



**Remarks by the Honourable Deputy Minister of Transport,
Ms Dikeledi Magadzi (MP) on the Occasion of the Limpopo province Taxi Lekgotla at
Bolivia Lodge, Polokwane, on 20 October 2020**

Programme Director,

MEC for Transport and Community Safety, Mavhungu Lerule-Ramakhanya

District Councillors led by the Executive Mayor of the Capricorn District Municipality

Local Government Councillors led by the Executive Mayor for Local Government in
Polokwane, Cllr. T. Nkadimeng

Senior Officials from the National, Provincial Departments and Local Government

Leadership of the Limpopo Provincial Taxi Council

Captains of Industry

All Protocols Observed

Introduction

Prayer/moment of silence

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Can we please all rise and show our lasting respect for those, including frontline workers who are perishing as a result of the pandemic.

We will also pray for the speedy recovery of the Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize, his family and his entire team as they go through the personal tribulations that come with COVID infection.

Let us observe a moment of silence in their honour.

Thank you.

Programme Director,

It is indeed a great opportunity to address this historic Provincial Taxi Lekgotla as delegated by the Minister of Transport, Honourable Fikile Mbalula and as mandated by the people of South Africa.

It is the people of South Africa through their election Manifesto that have mandated us to move with greater urgency and speed to resolve the many challenges our people face.

Among these challenges has been an urgent need for us to bring about improvements in the public transport sector given the current state of our public transport system.

These improvements have to do with reliability, affordability, accessibility, efficiency, safety and integration of the public transport system in ways that would render the system as a true economic and social enabler.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This has meant that, amongst others, we prioritise improvements in the public transport system as part of the Ministry's 5 priorities and as part of the Department of Transport's Strategic Plan.

More so these priorities are essential ingredients to the achievement of some of government's 7 Apex priorities, especially accelerated economic transformation.

Quickening the rail modernisation programme, launch of BRT systems in other provinces and the development of the taxi industry are thus expressions of our dream for a world class integrated public transport system.

To the ends that this must happen we must as South Africans build effective partnerships across the public transport system to ensure realise this goal more successfully.

And we could not have chosen a better month to lay the building blocks for a renewed partnership between government, the taxi industry, civil society and business.

The October Transport Month

The October Transport Month is a month in which we primarily showcase achievements of the sector, while we also in part launch new projects and host ground breaking summits including such significant gatherings as the Taxi Lekgotla.

Through these forums we not only announce our planned strategic interventions we are undertaking, but similarly consolidating all strategic actions taken in the past twelve months.

In addition, the October Transport Month (OTM) serves equally to profile successes by the private sector, communities and centres of learning and research and other actors in the sector.

Yet this transport month happens under completely unprecedented times at home and globally in which our already ailing economy has been further devastated by the COVID pandemic.

The pandemic and associated lockdowns have meted untold devastation on our economy causing the loss of many livelihood and jobs.

Role of the Industry during the harsh lockdowns

The taxi industry rose to this intense challenge we have all been facing in the last six months or so.

The industry provided South Africa with the wheels needed to ferry essential workers meant to sustain South Africa beyond the pandemic.

The services offered by the industry under these times have not only contributed to the endurance of the industry, but most importantly have held the nation together.

The industry has contributed immensely to the social cohesion we have all been striving for.

The industry accomplished this role, under very immense financial and other challenges that threatened or in many cases adversely affected the livelihoods of operators.

We are deeply aware that for many a complete recovery will be tough and will call for even more sacrifices on the part of operators and many South Africans relying on the industry.

We are reminded that the effects of the pandemic have equally affected other industries formal or not that support the taxi industry in ways big or small.

Support industries affected include not only formal industries such as filling stations, auto service centres and auto repairs, but equally must include food and other vendors that rely on a stable and profitable taxi industry.

Equally remiss of us will be to ignore the impacts of the pandemic on drivers and marshals, who not only had to face the risk of infection, but equally job losses as the industry buckled

The role of government as we rebuild the economy

As government we stand undeterred towards the achievement of the goals we set ourselves as the 6th Administration in which through the ethos of Khawuleza we have to work faster prioritised.

We realise not only that the pandemic has caused the industry a great deal of harm, but equally that the pandemic has sharpened the challenges of the relationship between the industry and government.

We admit as government that we could do more to assist and develop the industry, but that our efforts could only be successful if we all pull together as one.

The Taxi Lekgotla/Makgotla

Lessons learned

Together we learned valuable lessons about the business of public transport under conditions of a global emergency and these lessons will help us fashion a better future for the transportation of our people.

This learning also meant that we didn't just transcend our differences in our rush to cooperate for the common good, but that we also have had to go through serious introspection into our ways.

This introspection has included an analysis of the very nature of our partnership as industry and government.

