



**Keynote Address by Deputy Minister of Transport, Ms Dikeledi Magadzi
(MP) on occasion of the Mpumalanga Provincial Taxi Lekgotla on 13 October 2020 at
the Bombela Stadium, Mbombela, Mpumalanga Province**

“Taxi Industry: Shaping the Future, Growing Together”

Programme Director: Mr D Nkambule

MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport: Mr GP Mashego

The Executive Mayor of Mbombela

All Officials of the Transport Family

Captains of the Taxi Industry

Commuter-based Organizations Present

Members of the Media

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

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

I must thank the organisers of this Provincial Lekgotla, for good work well done as the organisation of this Lekgotla has, like all Makgotla not been an easy task to accomplish, especially given the vagaries of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has certainly been a very difficult time for all of us and the true consequences of the pandemic are yet to be fully calculated and understood.

Yet even through this difficult time, we have relied on our collective strength as the transport fraternity and as South Africans to find ways of keeping our economy alive and keeping the hopes of our people alive.

The taxi industry rose to this intense challenge we have all been facing in the last six months or so and provided South Africa with the wheels needed to ferry essential workers meant to sustain South Africa beyond the pandemic.

During our very harsh lockdown a taxi passing by always represented, to many of us, a continuity and resilience of life even in the face of a raging pandemic.

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

We know 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 must be reminded that the effects of the pandemic have equally affected other industries formal or not that support the taxi industries 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 under the lockdown and lack of commuter volumes.

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 collaboration we have deepened over this period has ensured we held together the stiches of our already ailing economy that remains affected by factors beyond the pandemic.

The outbreak of the pandemic caught us in the middle of a very slow global economic recovery including the historic and structural weaknesses of our own economy.

In different ways we have all sought to navigate the economic turmoil produced by the lockdowns associated with our means towards containing this pandemic.

The Taxi Lekgotla

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.

While interventions in the rail industry have seen the fast-tracking of the rail modernisation programme, the bus system including the rapid bus transport system has seen added focus through the replication of the system through remaining cities.

We are however also 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.

Furthermore, the industry still operates on the fringes of the formal economy and therefore not complying with the country's tax and labour laws.

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.

Furthermore, the industry still operates on the fringes of the formal economy and therefore not complying with the country's tax and labour laws.

To the ends that this must change, the Minister is convening a National Taxi Lekgotla to address challenges facing the industry.

The aim of the Taxi Lekgotla including the build-up Provincial Makgotla, is to achieve consensus on the blueprint of the future taxi industry.

The Role of Government

While it is clear that the taxi industry faces serious structural if historic weaknesses, it is equally incumbent on government to contribute further in our collective bid to transform the industry.

Government must improve its policy and regulatory environment as part of its contribution to easing the environment for development and growth of the industry.

This will include taking steps to effectively support and empower the industry and doing so fairly and equitably across provinces and across the modes of public transport.

It also means improving on its administrative systems in order to reduce the immense backlog that defines permit applications, a situation worsened by the pandemic and its associated lockdowns.

It is clear that the fragmented approach to regulation has led to weak and ineffective law enforcement.

Our effort towards improvements in the industry must without doubt include a reconsideration of the nature and size of support we afford the industry.

The Minister has made reference to the issue of a subsidy for the industry and we hope this will go a long way towards empowering the sector.

Transformation of the Industry

A large part of the required transformation relates to the empowerment of the industry towards self-sufficiency, and greater competitiveness of the industry.

Yet such competitiveness depends on a number of factors amongst which are the following:

Unity of the industry:

Unity remains a challenge as violence and conflict driven by turf wars and leadership contestations continues unabated.

Associations remain unregulated and operators are not held accountable for their conduct through an enforceable Code of Conduct.

Leadership:

The leadership of the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) as a recognised industry representative body is contested.

Lack formalisation:

The industry is not structured along legally recognised business units, does not contribute to the tax base in the form of corporate tax, flouts labour laws to the detriment of workers

What is to be done?

A large part of the change that must happen within the industry must also include:

- The professionalisation of the industry,
- Improvements of customer care
- The eradication of factional violence, and
- An end to sexual harassment and gender based violence against women and girls
- Increased commitment to safer road use

Because lack of professionalism has a great impact on customer perceptions, it remains critically important that customer care is improved especially by way of professionalisation of the industry.

The mandate to improve the public transport system is truly a mandate towards the betterment of the lives of our people, the betterment of which relies

crucially on a satisfactory, economically and socially responsive public transport system.

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% as we all apply effort 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 when it comes to 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.

We continue to find common ground among ourselves around matters of road safety and we must agree that the industry has been very cooperative.

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 that serves the very important social and economic needs of all South Africans.

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.

That remains in large part a plea to your patriotism in this regard as we put our hands to the wheel of road safety.

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.

Sexual Harassment, Gender-based Violence and Femicide

Captains of the Industry,

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

This has included the taxi industry.

We all know of the many grievances lodged by women due to the harassment and violence that they have experienced in many of our public transport hubs and this includes taxi ranks.

Today women have come out sharply to fight against the violence they have had to endure.

It is again 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.

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 not only the transformation of the industry in relation to competitiveness and professionalisation, but equally to ensure that women find opportunity to empower themselves in the industry.

Conclusion

It is our belief that the discussions here today will help us figure a clear strategy we could develop for the industry as regards the challenges I have mentioned including that of gender based violence.

Let the outcomes of this Lekgotla shine a light on the future of this industry and may all find wisdom and strength that shall help us navigate our way out of the challenges we are currently facing within the industry.

Thank you.

I wish you a constructive and insightful Lekgotla thank you.

May God bless you all.