

**SPEECH NOTES FOR KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE
SHONGWENI OUTDOOR EXPO IN HILLCREST.**

19th August 2011

Programme Director;

CEO's and MD's of trucking companies;

Main Partners;

Supporting Partners;

Distinguished guests;

Members of the media;

Protocol Observed;

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for allowing me to join you here today and to share some of my views with you on road safety issues in our province. There is nothing that makes me happier than being part of a project that will impact positively on the lives of our people.

I therefore take this opportunity to thank the Fleet Watch Truck Magazine for hosting this event with the aim of bringing together the heads of the South Africa Truck Industry to discuss ways of going forward with safer roads for everyone. I want to concur with the company owners and leaders of major corporates that indeed, it is time to strengthen our intervention in this regard.

Let me start by saying that as the Department of Transport we have realized the importance of our province as the gateway to the rest of South Africa and even the Southern African region. More than 75% of imports and exports for the whole country and the region move through this province.

Road freight activity between the ports of Durban and Richards Bay, and the interior of South and Southern Africa on the N3 and N2 national routes accounts for more than 23 million tons worth of goods per annum.

The N3 National route between Durban and Gauteng is the busiest road freight route on the continent.

Freight transport provides employment opportunities, not only in the transport operational sector, but in a wide range of associated activities, including vehicle and ship supply and maintenance, forwarding, warehousing and storage, manufacture of equipment and components, etc. KwaZulu-Natal is home to some of the largest manufacturers of equipment in earthmoving, materials handling, and manufacturing of trucks and trailers.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thought I should mention this so that as truckers you can see how important your role is in our economic development. In fact, freight transport in all modes, is one of the most important economic activities in the province, contributing to about 11% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and is a key element in the future development of the Province's agricultural and industrial potential.

The developments and opportunities in road freight transport since the inception of democracy in our country have led to tight competition in the trucking industry. The vehicle population has increased and companies have become profit driven, tending to overload vehicles, neglect vehicle maintenance and promote working conditions that compel drivers to speed on the road.

According to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the average overloading countrywide is approximately 20% and the road damage caused by the overloaded trucks is 60%. It therefore makes sense that to control overloading on our roads must be a very high priority to prolong the life span of our roads. The road traffic act stipulates that the load should not exceed 46 000kg and the height should not exceed 4,3 m.

Overloading and all these factors I have mentioned above are unlawful and they compromise safety on our roads. They are also detrimental to your business because your vehicles are delayed or even suspended by our law enforcement officers when they are caught on the road.

I would like to take this opportunity to give you some of our (Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) statistics regarding heavy vehicles on our roads. In KZN alone, an average of 47 000 heavy vehicles are stopped per month. Of these, 16891 go through weighbridge of which 2 900 are found to be overloaded. About 185 are suspended for not being worthy to be on the road, 415 are found unlicensed and 35 get warrants of arrest for unpaid fines.

It is nevertheless comforting to know that Government is not alone in tackling the task at hand - the task of fighting against road carnage. Ladies and gentlemen, today we are here to celebrate the public-private partnership that has seen the road freight industry adapting its position on road safety by changing the attitude of truckers.

This must be applauded since it is tangible evidence of how the business community has a vital role to play in contributing to the ideals of having a healthy and safe society. Indeed, as you rightly say, the time is now for the trucking industry to take road safety into its own hands and take an active part in leading the country into a new era of responsible road use.

As I am given to understand, Fleet Watch and its partners have over the past years covered the entire country with the Brake & Tyre Watch project training over 600 traffic officials on truck defects where 306 vehicles of all shapes and sizes were inspected during the exercises. Of these 306 trucks, 202 were served with Discontinuation of Service notices.

Obviously this 66% failure rate which is totally unacceptable and it shows the entire industry up in a bad light. Indeed this is a pity as there are some stunning operators out there and these operators are being pulled down into the dirt by reprobates who shouldn't be anywhere near the trucking industry.

These people are dangerous to your business, and of course the entire motoring population as well as the society at large.

These are people who have not been unfortunate to see what we see on a daily basis when we attend road accidents. They have no clue about the impact of road accidents on people who are left behind.

These are people who I wish could change their attitudes towards road safety and trucking before they experience the pain of having a loved one trapped in the wreck of the vehicle because it had no brakes.

We welcome your proposal to establish a National Trucks Task Team that will provide further training to our traffic officers on trucks from a manufacturing of vehicles so that they can see and smell danger from afar.

All this fits-in well with my Department's undertaking to ensure that road users take the responsibility for safer roads because road safety is everybody's business.

Earlier this year, as the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, we hosted a Road Safety Summit which was part of our consultation process to see how best we can tackle the challenges of safety on our roads. From that summit, it emerged that there has to be a synergy in the implementation of programs amongst all tiers of government as well as the private sector.

Your theme here is 'A Call to Action'. Coincidentally, as the KZN Department of Transport we dedicated this financial year of 2011/2012 to 'Activism Against Road Carnage and Transgressions'. Globally, the year 2011 is the beginning of the decade of the United Nation's commitment to Safety on our Roads. The whole world is uniting behind endeavours to curb road deaths drastically between 2011 and 2020.

We must continue to galvanise individuals and the society at large to play a role in curbing carnage on our roads. We say that accidents do not happen but they are caused and therefore preventing accidents from occurring is everyone's responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen, whether we are looking at public-private partnerships, or government and big business working together, or just people of whatever race, class, creed or status joining hands, we are getting closer to an inevitable destiny that must be reflected in the things we do to earn the status of one of the most promising developing nations of the world with a commitment to building a non-racial, non-sexist democratic society that we so cherish.

I want to highlight therefore that as government we would like to see an increase in the number of black emerging truck owners joining the industry.

Before I conclude, I want to acknowledge the role played by the trucking industry in the fight against HIV/AIDS with the formation of Trucking Against Aids (a *Fleet Watch* initiative back in the mid-1990s) which developed into the highly successful Trucking Wellness programme.

Finally, to Fleet Watch Truck Magazine, Wabco, Bridgestone and all other partners, we thank you for organising this event. It is an inspiration, and it is essential to us all as road safety ambassadors.

Indeed we agree that only if we join hands in the fight against road carnage will we be able to reconstruct and develop our country. As a developmental state, we believe that development follows the road and without a formidable road infrastructure network, meaningful economic activity will be undermined. We dare not fail the African continent and the world in this regard since our country is a gateway for thriving economic activity in Africa.

I thank you.