

**SPEECH NOTES FOR KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE
ROAD FREIGHT ASSOCIATION CONVENTION.**

21 May 2012

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 this morning to share some of my views with you on matters pertaining to road freight in our province. As representatives of the provincial government, we are always encouraged by initiatives like this convention because it seeks to find ways of impacting positively on the lives of our people.

I therefore take this opportunity to thank the Road Freight Association (RFA) for hosting this event with the aim of bringing together all stakeholders in the freight industry to discuss, among others, ways of securing KwaZulu-Natal, and particularly Durban, as the premier gateway to Africa.

Let me start by saying that as the KwaZulu-Natal 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.

KwaZulu-Natal is considered to have a comparative advantage over all other provinces, particularly in the manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and transport sectors.

Our comparative advantage lies in the fact that KwaZulu-Natal is the most critical route in South Africa's global supply chain – our ports of Richards Bay and Durban handle 80% of the value of exports and imports on South Africa's current balance of payments – and our own local supply routes are so much shorter and potentially more cost efficient than those of other provinces.

This translates to more than 75% of imports and exports for the whole country and the region moving through this province.

We are a relatively small province by way of size as KZN occupies about 7,6% of the land in South Africa, but we have a large population. Indeed if we combine the land area of KwaZulu-Natal with that of Gauteng, which is 1,4%, together we occupy only 9% of South Africa's land mass.

However, collectively we are home to 39% of South Africa's population and share more than 50% of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Little wonder, therefore, that the N3 and the N2 routes linking our ports to Gauteng are the busiest import/export routes in South Africa.

On average African countries conduct only 8% of their trade with other African countries and 92% with the rest of the world. 30% of South Africa's international trade is with Africa and South Africa is currently the largest Foreign Direct Investor (FDI) into the rest of Africa.

Given this scenario or background, it is therefore not surprising that 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 25 million tons worth of goods per annum.

We also appreciate the fact that 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 the freight industry 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 GDP, and is a key element in the future development of the Province's agricultural and industrial potential.

We have noted that 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 controlling 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. My Department is losing millions of rands which could have been invested in infrastructure development to claims made by victims of accidents that are caused by potholes. Our ageing road infrastructure is under strain precisely because of the excessive presence of trucks on our roads – a situation which government hopes to avert by fast-tracking the development of rail infrastructure so as to free the roads from the heavy burden of being overused by trucks.

We know that the roads are efficient and more flexible when transporting goods, but in the interest of safety, it is necessary that rail must rescue our roads from being made killing fields as a result of overloading and the apparent traffic congestion and the general saturation of the road environment due to the excessive presence of heavy vehicles.

You and I know very well that because of its sheer size, the damage that a truck inflicts on another vehicle in a collision is enormous and devastating, meaning it kills breadwinners and contributes directly to weakening the capacity of the South African family to take care of itself.

Family members who had a father, a mother, a grandfather, a brother and a sister, a supportive aunt or uncle, find themselves having to depend on limited government social welfare grants simply because their loved one was killed in an accident involving a truck and a light motor vehicle or taxi.

The country's skill base dwindles as we continually lose gifted managers, employees, professionals, experts, sports men and women, artists and artisans on our roads.

Overloaded and un-roadworthy heavy vehicles 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 the performance of the heavy vehicles on our roads. In KZN alone, an average of 47 000 heavy vehicles are stopped per month. Of these, 16900 go through a weighbridge of which 2 900 are found to be overloaded. About 185 are suspended for not being worthy to be on the road. An average of 415 heavy vehicles is unlicensed and about 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 while ensuring that freight industry contributes positively to our economic growth.

As I am given to understand, to ensure that industry's safety standards and ethics are upheld, the members of the Road Freight Association are required to adhere to a prescribed code of conduct. The RFA also offers an online complaints procedure to investigate unscrupulous operators.

We also commend you for adopting the Road Transport Management System (RTMS) which is an industry-led, government-supported, voluntary, self-regulation scheme that encourages road transport operators to implement a management system or a set of standards that demonstrate compliance with the Road Traffic Regulations so as to contribute to preserving the road infrastructure, improving road safety & increasing productivity.

Through this initiative, what we have achieved collectively has been nothing short of incredible. In sugar cane over the past few years the project has seen a reduction from almost half a million tons of overloads per annum, down to 62 thousand tons per annum.

We also note that following on from the success of the RTMS, many companies are now starting to award contracts only to RTMS-accredited hauliers. We are also looking to engaging insurance companies and banks, hoping that they will see the decrease in risk as a result of RTMS hauliers, and as such offer better rates to truck operators as business people whom we want to remain in business as happy entrepreneurs that make profit and provide jobs for the jobless majority of this country.

All 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, the time is now for the freight industry to take road safety into its own hands and play a significant role in leading the country into a new era of responsible road use.

Last year, I was invited by Fleet Watch Truck Magazine which organises an Outdoor Expo for truck owners every year in Hillcrest. I was shocked to learn that when this organisation ran a project that detected truck defects, 306 vehicles of all shapes and sizes were inspected and of these 306 trucks, 202 of them were served with Discontinuation of Service notices.

It also came out that 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 this 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.

As the KZN Department of Transport we started last year to dedicate the financial year of 2011/2012 to 'Activism Against Road Carnage and Transgressions'. We wanted to galvanise individuals and the society at large to play a role in curbing carnage on our roads.

Furthermore, globally, the year 2011 was the beginning of the decade of the United Nation's commitment to Safety on our Roads. The whole world has united behind endeavours to curb road deaths drastically between 2011 and 2020.

Now again this year, we have dedicated this financial year to 'Deepening Activism Against Road Accidents'.

We are saying this year we are recommitting ourselves to galvanize communities and deepen our partnerships with relevant stakeholders like the RFA and others to support and own our road safety campaign. We say that accidents do not happen but they are caused and therefore preventing accidents from occurring is everyone's responsibility. We thank the RFA for agreeing to take that responsibility.

We will continue with our educational and law enforcement activities throughout the year to ensure that we all become friends of the Decade of Action for Road Safety, including running wellness clinics to check on the health of your drivers some whom are found to be suffering from sicknesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, HIV and AIDS-related illnesses etc. Needless to say, a sick driver has a greater potential of causing or failing to avoid a road collision from happening.

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 business people joining the freight industry.

Finally, to the Road Freight Association and all other partners, we thank you for organising this convention. It is an inspiration, and it is essential to us all. Indeed we agree that only if we join hands like this that we will 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, as we say, our country is a gateway for thriving economic activity in Africa. Akube njalo ke – let it be so.

I thank you.