

**EXECUTIVE STATEMENT ON ROAD SAFETY INTERVENTIONS FOR FIELDS HILL (M13),
KWAZULU-NATAL
PRESENTED TO THE KZN LEGISLATURE BY MR. T.W. MCHUNU, MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON
THURSDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2013**

- Madam Speaker;
- Premier, Mr. Senzo Mchunu;
- Honourable members;

Madam Speaker, please allow me to table the executive statement on the interventions that the Department of Transport has undertaken, and is considering, to improve road safety on Fields Hill (M13) in terms of Rule 100 of the Standing Rules of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature.

These interventions result from an intensive consultation process with various stakeholders, after the horrific Pinetown accident which claimed the lives of 24 people.

Members of this House will recall that on the night of the 5th of September 2013 our province was badly hit by the sad news of the horrific accident involving a truck, minibuses and a light vehicle.

This accident had occurred at around 18h30 pm that fateful night – and devastated the entire nation.

Honourable members will also recall that on the 17th of September 2013, I tabled an Executive Statement, reflecting on the same accident. In the statement I also highlighted other accidents, including the R66-Nkwalini accident that claimed 11 lives; 9 maidens and two minders; who had come from uMkhosi woMhlanga on the 1st of September.

Cabinet had then tasked me to look at interventions we could take in the short-to-long term to address road safety improvements in Fields Hill, and possibly also in other high accident areas.

The Accident Report

The fatal crash occurred during early evening, peak hour traffic, around 18h30 pm on the 5th of September 2013, at the intersection of M13 and Richmond Road, in Pinetown. It is believed that the truck's brakes failed resulting in the driver deciding to drive straight through the intersection and crashing into four (4) minibus taxis and a light passenger vehicle.

Nineteen people died on the scene and a further three at hospital, bringing the death toll to 22. There were seven people critically injured, eight seriously injured and a further 11 who escaped with relatively minor injuries. Unfortunately, a further two people later succumbed to their injuries in hospital, bringing the total of the deceased to 24.

Investigation reports – both conducted by the department and the Road Traffic Management Corporation – point out that the truck's brakes were deficient. As well as, it was evident in the investigation that speed and inexperience of the driver were contributing factors to the accident. As you know, the matter of the driver is currently the subject of the court.

On Fields Hill interventions

Soon after the unfortunate accident, we were as a province and indeed nation again awoken to the untold pain and misery these accidents cause, in addition to hitting our public purse. There were even calls from some quarters that trucks needed to be banned from M13. Those terribly opportunistic among us even went to the extent of claiming they had sent recommendations to me, personally, about Fields Hill.

Stakeholder consultations

It was clear – in the midst of public and categorical call to ban trucks from M13 – that I urgently had to take actions as a responsible Member of the Executive Council. Fundamentally, this action entailed embarking on a stakeholder consultation process to establish:

- The facts on the state of road safety on Fields Hill, including existing law enforcement measures, and
- Stakeholders' views on the call for a total ban of heavy vehicles on Fields Hill, which is rather a steep and challenging territory of the M13.

I therefore consulted with the following stakeholders:

- Officials of the Department of Transport;
- eThekweni Metropolitan Council;
- Fields Hill Concerned Group;
- The Freight Industry, and
- The Business Community.

I have asked each of the stakeholders to furnish me with further presentations and recommendations, beyond the consultation meetings. In line with this, I remain open to engage with any stakeholder, going forward.

At least two important facts came up from the engagements:

1. Firstly, the accusation that I had ignored a report from the local Fields Hill Concerned Group was proven false. In my meetings with the department's officials and the Fields Hill Concerned Group, it was categorically confirmed that at no stage did I ever receive such a report. While it was true that some document existed, which carried suggestions to restrict the use of Fields Hill (M13) by heavy vehicles, this document was however, never brought to my attention nor that of the Head of Department.
2. Secondly, the call, and indeed sensational clamouring by political opportunists for a complete ban of trucks from Fields Hill was proven to be both misleading and ill-advised.

As a responsible MEC, and being part of a caring government, it remained critical to me that long lasting solutions which would be beneficial to all, and coming from stakeholders, be found.

