bicycles at Amahlubi Secondary school.

The Mtshebheni public transport rank facility at Inanda.

R6 million rank for Inanda

Although the deadline of end of May 2006 as the cut-off point for taxi operators to have changed their permits to operating licences was not extended, government is still prepared to consider motivation from operators with legitimate reasons for not having complied in terms of the stipulated timeframes.

This was announced by national Minister of Transport Mr. Jeff Radebe during the official opening of the Mtshebheni public transport rank facility in Inanda recently.

Radebe said the deadline of 31 May 2006 will remain. He applauded 80% of the country's registered taxi operators who have already converted their permits to operating licences.

The opening of Mtshebeni rank forms part of the Department of Transport's mission of upgrading public transport infrastructure to promote the use of all modes of public transport, including taxis, buses and trains.

The project cost approximately R6 million and its significance is to facilitate the movement and transfer of passengers between various modes and create business opportunities at the public transport interchanges.

Radebe said the public transport facilities which have been built are intended to improve access within the areas of Inanda, Ntuzuma and Kwa Mashu (INK) and the broader metropolitan area and also to eliminate bottlenecks in the transport system.

He said that during the implementation of the project, labour intensive methods were used and about 31 community members were employed. It is estimated that approximately 200 taxis use the rank daily to transport commuters in and around the township and to the city of Durban.

Radebe said the taxi industry transports the largest number of passengers and that the taxi recapitalization programme (TRP) was an intervention by government to bring about a safe, effective, reliable, affordable and accessible taxi industry. He also pleaded with members of the community to protect and preserve these facilities as they are meant to improve their lives.

"My department has finalized the development of a taxi facility guideline for the new taxis in order to ensure that adequate parking bays for larger vehicles are provided. The implementation of these guidelines will be done concurrently with the roll-out of the TRP. The TRP is not only about scrapping old taxi vehicles, but also about how best taxi operators can be assisted to benefit constructively from the industry. Through the introduction of the new taxi vehicles, government has for the first time prescribed compulsory safety and other requirements to protect the passengers, operators, pedestrians, motorists and other road users," said Radebe.

He explained that the new taxi vehicle will come in three categories: M1 Minibus designed to carry 9-16 people including the driver; M2 Minibus designed to carry 17-28 people including the driver and the M3 Minibus designed to carry 29-35 people including the driver.

The Minister also announced that his department has introduced a conditional grant known as the Public Transport Infrastructure Grant, which will assist municipalities with implementation of roads infrastructure and related projects for 2010 and beyond. He said that he anticipated that the Public Transport Infrastructure Grant will fund infrastructure investment to the tune of R 3.5 billion over the medium term.

The official opening of the taxi rank was jointly hosted by the national Department of Transport, KZN Department of Transport and the Ethekwini Municipality. Radebe, KZN MEC for Transport, Community Safety & Liaison Mr. Bheki Cele, Ward Councillors as well as representatives from local taxi associations and the KwaZulu-Natal Taxi Council were amongst those in attendance.

Cele said the event coincided with an important day for female learners as the 'Take a Girl Child to Work' programme was also commemorated on the same day. He was accompanied by two girls from Mthwalume High School on the South Coast where he was a learner and at a later stage a teacher.

"The opening of this rank signals government's mission of improving public transport infrastructure. Commuters are the most important people in the public transport industry and the rank will provide suitable conditions for commuters and public transport operators," Cele said.

Members of the community were jubilant about the opening of the rank. Mrs. B. Shezi who is a resident at Inanda said: "I am very delighted about the opening of this rank. It is a clear indication of service delivery by our government. The rank will provide good shelter during rainy seasons and taxis are now easily accessible to members of the community, more especially the elderly. We are now hoping for government to enforce the regulation of this industry and to ensure that it is safe, reliable and affordable".