



TRANSPORT MINISTRY

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MR MKHULEKO HLENGWA, MP. KEYNOTE
ADDRESS TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN BUS OPERATORS ASSOCIATION (SABOA)
CONFERENCE ON 06 AUGUST 2026**

Programme Director

The Acting Director-General of the Department of Transport – Mr Mathabatha Mokonyama

The Southern African Bus Association – SABOA

President – Ms Imogene Mncwango

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The Conference coordinator – Ms Nelisiwe Mkhabela – SABOA Manager

Members of SABOA National and Executive Council

The Principal Members and Associate Members of SABOA

Allied Industry stakeholders

Representatives of National Department of Transport and Provincial Governments and Municipalities

Academia

The Bus and Coach Industry of South Africa

Distinguished guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to deliver a keynote address at this Annual SABOA Conference 2026 under the theme: Driving the future of public transport through innovation, partnerships and sustainability.

I understand the conference theme to imply or indeed entail a call to action to all of us with a focus on three main pillars that include adopting new technology, developing enduring partnerships with not only government, but with the taxi industry too, while working towards a broader adoption of cleaner operations and infrastructure.

Public transport industries move South Africa's workforce through a relentless 20-hour daily operational cycle, yet our collective narrative remains defined by infrastructure bottlenecks, severe traffic congestion, extended passenger commute times, and unsustainable carbon emissions. These challenges affect all of us whether in a bus, taxi, truck or private passenger vehicle.

These challenges do not only cause road safety risks, raise costs of travel or costs of doing business, but have significant negative impacts on the environment from which we breathe, drink and eat.

Transport causes a quarter of global emissions, and here at home, it accounts for 12% of our national greenhouse gas emissions and is our second-biggest contributor to greenhouse gasses after energy, with road transport driving 97% of that total based on the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

I must however reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a modernised, sustainable, and zero-emissions transport sector, anchored by the foundational 1996 White Paper on National Transport Policy, followed by several key transport strategies including the National Public Transport Strategy in 2007 and our flagship 2018 Green Transport Strategy including the 2021 visionary revision of the White Paper on National Transport Policy. These set out the Department of Transport's vision towards access to public transport that is clean and without harmful vehicle emissions and pollutants.

The United Nations has committed the period 2026 - 2035 as a Decade of Sustainable Transport, which places public transport at the centre of global efforts to improve mobility. Key initiatives for the decade include shifting away from private car

dependency and cutting emissions of greenhouse gas by using public transport and through people centred mobility networks.

In his remarks at the launch of the event in December 2025, UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary Dmitry Mariyasin reminded delegates that transport is not an abstract sector. He said: “It shapes the rhythm of daily life—how a parent reaches a clinic, how a farmer brings food to market, how a student gets to school, and these stories remind us that transport is about people first — and when we improve transport systems, we improve lives at scale.” – (*United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*)

He stressed that accessibility, safety, efficiency and user-friendliness are not abstract aspirations. They are daily necessities in all regions, where countries face wide disparities in development levels, and different connectivity challenges across diverse geographies.

The Decade of Sustainable Transport is structured around achieving several strategic milestones for public transport, amongst which are:

Decarbonization and Access: Transitioning bus and rail fleets to zero-emission technologies while expanding affordable access to marginalized and rural communities.

Smart Investment: Redirecting public funding and leveraging green bonds to finance network expansions, signalling upgrades, and zero-emission rolling stock.

Aligned to the commitments to accelerate the improvement of public transport and deliver quality and effective services, the Department has initiated a process of public transport reforms that prioritise operations over just capital investment to deliver reliable user-centred mobility.

In this regard a new funding model is being developed consolidating the current road based public transport grants i.e. Public Transport Network Grant, Public Transport Operations Grant and the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme. The consolidation will streamline fragmented funding streams, improve spending efficiency and address underperforming systems. The objective is also to align transport modes (buses and

minibuses) to deliver seamless, user focused mobility rather than mode-exclusive operations.

Transitioning and winding down these programmes to the new public transport fund is not a short-term adjustment but a permanent and necessary step towards a new, more coherent, operations-focused funding model, which will prioritise service delivery, ridership and financial sustainability over capital inputs. The restructuring of the current funding model will therefore follow a well-managed wind-down of existing programmes.

Programme Director and honoured delegates,

It is my firm belief and informed by the positive deliberations at our National Transport Conference earlier this that we are moving past endless talk, and we are finally taking bold action as government and as a nation towards the desired changes in transport.

For too long, we have held countless conferences, imbizos, and forums repeating the need for change without stepping boldly into transformation, thus acting only as champions of great policies yet plagued by indecision and non-implementation.

Towards the changes we must all see and enjoy should be the building of an efficient, predominantly rail-based freight transport network.

We also need the urgent development and continuous improvement of our envisioned seamless, integrated public transport systems that must serve our people daily.

These actions are the true foundation of the change we crave for our transport sector.

It also remains critically urgent that we find effective ways of adapting to global realities.

Firstly, we must swiftly adapt to modern global technology to reach current global levels of tech development.

Secondly and towards achieving environmental sustainability, we must respect our planet by building green, sustainable transport networks.