In addition, it was important that whatever solutions we uncovered, would benefit not only Fields Hill but possibly also other parts of the country with high accident zones.

We had to look at the fundamental issues and common causes of accidents on Fields Hills, and balance these with the circumstances that led to this tragic accident.

Following the intensive consultations to improve road safety on Fields Hill (M13), the department has come up with immediate and long term measures to improve the safety of road users. These measures recognise the commercial and residential development and growth of areas such Hillcrest and Kloof, along Fields Hill. Critically, the measures are also sensible to the need to safeguard commercial and business activity, which has to be supplied by these trucks on a daily basis.

The immediate and improvement measures are as follows:

1. The existing carrying capacity of trucks passing through M13 will be further reduced from 25-tonnes to 16-tonnes.
2. The time period when these 16-ton trucks are restricted from passing through Fields Hill will be extended from 06:30 to 08:00 – to - 06:00 to 09:00 in the mornings on the eastbound carriageway (that is from Hillcrest to Pinetown).
3. The introduction of an afternoon restriction from 16:00 to 18:30 pm in both directions. We believe these restrictions will act as a deterrent for trucks, and make them avoid using this route.
4. The compulsory stop at the top of Fields Hill will be monitored by electronic surveillance technology.
5. Law enforcement will be increased along the M13. On this score, the eThekweni metro police and the department’s Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) will enter into a joint protocol agreement to ensure that policing on Fields Hill is optimised, within the limited resources.

The long term measures include:

1. We are looking at improving the capacity of Fields Hill (M13) to ensure the safety of road users. This will involve the addition of an extra lane in the easterly direction, and funding will be made available for its design and construction in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework.
2. The construction of concrete barriers (otherwise called “New Jersey” barriers) along the entire Fields Hill route.
3. The provision of street lighting.
4. Consideration of pedestrian movements with a possible construction of a pedestrian bridge near the interchange at the bottom of the hill.
5. Improving the ramps on, and intersections joining, the M13.
6. Construction of an arrestor-bed, near the interchange.
7. A total freight strategy for the EThekweni Metro and the corridor needs to be developed. The strategy should consider improvements at the harbor such as:
 - a. A weighbridge at the harbour,
 - b. Suitable park-off areas near the harbour for the truckers,
 - c. Truck stops,
 - d. Improvement of freight corridors,
 - e. Law enforcement, fine collection, driver and operator competencies, the dedicated freight corridor to Cato Ridge, and
 - f. The implementation of legislation and other issues relating to the public transport industry.
8. Investigation into further law enforcement interventions which could include, but not limited to, electronic surveillance technology, weigh-bridges, vehicle testing, and changes in legislation.

Madame Speaker, let me assure you and the Honourable members that road safety continues to be a critical part of our mandate. We will not tire until our people completely enjoy the fruits of the freedom we ushered in back in 1994.

As part of this, during our October Transport Month programme, we intensified our law enforcement and road safety campaigns by focusing specifically on heavy load vehicles, especially trucks.

We re-launched "*Operation Phezukwabo*", our multi-disciplinary law enforcement campaign focusing on heavy trucks and buses.

In the last two months, our officers stopped 3 540 trucks. Of these, 972 were found to have various defects and 214 were suspended.

This past weekend alone we suspended 17 trucks right here in Pietermaritzburg's Mkhondeni weighbridge for various defaults.

Going back to the basics

Madame Speaker, we remain concerned by the role human error or negligence continue to play in the cause of accidents. Last Friday's minibus accident that killed 14 people in a factory near uMkhomazi was neither necessary nor desirable. And again, last Saturday night's accident that killed six people on R66 could have been avoided by the driver who decided to overtake on a blind rise. On both accidents, the drivers simply had to respect themselves, have regard for the lives of fellow road users and passengers, and observe the basic road traffic rules.

That is why I call for us as a province to return to the basics. As we enter the Festive Season, let us commit ourselves to respecting the road rules. Let us observe the road signs, exercise patience, stop drinking and driving, and rest every two hours or 200 kilometres. Let us buckle up, keep to the speed limit and ensure that our vehicles are roadworthy. Above all, let us value life!

I wish you all a pleasant, restful and a safe festive season.

I thank you!