



**SPEECH NOTES BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIASON MR BHEKI CELE AT THE SOD
TURNING OF THE RIVER BRIDGE IN WEENEN ON WEDENSDAY, 26
MARCH 2008.**

Protocol Observed

- ? On 16 March 2008, as the Department of Transport in the province we requested that investigations be carried out and a report be made on the requirement for a river bridge across the Tugela River near Thuthukani Primary School in the Sahlumbe area.
- ? The requirement for the structure had been voiced by the local authority and also through the media, which had witnessed scholars crossing the Tugela on inflated tyre tubes.
- ? Today we are here for a sod turning ceremony to facilitate the construction of the Tugela River Bridge. This 160m long vehicular bridge will be constructed at an estimated cost of R22 million. There will be also R2 million to be spent on approaches, making the total cost of the project amount to R24 million.

- ? Although no one has so far been crocodile prey, the local communities have seen them in the river. Currently during the high flood months, scholars do not have direct crossing points of the Tugela and some resort to highly dangerous crossings using inflated tubes.
- ? The Department has been told that about 200 people are crossing this river and already, seven people since 2000 have drowned while trying to cross the river in this way.
- ? Currently, D1275 comes to a dead-end shortly after passing Thuthukani Primary School. The construction of the bridge and local road will link two communities from either side of the river and unlock the economic potential of the community.
- ? This will also provide all year access to scholars from the Sahlumbe High School and to the Sahlumbe clinic. There will be access to public transport for those communities residing to the north of the river.
- ? As per our government's policy, another important aspect of the construction of the bridge is that its cost remains an economic benefit to the communities it will serve. To this end, the prospective contractors will be compelled to source all materials from the local suppliers and employ all artisans and labour from the nearby communities. The job opportunities are estimated at 11 000 per person days.
- ? A study we conducted previously revealed that we needed 146 pedestrian bridges, but the Department of Education added 100 more, bringing the total number of pedestrian bridges that are needed in the province to 246.

- ? These footbridges are needed to help our school children whose lives are often in danger as a result of flooded rivers and are forced not to attend school during the summer months, especially when it rains.
- ? In the 2006/7 financial year, we constructed 14 pedestrian bridges to the value of R38 million; 10 pedestrian bridges in the current financial year 2007/8 at R45 million and in the next financial year 2008/9 we will be constructing 13 pedestrian bridges at R48 million in this province.
- ? I know that some people are saying we do many sod turnings, perhaps to score political points. But I think it's them who try to score political points by misleading people who have waited so long for this development because we do follow-up on our commitments.
- ? I want to emphasize that these projects are for people irrespective of which political party they belong to. Therefore, I am appealing to you as communities to refuse to be manipulated by politicians and officials who use your weakness for their political gain.
- ? As government we will continue to do everything possible to assist our communities in whatever challenges they face in their areas. But my appeal is that you use proper structures that we have put in place in all three spheres of government.
- ? This is not the first time we have government in the history of South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal in particular. But our people have only begun to see change in their lives through our democratic government's development programmes.

I thank you