



SPEECH (NOTES) BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON, MR. BHEKI CELE AT THE SOD TURNING CEREMONY FOR SQANDULWENI PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE HELD ON FRIDAY, 7TH OCTOBER 2005.

All Protocol Observed.

- Our gathering here today once again bears testimony to our government's commitment to ensure that we create a balanced road network.
- I have always stated that during my tenure as MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, I will endeavour to defend the weakest in our society by empowering them to participate in government programmes and in our market economy.
- A common policy for my term of office is that it will be unashamedly pro-poor with the upfront intention of bridging the gap - indeed chasm – between our first and second economies.

- In South Africa, and in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, a large portion of the population reside in rural areas where vehicle ownership levels are very low and people have no option but to rely on public transport to meet their mobility needs.
- Due to the high levels of poverty and unemployment in rural areas, local residents tend to visit local community facilities by bus, taxi or on foot.
- Since the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport commenced constructing pedestrian bridges at river crossings some five years ago, there has been an increase in the demand for such structures from numerous communities.
- During October 2004, His Worship the Mayor of Sisonke, Councillor J.P. Khoza approached our department requesting assistance with regards to difficulties that were being encountered by school learners in arriving safely at school in the Sqandulweni area, and to conduct a site inspection in this respect.
- On physical inspection of the site, it was evident that the existing footbridge, which crossed the Mkomaas River, had been washed away by the 1987 floods. As a result learners had to cross the river by any means possible in order to attend the nearby High School.
- On viewing the learners crossing, it was clearly evident that this type of situation required urgent attention as the lives of our children were at stake.
- Our Department then made attempts to obtain urgent additional funding for this project. Funding to the value R 3, 6 million was approved for the construction of Sqandulweni Bridge and construction is expected to commence soon.

- This project will also provide numerous employment opportunities and construction skills for the local people of the community.
- Squandulweni falls under District Council 43 and is a very large area comprising of approximately 3 200 kilometres of gravel and 600 kilometres of tarred road network. There are also a number of communities that are served by this road network, including rural, urban and farming communities.
- Our Department is in constant liaison and consultation with all these communities through our Rural Road Transport Forums (RRTF's), Community Road Safety Councils (CRSC's), local municipality structures and other civil society structures.
- This process of on-going consultation facilitates the identification of transport needs, which is then prioritised for the benefit of all the people of our province.
- The following roads and causeways have been or are currently being built in the Ixopo area for this financial year:
 - Mandlenja Road to the value of R777 000;
 - St. Otilia Mission Road to the value of R408 000;
 - Zweliyabuya Road to the value of R384 000; and
 - Zweliyabuya Causeway to the value of R150 000.

TOTAL =R1, 719 million

- In addition to the above, in this financial year this area will also benefit in respect of the following:
 - Safety Maintenance to the value of R1 million;
 - Routine Maintenance to the value of R2,2 million;
 - Zibambele contracts to the value of R4,9 million; and
 - Regravelling to the value of R3, 4 million.

- Therefore, in addition to the R3, 6 million that will be spent on the construction of the Squandulweni Pedestrian Bridge, the lives of the residents of this area will be improved through other road infrastructural projects to the value of more than R13 million.

- The present government has realised that nation-building is linked to reconstruction and development, and the key to this link is an infrastructural programme that will provide access to modern and effective services such as electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people.

- This programme must meet both basic needs and open up previously suppressed economic and human potential in urban and rural areas. This in turn will lead to an increased output in all sectors of the economy.

- There is no doubt that an infrastructure programme is more than just providing electricity, water and telephones.

- Our government has also realised that better transport systems can link up rural and urban areas as well as Southern Africa as a whole, and at the same time contribute broadly to economic development and social upliftment.

- In turning the sod today, we are not only linking communities to social, cultural and economic amenities, but this project will also ensure our commitment to “create a better life for all”, as well as “defend the weak and protect the vulnerable”.
- This project is yet another indication of our government’s commitment to accelerate the pace of service delivery in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly with regards to infrastructural development in rural and historically disadvantaged areas.
- There can be no doubting the fact that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is well advanced towards achieving its objective of creating equitable and sustainable transport systems in KZN.
- Much has been achieved over the past ten years. Much more is still to be achieved in the years ahead.
- In conclusion, I would like to remind you that the Month of October has been declared National Public Transport Month and I urge you to actively participate in the various programmes and activities that have been planned.
- Remember:
 - Public Transport makes the economy work!
 - A better and sustainable Public Transport system is ONLY possible with the participation of citizens!
 - Public Transport is for all irrespective of social status.
 - Most South Africans cannot live without public transport.
 - Improvements in Public Transport infrastructure is for better services.
- Together, let us champion the speedy transformation of public transport services.

