

**SPEECH BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND
LIAISON, MR. WILLIES MCHUNU**

PIARC SEMINAR ON RURAL ROADS MAINTENANCE.

28 November 2013

Programme Director;

CEO of SANRAL;

Representatives of various organisations;

Distinguished guests;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

It is an honour for me to have this opportunity to join you this morning. That you are concerning yourself with issues of rural road infrastructure development means we have a lot of common interests. And when we have some common interests, it means we can agree on a number of things.

I therefore would like to thank the organisers of this event, including World Road Association, National Department of Transport, SANRAL, eThekweni Municipality, South African Road Federation and the South African Institute of Civil Engineers – for making it happen.

This seminar takes place just five months before our country celebrates 20 years of democracy.

Perhaps, the big question now is whether our rural communities have anything to celebrate 20 years into our democracy?

As patriotic citizens of this beautiful nation we should then provide honest answers to honest questions.

We should also have the courage of our conviction as to be able to recognise progress made, in the same way we admit shortcomings.

Let me attempt to respond to the one question I pose. As you know, I am the MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison in KwaZulu-Natal. As such, my exposure is greatly biased towards this province. I therefore find it natural to share with you that the largely rural KwaZulu-Natal, over the last two decades, worked tirelessly towards improving the road network.

The last four years especially have seen a spirited attention and resolve to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas with a huge chunk of our budget going into

constructing rural roads. For example, we have invested nearly R6 billion upgrading 355 kilometres of gravel into tar roads, over the period. We steadfastly did this because we realised the importance of connecting the underdeveloped communities to main roads taking them towns and cities, clinics and schools, but also to areas of work and neighbouring communities. And that is empowerment!

Our focus is informed by the ANC-defined national priorities, which include rural development. It was also a fulfilment of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport's project, initiated in 1998, to identify and address the province's rural mobility problems as a second phase of the Community Access Roads Needs Study (CARNS).

The CARNS project examined the infrastructural side of rural transport in the form of community access roads and provided a list of priorities for funding road access.

Subsequent to that, the KwaZulu-Natal Rural Mobility Project was developed to assist in identifying rural mobility patterns. It also identified inputs to the development and design of transport modes and services to accommodate specific transport needs. It took into cognisance policies and planning activities of other provincial departments, as well as the province's rural development and economic growth policies.

Input was to be obtained from all role players across provincial, regional and local levels during the project.

Among the objectives of the project were:

- To supply access of Provincial and National road networks to rural communities through appropriate rural road provision and maintenance;
- To create employment opportunities;
- To create effective communication channels with stakeholders;
- To consult stakeholders in the prioritisation of road needs within the framework of a coherent road network;
- To support emerging construction and maintenance contractors;
- To support emerging business entrepreneurs;
- To maximise financial benefits and assets to communities; and
- To create an awareness of career opportunities within the transport and construction industry for rural youth.

Following these as a basis, the KZN Department of Transport rolled out a massive rural road infrastructure development campaign called '*Operation Kushunquthuli*', which has since changed people's lives for the better, particularly in rural areas.

We remain committed to this programme of uplifting rural communities through the provision of access to schools, clinics and social amenities, including areas with agricultural potential.

We have gone to outlying rural areas and built scores of vehicle and pedestrian bridges. We constructed 1 340 kilometres of new access roads, which is equal to the return distance from Durban to Pretoria. These are roads that never existed before.

While building new roads, we balanced this with the maintenance of existing roads – meaning we have re-gravelled, patched holes, rehabilitated, resealed tarred roads.

When you look at our budget, you will see that we have split it to continuously strike a balance in the construction of new roads and the maintenance of existing roads.

One of the biggest challenges currently is dealing with the vexing subject of pot holes. This has become a rather daunting task owing to the heavy rains and storms. These rains, and we love the rain, sometimes seriously damage and destroy the road infrastructure, including bridges and causeways for which huge resources have already been invested.

We are pleased that over the past five years, more than 740 square metres of pothole repairs were successfully carried out in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Gravel shortage is another problematic area. A lack of gravel results in increased haulage or long distances travelled between construction sites and the quarry which in turn results in increased costs of either construction or re-gravelling of the roads.

The department is also relying on Amakhosi in the Ingonyama Trust to assist in providing access to the identified quarries as mining rights and the costs associated with them are frequently an issue.

The fact that KwaZulu-Natal is home to 21 percent of South Africa's poor and 75 percent of the poor live in rural areas, indicates a substantial scope to use labour-based methods in the construction and maintenance of rural access roads.

Roads are built where people live and therefore their construction and maintenance creates work opportunities for those who are least mobile. Further, roads can be designed to create work and entrepreneurial opportunities which fit the skills profile of local communities.

This in itself provides a compelling case to invest in labour-based construction and maintenance methods. It is on these considerations that we have always used our *Zibambele* Road Maintenance Contract System in the maintenance of our rural roads.

This is a poverty alleviation programme creating sustainable jobs for poor rural families while they maintain rural roads.

In order to break the poverty cycle in the medium to long term, the department employs a household rather than an individual. This ensures that a household does not rely on one person for continuity of the contract.

I am sure you are well aware that our *Zibambele* programme, which has scooped awards for being the best programme under the infrastructure sector of the Expanded Public Works Programme, is a pioneer.

A *Zibambele* household maintains the road drainage system, ensures good roadside visibility, maintains the road surface at good condition, and clears the road verges of litter and noxious weeds.

The length of the road allocated to each household depends on the difficulty of the terrain. The more difficult the terrain, the shorter the length of road. The maintenance needs of the road is based on a maximum of 60 working hours per month.

Ladies and gentlemen, our strategic objective has been to provide transportation access to the people we serve. This has also called for collective involvement in creating a safe and reliable transport network.

We live in a society where a range of things can happen to you once you leave point A towards B. For one, you can drown in a river where there is no bridge, or you can be run over by a speeding car steered by a drunk driver, or even disturbed by a stray animal.

Our mission is therefore to address all these factors to allow the movement from points A to B to be as safe, easy and convenient as possible. This is what road safety campaigns require of us as a society.

Approximately, 70% of the roads managed by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport are found in the rural areas, where animals are kept by the local community for a variety of reasons.

Fencing of the road reserve has been found to be impractical in most areas due to theft of the fencing material, the use of the strips of land as valuable pasture. But also the need for the communities on either side of the roads to cross in order to interact with one another has contributed to the challenge.

In addition, the loss of even one animal, generally by one of the poorest of our citizens, could mean enormous financial and emotional hardship, so any reduction in the mortality or injury rate would be welcomed.

Cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles all share the road space. It is crucial to ensure that the physical infrastructure allows each to be able to use the space in harmony with the others.

I am heartened to learn that there are civil engineering professionals within our midst. That is comfort to me, because at least with them, sustainable solutions to the challenges to rural road infrastructure will be possible.

In your deliberations, I urge you to remain mindful of our collective responsibility is to balance preservation of our environment with the developmental needs of communities.

We appreciate that the roads sector is a major employment contributor and its full potential can be realised through solutions-oriented dialogue.

Our National Development Plan, and indeed our Provincial Growth and Development Strategy aim to unlock our productive capacity, so our country can prosper. It is going to be men and women like you who will make all of these grand plans a living reality, and in turn lift the hopes and dreams of many our unemployed youth for generations to come.

I thank you.