The Taxi Lekgotla an Outcome of Our Priorities

We must however mention that the outbreak almost derailed this very epic march we had already embarked on from the declaration of the Minister of Transport's programme for the first hundred days in office.

In this time the Minister had set out to fix the many challenges we faced in the delivery of transport related services and these constituted the Minister's five priority areas.

Amongst these priorities has been a sharp focus on the improvement of public transport as an economic and social enabler through which centres of commerce, industry, health, education, leisure and other social amenities are accessed.

To this end the Minister embarked on tasks to fix the challenges we face in our rail passenger transport, our bus transport system and the challenges facing the taxi industry.

We are drawn to the conviction that without an adequately transformed and sufficiently integrated taxi industry we cannot totally enjoy the benefits of the taxi industry's full potential.

Yet we also understand that many challenges faced by the industry are historic and will need a concerted resolution only possible through partnership and collaboration.

While government has continued to support the industry in various ways many challenges still remain. These include the following:

- Oversupply and thus diminished revenue,
- Poor infrastructure and
- Uncontrolled competition on routes that has become a source of ongoing conflict and violence.

Many operators are forced into financially unsustainable businesses operating with badly maintained and extremely old taxi vehicles that threaten the safety of passengers and other road users.

But how did we get to where we are today?

Where did we go wrong?

Background

Ladies and gentlemen,

Various researchers have attempted to trace the nature of changes that have characterised the development of the taxi industry in South Africa.

Most of the research has been focusing attention largely on the minibus taxi industry and have in so doing attempted to pin down the nature of challenges affecting the industry.

Most have recognised the commitment by state to build the industry and make it more suitable to South Africa's broader public transport needs.

In one such study by H Schalekamp and J M Klopp, this commitment is made very apparent. They state and I quote:

“Since 1994 [minibus taxi] MBT reform has consistently been on the government's transport agenda” unquote.

This commitment was more clearly expressed with the formation of the National Taxi Task Team (the NTTT) in 1995 whose intentions included investigating issues affecting the MBT sector and to propose solutions and policy options for sustainability of the sector.

It is important to note that some studies of the sector had already picked up negative developments in the industry as was revealed in a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

According to the study by the ILO, it is apparent that “by 1990 the industry, while remaining largely informal was already showing signs of over-saturation in some areas and sparked intense (and often violent) battles between associations of owners, fighting for commuters routes”.

It is for this very reason that amongst other solutions the NTTT had proposed the formation of a national structure to bring about unity within the industry and through unity to quell the violence and establish a structure that would be a voice for the whole industry.

And the NTTT had proposed that the industry should be supported and built into a modern and formalised industry.

Subsidy

What is more profound in the study by Schalenkamp and Klopp is that already in 1997, the NTTT had concluded that the subsidy system did not reflect the MBT sector’s contribution to the public transport market.

Yet we know today, as is clear in the both the 2003 and 2013 National Household Travel Surveys that minibus taxi commuters account for 69 percent of public transport users for work, school and other purposes.

The discrepancy of the public transport subsidy scheme is again also acknowledged by the 1996 White Paper on National Transport Policy,

which in response to this challenge proposed a need for industry development support.

The 1996 White Paper as with studies preceding it, directed that

1. Minibus taxi operators be supported to form collectives in the form cooperatives, associations or companies;
2. Provinces introduce MBT route or network operating permissions; and
3. Minibus taxi operators could on their own or in partnership with bus companies compete for contracts issued by transport authorities.

To this extent a need arose for the recapitalisation and formalisation of the industry while also understanding the greater possibilities for advancement of the sector as an important economic actor.

The intentions of the NTTT and proposals of the White Paper on National Transport Policy were followed by the DoT's Moving South Africa: the action agenda: a 20-year strategic framework for transport in South Africa of 1999, the MSA in short.

This "MSA Agenda" identified prioritised customer groupings, namely, the poor rural and urban stranded and survival categories, selected tourist passengers etc.

The MSAA agenda also suggested improvements of minibus taxi operations, formalisation and the ability for minibus taxi operators to enter into contracts with government in the provision passenger transport services.

Formalisation presents several benefits to the industry and government not to mention the commuter and these include:

- Ability to introduce cashless fare collection

- Ability to contract with government
- Ability to form a limited number of contracts instead of multiple contracts with each individual
- Reduced burden of regulatory control – several hundred (or fewer) companies instead of tens of thousands of individuals.
- Ability to award rights to a NETWORK of routes instead of individual routes, and ability to impose requirements to operate a certain level of service

Taxi Recapitalisation

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP) was approved for implementation by Cabinet in 2004, for a period of seven (7) years, at a total cost of R7.7 billion and was finally launched in 2006 with the following aims:

Replacing old unsafe taxi vehicles with safe compliant vehicles, through compensation of operators with a scrapping allowance for each vehicle scrapped;

Promoting modal integration through addressing the fragmentation and de-regulation of the MBI through, inter alia the:

- Promotion of formalisation of the Taxi Industry and its operations into business units thereby facilitating modal integration and effective structuring and institutionalisation of the Taxi Industry;
- Ensuring effective regulation of the Taxi Industry through inter alia, conversion of route based permits to OLs and compliance of OLs to developed Integrated Public Transport Plans;
- Promotion of the economic empowerment of the Taxi Industry by means of a once-off scrapping incentive;

- Proposed restructuring of Government support to the Taxi Industry, involving strategic business partnerships between the Taxi Industry and business sector.

