



SPEECH NOTES BY KZN MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR. BHEKI CELE AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THOMBOTHI BRIDGE ON TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2009.

Protocol observed

- Our gathering here today for the opening of the bridge once again bears testimony to our government's commitment to ensure that we keep our promises.
- It is not surprising that our people who were previously disadvantaged are now on record giving testimony that indeed, we do follow-up on our commitments.
- The bridge we are opening today is part of R1,5 billion that the Department of Transport has invested in Zululand to deal with the road infrastructure challenges.
- We have injected cash in projects that include, among others, D1820, D487, P700, P432, P235/ P49/ P52, P234, Umbhudula Road Qwasha River Road Bridge, Mpembeni, Sikhwebezi Pedestrian Bridge, Thombothi River Bridge, Obivane River Bridge, Wela River Bridge, KwaBhanya Vehicle Bridge, Intethe River Bridge and Nsonyane Bridge.

- Zululand is one of the areas in the province where people still travel kilometers on foot to the nearest clinic, hospital, school, pension payout. Therefore, we say as government we cannot allow a situation where teachers and learners have to undress everyday to cross rivers to school.
- But it is important to emphasise that as a democratically elected government we have an obligation to serve our people irrespective of which political party they belong to.
- As a society, we are facing challenges such as crime, AIDS, poverty, unemployment etc. These challenges can only be addressed under certain circumstances which include peace, democracy and development. These are preconditions of a better life for all. People must guard against being used by politicians for their political gain.
- The construction of a bridge and link road over the Black Mfolozi River for the Xasane and Esizinda communities in the Mahlabathini district has had a major impact on a large community on both sides of the river.
- Our national government and provincial government have jointly embarked on this project, and the construction work has seen an investment of more than R14 million in this area.
- In line with our policy, most of the work was done by local labour using small concrete mixers and hand tools were used to construct the concrete paving, which resulted in a good finish to the riding surface.
- We always say that during construction the cost must remain an economic benefit to the local communities where contractors source all materials from the area and employ all artisans and labour from the nearby communities. There must be no political preferences in this regard.

- Apart from providing local job opportunities, the project embraced community outreach initiatives, which included amongst others career guidance at high schools. Civil Engineering was promoted to over 1200 scholars at all 9 high schools in the two local tribal authorities, KwaNxasane and Sizinda.
- It is true that the bridges both for vehicles and pedestrians are central to the provision of access and the improvement of the quality of lives of our people. Indeed in communities where these were constructed, people bear testimony of how much improved their lives have been.
- *“Before the bridge was built, we had lost many lives due to the river. This project benefits us as a community very much as it brings family members together that have been separated by the river. Besides, we could not meet with Esizinda community members and plan together for community development projects. From our community point of view, this bridge has put the other community on the map.” Mr D. Ntombela (Xasane community).*
- In conclusion, the figure for pedestrian bridges to be built in KwaZulu-Natal has increased dramatically to more than 400. Unfortunately, the problem of limited funding continues to face us, hence we are unable to deal with our backlog as quickly and expediently as we would want to.
- However, we know that some rich nations may have sophisticated transport infrastructure that has landed people on the moon and yet our people are still struggling to move from one village to the other, but we are very proud that our goals are centred around the lives of our people.

I thank you