



SPEECH (NOTES) BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON, MR. BHEKI CELE AT THE SOD TURNING CEREMONY FOR THONYELANA RIVER BRIDGE HELD ON SATURDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER 2005.

All Protocol Observed.

- 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.
- Our gathering here today once again bears testimony to our government's commitment to ensure that we create a balanced road network.
- Historically, road authorities focused on providing road infrastructure for the use of motorized vehicles.

- More recently the needs of the pedestrian, the cyclist, and indeed the users of public transport have been receiving more attention.
- As a result, footways, sidewalks, bus bays, taxi ranks, pedestrian crossings and pedestrian bridges are becoming more prevalent on our roads. In addition, cycle ways for the exclusive use of cyclists are being provided in some areas. This is in line with trends in other countries.
- 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 increasing demand for such structures from numerous communities.
- Such a demand also came from the Bergville Rural Road Transport Forum and local Emazizini community who have vigorously campaigned for the proposed pedestrian bridge over the Thonyelana River.
- Earlier this year I personally visited Bergville and promised the community that I will ensure that urgent attention is given to their plight.

- As promised, today we are back here to inform you that the construction of the Thonyelana Bridge will commence soon.
- The Thonyelana River is a major tributary of the Tugela River, which is strategically important to South Africa for water, for domestic and agricultural purposes and for the generation of electricity.
- Pedestrian bridges provide all-weather river crossing that make rural schools, clinics, police stations, heritage sites and other community facilities more easily accessible to pedestrians.
- Pedestrian bridges also play an important role at hazardous locations with high traffic volumes and high speed roads, where pedestrians need to cross.
- 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 a nutshell, it is not wealth that builds roads, but it is roads that build wealth.
- The crossing over the Thonyelana River is an essential link to the Nsetheni Combined Primary School, Thonyelana Primary, Goeckner Memorial Senior Primary, Qhozo High schools, as well as to several clinics.
- The road also provides access to the Isandlawana police Station. The crossing is also an access to an IEC voting station. The Mweni River Cutback, which is part of the Okhahlamba Heritage Site, and which is an international eco-tourism destination can also be accessed.
- The Thonyelana River catchments drain off the Drakensberg watershed and in the rainy season has a high peak runoff that renders the present low-level causeway unsafe to cross.
- There have been a number of tragic incidents and at least six school learners have drowned whilst attempting to cross the Drift Crossing. When the river is in flood there is no alternative access to the area, cutting off essential services. This leads to members of the community becoming frustrated, and they risk their lives which results in drowning.
- As stated previously, the KZN Transport Department has received several requests for pedestrian bridges all over the province. However, priority is given to sites where learners, and sometimes even educators, have no alternative but to wade through rivers to reach certain schools.
- During 2004 investigations were conducted and the design for a bridge over the Thonyelana River was completed.
- A joint venture between an established contractor and an emerging Vukuzakhe contractor was created for the construction of this bridge. **The value of this project is estimated at R6.9 million.** The tender is currently awaiting approval by the Tender board.

- The bridge will consist of a single vehicle width structure with pedestrian walkways. It has a length of 70 metres with seven spans. Construction is anticipated to start in December this year and is expected to take about one year to complete.
- This project will provide employment opportunities and construction skills for the local people of the community. It is estimated that 25 job opportunities, including five for women and ten for youth, will be created.
- In addition to this R6, 9 million, the lives of the residents of this area will be improved through other road infrastructural projects to the value of more than R16 million.
- These additional projects include routine road maintenance, Zibambele contracts, regravelling, the provision of access roads through Vukuzakhe contracts and so on.
- 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”.
- 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 needs to be achieved in the years ahead.
- Our department has just completed hosting a successful 2nd Africa Technology Transfer Conference, where various transportation issues were thoroughly debated and I am

confident that the resolutions adopted at this conference will also assist us in building a KwaZulu-Natal that truly belongs to all.

- 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.
- Masisukume Sakhe – Let us Rise Up and Build.

THANK YOU.