



TRANSPORT MINISTRY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Programme Director,
Executive Mayor of the Mkhanyakude District Municipality,
Executive Mayor of the Local Municipality,
All Councillors Present,
The Various Houses of Traditional Leadership as represented this Morning,
Chairperson of the Road Accident Fund (RAF),
Chairperson of the South African National Roads Agency Soc Limited (SANRAL),
Acting CEO of the Road Accident Fund,
CEO of SANRAL,
Leadership of other DoT Agencies Present,
All Senior and Support Officials of Government with Us Today,
Members of the Surrounding Communities,
Members of the Media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking my colleagues who have allowed us the opportunity to officially visit this district and present to the people of this district what we are doing to improve transport services and infrastructure towards the development of the people and their economy in this region of our country.

This is especially important in these times when economic recovery, addressing poverty and creating jobs in an inclusive economy can only be viewed as a cross-cutting mandate across all spheres of government.

I must also thank the leadership of our two companies, the RAF and SANRAL whose programmes we will champion in this district today, one part focusing on post-crash

assistance provided by the RAF and the other part with emphasis on road repair and maintenance.

We must also acknowledge the presence of officials from other road agencies that are supporting this event.

This engagement is a representation, indeed an expression of our connectedness across the three spheres of government and thus a humble attempt at delivering the building blocks needed from all of us for the development of very genuine and effective intergovernmental relations across these spheres.

These relations that we strengthen today, must be foundational to the stability required across our institutions and reducing fragmentation of planning and budgeting to ensure effective responsiveness to community needs amongst which are needs for safer, efficient and sustainable road networks that enable not only mobility of persons to meet daily needs, but also enable economic growth.

Over the last few months, as a department together with our entities we have been visiting provinces speaking to the leadership variously about improving the overall condition of our road network across provinces and municipalities to serve people's needs, create jobs and sustain provincial economies.

Central to the discussions we have had so far among these provinces, have been issues regarding aging, unmaintained and at times totally unusable road infrastructure.

The challenges have ranged from funding constraints, lack of investments into road infrastructure, lack of capacity and at times just poor management of resources to build and maintain road infrastructure.

These discussions have also looked at the extent to which we coordinate our planning and budgeting across spheres of government for more sustainable road development outcomes and impact.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What are the consequences of these weaknesses?

Firstly, the lack of investment into road infrastructure and lack of a rigorous regime for maintenance across road authorities means that our roads get to crumble, exposing potholes that now litter a large part of our provincial and local road networks.

Secondly, bad roads lead to slower movement of vehicles and thus increasing congestion that leads to bearing carbon emissions and pollution especially from heavy vehicles.

Thirdly, poor road conditions are a recipe for risks to road user safety, especially as this results in illegal road uses.

Fourthly, bad roads affect the mobility of persons and may affect the realisation of personal needs, disconnecting communities from others and from services, with impacts on provincial and local socio-economic development.

Weaknesses in the development of road infrastructure can also be seen as opposing our efforts of realising government's priority of eradicating poverty while growing a social wage that is fed by among others, the provision of safe and efficient road infrastructure and the provision of responsive road transport based services, including adequate post-crash services.

The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) gives a very concise explanation of the role of roads in the development of people and the economy.

According to the DBSA, quote:

"Road quality plays a vital role in the community. It helps keep people connected to metropolitans, making it easier for people to commute to different areas. Road infrastructure is an effective way to improve road safety. It helps people by increasing access to jobs, schools, stores, and other recreational activities that improve quality of life. Lack of high-quality and safe roads impacts how people live their daily lives", unquote.

The DBSA concludes that "by ensuring road infrastructure investment in South Africa, we're one step closer to addressing the accidents on our roads".

As political officials, what we share in this room is therefore a mandate to improve the social wage by improving services that are critical to the optimum development of South Africans across rural and urban spaces and this is one of government's central priorities for the seventh administration.

This priority is tied to the priority of building an inclusive economy and creating jobs as well tied to the priority of building capabilities of an ethics-driven state.

Today, I am accompanied by two teams including both the road infrastructure development sector represented by SANRAL and the road safety and post-crash services as represented by the RAF.

It is here important to note that this very event also represents two important pillars of road safety accordance with the United Nations Decade of Action with its emphasis on both safer road environments and effective post-crash services.

Together with global partners for road safety, the World Health Organization, and the UN regional commissions, developed a Global Plan for the second Decade of Action, 2021-2030, which was released in October 2021.

The target of the plan is to reduce global road deaths by 50% by 2030.

As a department we aim to reduce road fatalities by 45% by 2029 so we can reach the UN target of halving road fatalities by 2030 and reduce the devastating toll that road accidents have on lives and livelihoods.

This also has implications for our approach to the festive season ahead of us, because again we must join hands to fight the scourge of fatalities on our roads, of course notwithstanding the commitment to a 365-day road safety programme.

The UN Global Plan continues to emphasise a holistic approach to road safety, encouraging "improvements in the design of roads and vehicles; enhancement of laws and law enforcement; and provision of timely, life-saving emergency care for the injured".

This approach by the UN and WHO surely finds full expression in our purposes this morning, as we are asked to make this important connection between improving the road environment and saving lives.

We have been hard at work intensifying interventions aimed at addressing challenges relating to road infrastructure and we remain committed to address the sources of risk including the challenge of potholes on South Africa's road network.

