



**TRANSPORT MINISTRY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT DURING AN
OVERSIGHT VISIT ASSESING PROGRESS ON THE UPGRADING OF THE R573
MOLOTO ROAD IN MPUMALANGA, Monday, 4 March 2024**

Salutations to

The Premier of Mpumalanga, Ms Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane, and Limpopo Premier, Mr Stanley Chupu Mathabatha

MECs for Mpumalanga Public Works and Roads and Transport, Mr Mandla Padney Ndlovu, and the Limpopo MEC for Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure, Ms Nkakareng Rakgaole

Mayors and councillors from surrounding municipalities

Deputy Director General for Roads at the National Department of Transport, Mr Chris Hlabisa

The Chairperson of the SANRAL Board

The CEO of SANRAL and officials

Officials from the National Department of Transport

Business

Civil Society Representatives and Community Members

Members of the Media

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen

This month represents our Human Rights Month and commemorates not only the innocent lives lost to the brutality of apartheid in 1960, though we shall never forget, but more importantly it reminds us of what needs to be done to ensure that every South African citizen has their rights equally promoted and protected.

The right to learn formed an important component in our struggle for freedom and today in this thirtieth year of our freedom we will not forget that there is still so much more to be done to ensure universal enjoyment of the right to learn.

While we have abolished segregated schools and opened up education for all, got more children into early development programmes, installed free education, ensured every schooling child has a good meal on every schooling day, increased the overall number of learners across the country, there remains still more to be done.

As the Department of Transport, we have never forgotten the critical importance of skilled people in the transport sector and broadly within the economy.

We also know that education is an important means to fight poverty, unemployment and inequality, all of which stand as obstacles to full enjoyment of the human rights that have returned dignity to the majority of South Africans. We can only continue to do more, because we can never be allowed to forget.

The month of March also enjoins us to reflect on the extent to which we have developed a public transport system and supporting infrastructure that enables the realisation of social needs amongst which is the right to learn.

We have through various means of public transport ensured we brought centres of education closer to learners by ensuring the provision of learner transport and thus furthering the rights of every citizen to education.

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today as we also engage with learners in Mpumalanga on matters of transport careers and their needs among whom are those of walking long distances to school and back.

I must deeply thank the educators, especially the Department of Basic Education for allowing learners to be a part of this engagement and for their cooperation and advice on the selection of learners qualifying for our bicycle programme.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 Section 85(2) (b) mandates the Department of Transport to develop and implement transport policy. This mandate places a huge responsibility on the Department's role to ensure that transport policy development addresses the mobility needs of all citizens.

Furthermore, section 28 of the Constitution provides that everyone has a right to basic education which the learner transport programmes support.

The Department of Transport has developed the National Learner Transport Policy which was approved by Cabinet in 2015. This policy recognizes the deep challenges of learners who walk long distances to school and with adverse impact on their school attendance and performance.

The policy is aligned to the South African Schools Act of 1996 and the National Education which recognizes learner transport as another intervention to attain access to schools other than building of schools where learners live.

In order to deal these mobility challenges, Government has been implementing the National Learner Transport Policy to provide learners who live more than 5km with transport to schools.

The vision of the policy is "A safe, reliable and integrated transport service that caters for the needs of learners." The mission of the policy is "The mobility needs of learners shall be met through the provision of a safe, secure, reliable and affordable learner transport service to support social development and enhance future economic growth".

In line with the above-mentioned policies, all provinces are implementing the National Learner Transport Policy through the National Learner Transport Programme. The

programme has been developed with clear set of objectives and key performance indicators. These indicators include the numbers of learners in need and transported, number of schools benefiting from the programme and budget/expenditure on the programme.

There are 900 946 learners in 5635 schools that required learner transport to access their schools in 2023/2024 financial year. These learners have been identified by the Provincial Departments of Education who are responsible for the selection of learners to benefit from the subsidized learner transport service in line with the National Learner Transport Policy and provincial policies.

The learners invited today and to whom the bicycles displayed are being distributed today are part of the national Shova Kalula or Ride Easy Bicycle Programme of the National Department of Transport. The Shova Kalula bicycle programme was initiated by the Department of Transport as a pilot project in 2001 with the purpose of promoting and maximizing the use of bicycles as a low-cost mobility solution to poor communities, particularly in the rural areas.

The Shova Kalula Programme is part of the broader learner transport programme, focusing on learners who walk less than 5 km and walk more than 3 km to schools. Other learners on the learner transport programme are being ferried through buses and taxis through contracts that are managed by the provinces.

Today, we are handing over 455 bicycles, as part of our Shova Kalulu project, to deserving learners from Sindawonye and Kwakwari Primary as well as Mgudlwa, Mkhaphuli, Mbedlwana, Sozilani and Hlomanani Secondary Schools in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality. We hope that these means will help in them getting to and from school quicker and that it will inspire them to pursue their educational dreams.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am also checking up on the progress of Vala Zonke, our national campaign to fix potholes on all South African roads. Vala Zonke is an integrated, rigorous and comprehensive plan for provinces, municipalities, the private sector and the public to

come together to eradicate the challenge of potholes on all South African roads and SANRAL was appointed as the coordinating agency to drive the campaign.

