



TRANSPORT MINISTRY

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MR MKHULEKO HLENGWA (MP) AT THE C-BRTA MSME CONFERENCE, UMHLANGA, ETHEKWINI, KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE, 15-16 SEPTEMBER 2026

Programme Director;

The Chairperson of the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency Board;

Board Members of the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency;

The CEO of the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency;

The Executive Team and Management of the C-BRTA;

Stakeholders in the cross-border road transport industry;

C-BRTA staff;

Members of the media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning.

I am pleased to be here today for this second instalment of the C-BRTA MSME Conference, following the inaugural conference held in Gqeberha last year.

That conference placed a spotlight on the challenges confronting small businesses and the barriers that prevent them from fully participating in the transport economy. More importantly, it challenged us to move beyond dialogue and towards practical interventions that create opportunities for businesses to grow and participate meaningfully in the sector.

This conference therefore comes at an important time for the Department of Transport and for the transport industry as a whole.

Transport is not simply about moving people and goods from one place to another. It is an economic enabler. When our ports work efficiently, when freight moves reliably by rail and road, when public transport is safe and dependable, when aviation expands, and when our roads are safe, businesses become more competitive, markets expand and new economic opportunities are created.

This is the context in which we must understand the Department of Transport's priorities for the next four years.

The Department has identified six key targets that will guide our efforts to improve passenger, freight and logistics systems.

The first is to ensure that **250 million tons of freight are carried on the Transnet network by 2029.**

The second is to improve the speed of loading and unloading ships to the international benchmark of **30 gross crane moves per hour.**

The third is to ensure that our **rail system provides safe, reliable and affordable transport to workers and families.**

The fourth is to achieve **600 million passenger journeys by 2030.**

The fifth is to increase the contribution of aviation to tourism, economic development and job creation, with an expectation that **42 million passengers and 1.2 million**

tons of air freight will move through the Airports Company South Africa network by the end of this policy term.

The sixth is to **reduce road fatalities by 40% by 2029**, placing South Africa on a stronger path towards achieving the United Nations target of halving road fatalities by 2030.

These targets are not simply numbers on a government performance plan.

They represent economic activity.

They represent markets.

They represent opportunities for businesses.

They represent opportunities for MSMEs to enter, grow and compete within the transport value chain.

For example, achieving the target of moving 250 million tons of freight on rail will require a broader and more efficient logistics ecosystem. It creates opportunities not only for large logistics companies, but also for smaller operators providing services such as freight handling, warehousing, distribution, maintenance, fleet services, technology, security, cleaning, catering and other support services.

Similarly, improving port efficiency to achieve 30 gross crane moves per hour is fundamentally about improving the competitiveness of our economy. Faster and more predictable movement of cargo reduces delays and costs throughout the supply chain. For MSMEs, this can mean faster turnaround times, more reliable contracts and greater opportunities to participate in import and export supply chains.

Our objective of restoring safe, reliable and affordable rail transport also has a direct impact on business.

When workers can travel reliably to places of employment, businesses benefit from a more dependable workforce. When people can access economic opportunities at an affordable cost, household incomes and economic participation improve.

The target of 600 million passenger journeys similarly creates opportunities across the passenger transport value chain. There is space for businesses in operations, maintenance, technology, ticketing, vehicle services, infrastructure support and other areas that contribute to a functioning public transport system.

Aviation presents another major area of opportunity.

Our target of 42 million passengers and 1.2 million tons of air freight is not merely about increasing passenger numbers. It is about strengthening tourism, trade and investment and creating new opportunities for businesses.

MSMEs can participate in airport-related services, tourism transport, logistics, cargo handling, hospitality, catering, technology and a range of other activities connected to the aviation ecosystem.

The road safety target is equally important.

Reducing fatalities by 40% by 2029 is first and foremost about saving lives and protecting livelihoods. But road safety also has an economic dimension. There are opportunities for businesses to contribute through technology, vehicle maintenance, driver training, road safety education, data systems, fleet management and innovations that make our roads safer.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is why MSME development must be viewed as an integral part of transport transformation.

Government cannot achieve these targets alone.

The private sector, financial institutions, development finance institutions, established companies, original equipment manufacturers, industry associations and MSMEs themselves all have a role to play.

The C-BRTA has already taken important steps in this direction.

Following the resolutions of last year's conference, 36 MSMEs were enrolled into the C-BRTA Incubation Programme. The programme brings together industry stakeholders to provide a coordinated approach to supporting MSMEs, with particular attention to black-owned businesses and companies owned by women, youth and people with disabilities.

The programme targets existing cross-border freight operators, domestic freight operators seeking to expand into cross-border operations, and start-ups in the transport industry.

This is precisely the kind of intervention that can help businesses position themselves for the opportunities emerging from the transformation of our transport and logistics system.

We have also seen strengthened relationships with financial institutions and the National Empowerment Fund, increased participation in industry and trade platforms, and the mainstreaming of MSME development within sector forums.

These initiatives are important because access to opportunity must be matched by access to finance, markets, skills, information and networks.

However, we must be clear: the existence of programmes does not automatically guarantee business success.

Government must continue improving the regulatory environment, providing oversight and addressing structural barriers.

Financial institutions must develop funding products that respond to the realities of MSMEs.

Established companies must create meaningful opportunities for smaller businesses to enter their supply chains.

And MSMEs themselves must be prepared to meet the standards required to compete.

This requires professionalism, compliance, innovation, sound financial management and a willingness to build sustainable businesses.

The opportunity before us is significant.

As government works to move more freight by rail, improve port efficiency, strengthen public transport, expand aviation and improve road safety, we must deliberately ask a fundamental question:

Where are our small businesses in this value chain?

We must ensure that the answer is not that they are spectators.

They must be participants.

They must be suppliers.

They must be service providers.

They must be owners of transport businesses.

They must be innovators.

And, ultimately, they must be employers.

This is the essence of inclusive economic transformation.

The Department's targets therefore provide more than performance indicators for government. They provide a framework around which the private sector can identify new markets and investment opportunities.

I therefore encourage every MSME represented here today to look beyond the immediate challenges facing your business and ask where your company can position itself within the future transport economy.

What service can you provide?

What market can you enter?

What partnership can you establish?

What skills do you need?

What funding do you require?

And what must you do differently to become competitive?

Government will continue creating the conditions for businesses to participate, but businesses must seize those opportunities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of this conference, **“From Dialogue to Action: Strengthening MSME Participation in Cross-Border Road Transport,”** captures exactly what is required from all of us.

We cannot continue having conferences where we identify the same challenges year after year without measurable progress.

Dialogue must lead to action.

Action must lead to opportunities.

Opportunities must lead to sustainable businesses.

And sustainable businesses must lead to jobs, economic growth and improved livelihoods.

The transport sector has a critical role to play in building a more competitive, inclusive and growing economy.

Our six targets give us a clear direction. Our responsibility now is to ensure that the transformation of the transport system translates into meaningful participation by South African businesses, particularly MSMEs.

Let us therefore use this conference to identify practical interventions, build partnerships and remove barriers.

At the end of this programme, I expect the resolutions to provide a clear roadmap for action, with responsibilities, timelines and measurable outcomes.

The success of this conference should ultimately not be measured by the quality of our discussions, but by the businesses that grow, the opportunities that are created, the jobs that are sustained and the number of MSMEs that become meaningful participants in South Africa's transport and logistics economy.

I wish you productive and frank discussions.

Let us move from dialogue to action.

I thank you.