Through the media, many would have noticed the unveiling of new roads and the beginnings of others as we grow our portfolio of efficient and safer roads meant to complement our overriding efforts towards economic recovery and developing society.

Accordingly, over the past year national government, through the agency of SANRAL has at the request of our Provincial Premiers taken over 3 099 kilometers of provincial roads.

SANRAL has reprioritised within the existing maintenance and capital allocated funding to service affected roads through the Route Road Maintenance Programme, but with limited resources, it cannot take more of these roads.

The department together with provincial departments will however embark on a review of road maintenance financing across all spheres of government and in the process of the review, ensure existing budgets given to provincial and municipal governments are effectively spent and not returned to National Treasury.

We must improve our ways so that our provincial and municipal roads are as equally safe and as equally efficient.

When our ambitions are to continue to build the tourism sector in this district, that cannot be optimally achievable when some parts of our roads remain poor, littered with potholes and dangerous to navigate.

We can however not despair but rather trust in the potential of our programmes.

To find solutions to our pothole challenges, Operation Vala Zonke was launched on 8 August 2022, with a call for a joint effort by the nine provinces and all 278 municipalities.

As our approach is to be more hands-on in the management of road development, we are deploying SANRAL as our coordinating agency to step in with its rich basket of skills and expertise to help us address the challenges of fixing potholes and resurfacing of roads where necessary.

SANRAL was appointed as the coordinating agency to drive the campaign of fixing potholes, which included the harmonisation of all data and information on potholes and providing the technology and technical knowledge to ensure quality delivery on the campaign.

However, being a coordinating agency does not mean SANRAL is responsible for repairing all the potholes as we are all aware of and understand the legal mandates of the various spheres of government, understanding who is responsible for which roads.

South Africa's total road network is estimated at 750 000 kilometres, the longest of any African country and the 11th longest in the world. Responsibility for building and maintaining the network is therefore divided between SANRAL, provincial and local government authorities. SANRAL manages national roads and has a network of 23 512 kilometres of paved roads.

Provinces are responsible for just over 270 000 kilometres (46 500 km paved) while the municipal network is estimated at just over 320 000 kilometres (nearly 88 000km paved) of the proclaimed network.

The rest are gravel roads (mainly serving rural communities) that are not proclaimed and are therefore not owned or maintained by any road authority. This means that SANRAL is only responsible for fixing potholes on national roads, while the province and municipalities are responsible for fixing provincial and municipal roads.

The department established the Vala Zonke War Room as a key component among solutions to provide efficient and safer roads, encouraging a rigorous maintenance regime across road authorities.

The War Room at the SANRAL Central Operations Centre (COC), which already has the existing appropriate infrastructure, technology, and personnel, will effectively monitor and coordinate intervention programmes for road operations, maintenance and other road-related activities.

Overweight loaded vehicles play a significant role in damaging the road network. The freight industry has therefore a role to play in reducing damage to the road network by not only adhering to legal tonnage but also migrating rail friendly cargo towards rail, a sector that is also seeing a major revitalisation.

Given the magnitude of the pothole problem and collective range and depth of skills and expertise at SANRAL, it has become only logical, cost-effective and prudent that SANRAL becomes the custodian of the national road network and to work with provincial and local government to fashion sustainable ways of managing our road infrastructure.

Because there are over 250 road authorities in the country, there is a need to create a single portal for the public to report potholes and for this system to automatically redirect the complaint to the correct roads authority down to the correct maintenance depot level and to have a monitoring, tracking and feedback system in place.

Most of the South African road network has reached their 20 years design life with the maintenance backlog estimated to be R197 billion. It is also important to note that insufficient budget for roads at both provincial and municipal levels continue to hinder the sector hence most of these roads are riddled with potholes.

Today, the SANRAL team will brief us further on what Vala Zonke is and how the whole district can benefit from its implementation towards eradication of potholes.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The RAF remains inclusive in its approach and is thus a very appropriate candidate for the inclusivity we all seek from public services. Such inclusivity forms a central part of its mandate which is to provide appropriate cover to all road users within the borders of South Africa; rehabilitating and compensating persons injured because of motor crashes vehicles in a timely and caring manner; and actively promoting the safe use of all South African roads.

We are all aware that the RAF has had its fair share of challenges over the years, challenges which prevented it from fully performing its mandate and thus prevented it from being fully responsive to the needs crash victims.

We are however encouraged by the progress being achieved by the RAF, which in its turn-around plan has focused sharply on implementing new efficiencies and a new claims management system to settle claims faster.

The RAF has continued to improve its financial stability, reducing its deficit, reducing legal costs, which have been its Achilles Heel in the recent past, increasing pay-out of claims and continuing to speed up the reduction of the claims backlog among several other achievements.

It is also important to note that the RAF's commitment to road safety presents an opportunity to contribute actively in the reduction of road injuries and deaths and thus an opportunity to reduce burden of claims.

Today, we will hear first-hand how the organization has been improving systems to meet its mandate and through today's walk-about to learn more about the processes followed from beginning to end of a post-crash service.

I hope we all learn from the demonstrations after which we will have sight of the road repair processes including the methodologies, technologies and materials being developed for more sustainable road infrastructure.

Thank you for your attention.

God blesses us all and may we all have a safer festive period ahead.