

Address by the MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison in KwaZulu-Natal, Mr Mxolisi Kaunda, at the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the eThekweni Municipality and Bus Operators.

23 June 2016.

- His Worship the Mayor Cllr James Nxumalo;
- Deputy Mayor Cllr Nomvuzo Shabalala;
- EXCO members and councillors;
- City Manager Mr Sibusiso Sithole;
- Members of the bus operator leadership represented by Durban Bus Owners' Association, the KwaZulu Natal Bus Council (KWANABUCO) and the South African Bus Owners' Association (SABOA);
- Management and staff from the eThekweni Transport Authority and City Officials;
- Members of the media;
- Distinguished guests.

Let me start by congratulating you Mr Mayor and your council on this auspicious occasion, the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between you and our bus operators – which forms part of the eThekweni's Integrated Rapid Public Transport Network, Go Durban.

Contextually speaking, as part of a bigger picture of addressing the policies of apartheid which aimed at keeping people divided along racial lines, government identified that key to connecting people and communities and to provide equal access to economic and societal hubs, a major overhaul of our public transport system was required.

This led to the National Department of Transport's action Plan of 2007, which included extensive consultation with transport experts and stakeholders, resulting in the passing of the National Transport and Land Act of 2009. This entrenched government's commitment to ensure that public transport was dramatically improved for all.

So given this, it has always been part of government's plan to ensure that those who have created their livelihoods around provision of public transport, have an option of participating in the new improved system, should their routes and livelihoods be affected by the various phases of the development.

As with anything, this process of consultation takes time, and has to be as inclusive as possible.

So as province we are deeply grateful and obviously very pleased that local government in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality has reached a point in this first phase of rolling out its IRPTN, with this, the second MOA with public transport operators being signed, the first having already been signed with the taxi industry.

This heralds the beginning of the process of negotiation with these very important stakeholders, on how they will participate and operate within the new system. It represents the city's policy of inclusivity and partnership with public transport operators and negotiated solutions for the city's public transport challenges.

The agreement also represents a firm commitment by all affected parties to meaningfully engage with one another in order to arrive at a mutually satisfactory position to achieve not only the goals of excellent service to passengers but also broad transformation within the public transport sector as a whole.

Both the minibus taxi industry and the bus operators play a key role in moving millions of citizens to and from various areas of social and economic activities.

Therefore, in the implementation of the Go Durban project, all the existing legal operators in the eThekweni Metropolitan area have critical role to play.

Another reason I'm so pleased to be here is to celebrate Go Durban's contribution to a cause very dear to my heart, which is socio-economic transformation.

As the provincial Department of Transport, we remain resolute in our commitment to drive radical socio-economic transformation. We are determined to improve participation of Black African-owned companies in all roads infrastructure projects and subsidised public transport services. This is to ensure that we achieve a fair and equitable distribution of work and wealth.

Moreover, as I understand the many benefits Go Durban is set to bring to the city and its citizens, I am also satisfied as it is clear that those benefits will extend well beyond the borders of eThekweni.

We all know that Durban is the economic engine of KwaZulu-Natal, and the gateway to South Africa for a huge range of essential goods. When Durban prospers, so does the rest of the province.

When people and goods can move around, and through, the city more efficiently, quickly and safely, we all win. As the "N" in IRPTN makes clear, transport is a network. When the city's transport network operates in a more efficient, integrated manner, the provincial and national networks run more smoothly.

The many employment and business opportunities that are being created by Go Durban now and in the coming years, both directly in building the necessary infrastructure and through improved access to work and shopping, will benefit the entire province and the nation as a whole.

Go Durban is also a shining example of inter-government co-operation and partnership in service delivery, a fact reflected by my own presence here today.

It is on that score that my department has and will continue to work closely with the eThekweni Municipality to ensure a seamless interconnection between provincial and municipal roads.

Indeed, road users are not interested in which organ of state is responsible for the road they're travelling on. All they want is a smooth, hassle free journey.

In light of the above points, it is clear that Go Durban meshes perfectly with our provincial growth and development strategy.

The strategy was crafted to help us realize our 2030 vision of, transforming KZN into a prosperous province with a healthy, secure, skilled population, a province that acts as a gateway to Africa.

It identified seven key focus areas: job creation; human resource development; human and community development; strategic infrastructure; environmental sustainability; governance and policy and spatial equity. And Go Durban addresses all these.

We also recognize the contribution that Go Durban is making towards road safety. Road safety concerns were taken into consideration right from the start in its planning.

Ending the carnage on our roads is a priority for my department and for me personally. We have all lost someone we know to this scourge.

Apart from the enormous human cost, it is estimated that road accidents drain our national economy of approximately R306 billion a year. The money we could be spending on schools, clinics or better roads.

As successful integrated transport systems around the world have shown, smoother traffic flows make for safer roads.

Cost effective, safe and punctual public transport encourages more citizens to use it, which means fewer vehicles on our roads, lowering congestion and reducing the potential for accidents.

Yes, Go Durban will bring enormous economic benefits to our province. But its contribution to curbing the carnage on our roads must not be underestimated. Now that's truly something worth celebrating.

We call on all public transport operators to play their part and change people's mind-sets and attitudes on road safety. Speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol, unlicensed drivers and vehicles with defects, continue to be areas of great concern.

As I conclude, I want to reiterate that the signing of this agreement marks Government's commitment to on-going consultation and participation in the democratic process of the country. It is vital that they are part of the process going forward, with their voices heard, and that they play a role in planning their futures in the programme.

I thank you.