

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE SOD TURNING OF P601 AND P749 IN UMZIMKHULU ON 11 APRIL 2010.**

**Protocol Observed**

On Friday I was presenting my first Budget Speech for both the Department of Transport and Community Safety and Liaison. In my Transport budget presentation, I highlighted that our planning and prioritising of projects in the department are in line with the 12 provincial strategic priorities that support rural, economic, social and human development of our people.

We are aware that in South Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, a large portion of the population who reside in rural areas can only access community facilities like clinics, schools, pension pay-out points, home affairs offices etc. by bus, taxi or on foot. Our mandate therefore, as the Department of Transport, is to ensure that our rural communities have a safe, reliable, affordable and efficient transport system to access the above mentioned facilities and services.

Umzimkhulu is one of the areas that suffered most from a combined oppression of Colonialism and Apartheid which left our communities on the verge of underdevelopment, stagnation and doom. When Umzimkhulu was handed over to the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the existing roads were in a very poor condition. The community of this area was facing a social and economic crisis in spite of their potential in terms of agriculture and tourism.

Now, what do we do as government and as the Department of Transport to address the situation? In April 2007, the National Department of Transport allocated R96.6 million to the provincial department for the construction of new road infrastructure and the upgrade of existing road infrastructure in Umzimkhulu area. The budget of R120 million and R108.8 million were allocated for the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 financial years respectively. For the 2010/2011 financial year, we have allocated R164, 2 million for the development of Umzimkhulu. Part of this is the upgrade of main roads P601 & P749.

Taking into consideration the communities roads **P601 and P749** serve and the important benefits these roads provide, it was also noted that the traffic flow over the past years have increased and traffic is very heavy on these roads. Therefore, the need to upgrade **P601 and P749** from gravel to blacktop was listed as a priority in the KZN Department of Transport's business plan for the 2010/2011 financial year.

These roads will be continually upgraded to blacktop surface over a period of three consecutive financial years. This financial year (2010/2011) three kilometres of each road will be completed to the tune of R14,9 million for P749 and R26,3 million for P601. The total length of each road will be 13 km and is to be completed by the 2012/2013 financial year. The total amount that will be invested in both roads is R211,2 million.

The methodology of construction will be the use of established contractors and emerging contractors where skills will be transferred. But I want to assure you that the construction work will also involve a substantial financial injection into the area with job opportunities being created for locals. It is always our policy that during construction the cost must remain an economic benefit to the local communities. Hence contractors will source all construction materials from Umzimkhulu and employ all available artisans and labour from the nearby communities.

These main roads are important links within the Umzimkhulu area and both service almost half the community of Umzimkhulu.

They are the mode of boosting the economy of Umzimkhulu since they are:

- Used by Tourists to visit tourists attractions; e.g. Nature reserves, B&Bs, etc.
- Used by trucks and delivery vans to & from the factories around Franklin, Malange and the general Umzimkhulu area.
- The link to a wide range of district roads as well as local roads.
- Used by communities to reach the Magistrate court, Departments of Education & Health, Social Welfare Department, Clinics & Hospital ,Schools, Police Stations, etc.
- They service many Traditional Authorities.

As I delight in the knowledge that today a milestone is recorded in the lives of the people of Umzimkhulu, I also find it important to emphasise the use of road safety even before the roads upgrade begins. It has become clear that there is no use to build roads that will kill our people because motorists tend to drive recklessly on a smooth road. We need to strengthen our road safety awareness campaigns wherever we are, so that we build roads in order to develop people, and not to kill them. When completed, these roads will have appropriate speed reduction measures installed.

I want to take this opportunity to also warn the taxi industry, particularly the mini-bus operators who have a tendency of 'hijacking' the routes that have been upgraded. We know that some people are breaking the law here by using bakkies to transport our people. But we also realise that this is a chicken and egg situation because others will ask what comes first between a good road that does not harm vehicles and vehicles that are suitable to transport commuters. We hope that one day we will find a solution to this challenge. I will therefore encourage all public operators on these roads to follow all the proper channels before they take advantage of the upgraded roads once completed.

As MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, I always find it difficult to separate some of the issues that need to be addressed by both departments. They are both about life and death. If you don't die on the road, you might be a victim of crime or a perpetrator of one of these or both. In any case, even a traffic offence is a criminal offence. If you drink and drive, you can go to jail or lose your licence. If you kill or injure a pedestrian on the road you have committed a criminal offence.

It is on that score that today we also appeal to communities of Umzimkhulu and Sisonke District as a whole to join our government in spearheading its drive to **build a united front against crime** in KZN. I was informed that stock theft is number one crime in this district followed by car hijacking and smash and grab. We make a clarion call for the mobilization and involvement of all sectors of society in a concerted and sustained campaign to significantly reduce crime levels in this area. It is important that we support our Volunteer programme in this area. Currently, Umzimkhulu has 24 volunteers and together with other local municipalities, we have 101 volunteers in the Sisonke District.

May I conclude by congratulating the community of Umzimkhulu and the whole Sisonke District on all the road and bridge projects they have received and yet to receive. As government, we will always ensure that our budgets reach grassroots communities and make a real tangible difference in the lives of poor people.

**I thank you**