This aims to ensure the diversification of the Taxi Industry's economic base through its participation in other public transport modes as well as valuation of its OLs.

Challenges

The challenges affecting the aforesaid processes meant to improve working of the industry can be understood from various perspectives as mentioned earlier amongst which are legislative, institutional, regulatory, and financial challenges.

As mentioned earlier, I will only pick on some of the challenges, especially legislative and institutional that have contributed to inertia and lack formalisations of the industry.

Legislation

In a large measure the National Land Transport Act (2009) following the repeal of the Transition Act had serious impact on institutional arrangements that governed the industry.

Whereas the National Land Transport Transition Act (NLTTA) had recognised taxi associations.

This recognition formed the basis on which operating licenses and governmental assistance could be applied for by operators, the National Land Transport Act of 2009 ignores this recognition completely.

This omission on the part of legislation has not only diminished the benefits of registration through associations, but has inadvertently allowed for the negative mushrooming of splinter associations in certain provinces.

This has led to major divisions in the industry, a recipe for conflict and violence.

Other resultant challenges are defined by an increase in the number of illegally registered vehicles, some of which are not fit for safe passenger carriage and thus a cause for road safety concerns.

Above all else is the responsiveness to the need for safety of the public that uses the public transport system.

Road Safety Campaign

Fellow South Africans,

As a Department we remain partners to the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety in which the world must reduce road fatalities by 50%.

For many years we have together with the taxi industry collaborated to stem to stem the scourge that has seen and continues to see around 14000 South Africans dying on our roads annually.

We must however hasten to mention that the industry has been an extremely progressive partner regarding the reduction of road crash fatalities.

We have noticed over the years a persistent effort on the part of the industry to reduce road crash fatalities.

Most importantly, we continue to find common ground among ourselves around matters of road safety and we must agree that the industry is remains a critically important partner in this effort.

In fact we must hasten to mention that the very Operation Hlokomela must be put down in history as a road safety initiative produced by the taxi industry.

However, much, much more can still be realised by all of us collectively as we put together our heads to improve our stride towards halving fatalities on a road network.

We continue to search for more road safety ambassadors among all in the transport sector as a whole and today we again appeal specifically to the taxi industry for us to grow the community of road safety ambassadors.

Sexual Harassment, Gender-based Violence and Femicide

Captains of the Industry, ladies and gentlemen,

Before I conclude I must raise a pressing issue, the neglect of which will leave this Lekgotla with a task incomplete.

Gender-based violence.

South Africa finds itself deeply affected by the scourge of gender-based violence, be this in our communities, our homes, at work, in schools, institutions of higher institutions of learning and other spheres of society.

It is a scourge that has gotten to the levels of a pandemic and which shall need the very cooperation and unity we are here gathered to build.

Women of South Africa send us across the nation, across all spheres of social interaction to spread a word against the violence against women and girls.

It is our plea to all gathered here today to join the growing partnerships with government and communities as we collectively join hands to fight the pandemic of violence against women and girls.

Today women have come out sharply to fight against the violence they have had to endure in the hands of men that continue to date continue brutalise them.

Women Empowerment

It is the view of women, government and large parts of society that gender based violence arises not only out of historical and cultural factors, but is also a result of the economic exclusion of women.

It is our view that the economic exclusion of women has in many ways led to dependence of women on men and inversely with men believing they own women and can treat them with as much disrespect and violence.

We are however building a new society, a society free of sexism and violence against women and wish that the industry can join actions against GBV and femicide.

Equally so, the Department has also realised that the transport sector remains an important vehicle for the empowerment of women as much as an important conduit for the overall advancement of black people.

To that extent, we have prioritised to ensure that women find opportunity to empower themselves in the industry.

It is however only with the full support of the industry and the commitment and will of its captains that we shall succeed in our fight against this pandemic.

Conclusion

I must, in conclusion, make some appeal to the Captains of Industry and all gathered here today, that these are times certainly for us to unify in this broadly progressive purpose.

It should be the wish and commitment of all to bury that which has kept us apart and that today we plot a new and enduring path through which we must reach the competitiveness so deeply needed by the industry.

We must through this process emerge with guidelines that will feed into the strategies of those meant to provide a fair and effectively regulated environment for the industry.

I thus wish this Lekgotla the greatest of success.

And I thank you all for the opportunity to stand before you.

God Bless