Third and finally, we must be flexible in our implementation as global trends also demand that we remain flexible, adaptive, and dedicated in all our transformative efforts.

Our nation must fully decarbonize public fleets, link transit hubs to renewable grids, and integrate all transport modes digitally. Through such actions we move beyond trials to enforce absolute sustainability, public health, and economic growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, replacing dirty diesel vehicles with green technologies—specifically battery-electric systems, hydrogen fuel cells, and clean alternative fuels—eliminates harmful tailpipe emissions instantly when powered by renewable energy.

True sustainability requires us to link our transport infrastructure directly to green energy grids. Across the globe, we are noticing the design of modern transit hubs as eco-assets featuring rainwater harvesting, solar-panel roofing, and energy-efficient architecture.

As Deputy Minister of Transport, I must state that the department of transport is committed to a vision and an ambition to see South Africa's public transport system transform, ensuring that all future public transport hubs are green community anchors, driven by a strict zero-emission transition to meet our Paris Agreement net-zero goals by mid-century.

This decarbonization is an economic and health necessity, while digital innovation seamlessly unifies buses, trains, and taxis to beat private car convenience.

We must therefore shift rapidly to electric buses and trains to meet global climate targets. This is in addition to our commitment to continue to encourage green transit as a core economic and health driver and not a side project.

Equally so we will remain committed to the development of transit stops.

We continue to encourage a transition towards the digitalisation phenomenon through the adoption of digital apps to link trains, buses, taxis and e-hailing into a single easy trip.

Innovation is the digital engine that makes sustainable public transport an attractive choice for the commuter. The technology is available to disrupt private vehicle use preferences by integrating trains, buses, minibus-taxis, e-hailing etc. into a single, seamless digital ecosystem.

President, we should all join hands for the sustainable transformation of our public transport into a living, intelligent network through three major pillars: an all-in-one citizen travel app, smart AI-driven fleet management, and real-time operational control.

Given the commitment of SABOA to the development and growth of the industry especially to the benefit of your vast membership, including your commitment towards compatibility with global trends, we remain confident that the industry will continue to embrace innovation.

We genuinely trust that SABOA has already considered these ideas I have expressed and that your members are already exploring effective ways of adapting to the trends we are now so aware of.

These trends have to do with improving commuter experiences through seamless ticketing platforms and seamless travel and the trends also have to do with ease of operations through AI driven route optimisation through which we can dynamically adjust paths using real-time traffic data to keep transit moving.

This also ties in effectively with energy efficiency considerations by your members., especially in these times when energy costs are becoming major obstacles to growth. Such considerations of cost must necessarily be directed at shifts from rigid schedules into more flexible schedules guided by demand.

In addition, SABOA members may already be tinkering with predictive maintenance solutions through which mechanical failures can be detected earlier to reduce vehicle breakdowns a responsive network tailored to our needs.

Moreover, Programme Director, early detection of mechanical weaknesses can save lives and with your permission this calls for an important deviation if only briefly from the current subjects as it touches the important nerve of road safety.

Nelly Mkhabela, writes in the publication “Focus and Transport” in February this year that; and I quote:

Bus operators carry the trust of millions of passengers each day. At the heart of this responsibility lies an equally important priority: road safety. The industry therefore plays a central role in promoting professional driver training, disciplined operations, fleet maintenance and compliance standards that contribute directly to safer roads and reduced accident risk across the transport system, unquote.

Elsewhere the writer however cautions against the dangers of complacency. She says, quote:

Nevertheless, the sector has experienced serious operational and safety challenges in recent periods. It is therefore imperative that operators and drivers uphold the highest standards of professionalism and responsibility – maintaining roadworthy fleets, adhering strictly to passenger capacity limits and placing safety above all commercial pressures. Protecting lives, preserving public confidence and safeguarding the reputation of the industry must remain non-negotiable priorities, unquote.

It is thus clear that the digital technologies we are exploring for broader adoption today will help to arm operators and ensure safer travel, environmentally healthy operations and reduce costs.

The link between sound policies and effective implementation remains the stuff of strong partnerships between government and the private sector and this can be clearly evidenced in our current roadmap towards freight logistics efficiencies where these partnerships have begun to truly move the needle towards the desired efficiencies.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in South Africa's freight logistics roadmap drive critical benefits by injecting private capital, introducing operational expertise, and modernizing decaying infrastructure. These collaborations alleviate state resource constraints to optimize rail and port performance.

We have committed to break down inter-governmental silos to ensure effective coordination of projects and services across the three spheres of government. We

remain conscious of the extent to which the prevailing situation in the public transport space continues to paralyse large sections of our communities and that solutions must be found in effective intergovernmental relations and strong PPPs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can therefore conclude that the transition towards cleaner public transport depends on joint efforts amongst ourselves as government and private business. In our deliberations today and in the near future, we must consider the importance of innovation, cross-sector partnerships, and environmental sustainability to modernise the national bus and public transit network.

We must foster robust public-private frameworks between municipal authorities and private bus operators, engage local manufacturers to build sustainable and accessible transit vehicles and throughout these efforts let us protect worker livelihoods while expanding efficient journeys countrywide.

I wish to thank you all for your attention and thank you for your invitation to participate at this conference. I wish you have a constructive and fruitful conference

Thank you.