I am being joined here today by the leadership of the province and the municipality, as well as several other key stakeholders and officials who are involved in the project to upgrade the Moloto Road. I hope they will be able to provide you with all the answers I might not be able to provide. I hope to have a good conversation about transport infrastructure and community development.

The visit today is one of many we are conducting throughout the country to ensure that critically important infrastructure projects such as the Moloto Road project is on track and will be completed on time.

Roads remain an important enabler of our economy by enabling the transportation of goods and services and any lapses in the provision of efficient roads impacts on both economic growth and the development of the people and thus have implications for the realisation of the very human rights we must promote.

It is therefore on this mandatory basis that we are conducting the project oversight visit today.

This visit also comes a few days ahead of the Presidential Imbizo which will take place in this province later this week. We will share with the President what we have learned today as he prepares for his visit.

Background

I believe that this road, the R573 Moloto Road, is one of the busiest routes in the country, carrying about 60,000 commuters daily using buses, taxis, private cars and trucks.

The R573 Moloto Road is one of the Strategic Infrastructure Projects (SIPs) undertaken by government to revive the South African economy. The upgrades link seamlessly with broader transport plans and the Moloto Development Corridor Initiative, attracting new investments and broadening the economic base of surrounding districts.

The Department remains therefore committed to fast-track the delivery of critical road infrastructure in the Republic, which is key to unlocking economic growth and the potential of the country. A stable and well-maintained road network provides local communities with improved access to economic activities and allows them to travel on a safe road system.

Work on the project is progressing steadily across all the three provinces of Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The SANRAL team is working tirelessly to make the road safer for road users. In Mpumalanga, Work Package 2 is currently ongoing, and it is 75% complete.

The anticipated completion date of construction for this phase is June 2024. In Limpopo, Work Package A2 is currently underway, and it is 95% complete. The anticipated completion date of construction is February 2024. In Gauteng, SANRAL is on the verge of appointing a contractor to start with works on this section of the project in 2024.

The South African Government's infrastructure development programme is focused on revitalising the country's economy and creating employment opportunities. Several projects introduced as part of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) have kicked off and are in the construction phase, providing much-needed jobs.

The Infrastructure Investment Plan is the cornerstone of the ERRP announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in October 2020. Infrastructure projects are vital to the country's economic recovery due to its multiplier effect on restoring economic growth, creating new jobs, and protecting livelihoods.

Working together with the different spheres of government and its socio-economic partners, National Government continues to build critical network infrastructure such as ports, roads, bridges and rail that are key to the competitiveness of the country's economy.

Moloto Road

Upgrading the R573 Moloto Road is a key project for SANRAL and the Department of Transport and which will contribute to broader efforts of reviving the country's economy.

The project which traverses three provinces, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo was officially handed over to the South African National Roads Agency SOC Ltd (SANRAL) for upgrading and maintenance.

The road was previously known as “The road of death” due to the high number of crashes. As a result, SANRAL prioritised safety in the design and construction of the project to ensure efficiency and improved quality of life for all. SANRAL has introduced four traffic circles/roundabouts, three in Mpumalanga and one in Limpopo, to serve as speed-clamping measures and to minimise fatalities.

SANRAL has invested R4.5bn in this project over five years. The Mpumalanga and Limpopo sections were incorporated into the SANRAL network in July 2015 and construction of the first phase on those sections is almost complete. The Gauteng section was incorporated into the SANRAL network in June 2020.

Benefits to the community

Ladies and gentlemen,

SANRAL has invested R3.7 billion for the first phase of the R573 Moloto Road in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo sections. Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) will benefit to the tune of 30% of the project value.

About 12,500 jobs are expected to be created throughout the project duration. In line with SANRAL’s Transformation Policy, the inclusion of youth- and women-owned businesses will be prioritised.

Furthermore, the roads agency has launched a programme to empower SMMEs headed by people with disabilities to form part of the construction of Moloto Road. Nearly R130 million has also been earmarked to train prospective contractors from designated groups, to get them to the point where they are able to submit compliant, competitive and profitable tenders for such projects.

Annually, SANRAL spends more than R3 billion on contracts with SMMEs, especially benefiting enterprises owned by black entrepreneurs, women, youth and people with disabilities.

The introduction of light masts will also ensure visibility for road users at night and the constructed cattle-creeps will ensure safe passage for livestock, removing them from the actual road.

This is an important road safety pillar that compels us to ensure that we address environmental problems along the road and reduce risk for animals and humans on the road.

SANRAL has introduced several additional safety interventions on the R573 to minimise crashes, paying particular attention to pedestrian safety.

So far, we have worked on the Moloto Road in Mpumalanga and Limpopo and we hope to begin work in Gauteng this year. The spend to date is **R559 million** on upgrading of national road R573, Section 2, Thembisile Hani Local Municipality, Mpumalanga; and **R362.8 million** on upgrading of national road R573, Section 3, from Slovo to Siyabuswa, Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality.

There are several other projects that will kick in around this road over the next few months.

We understand that there have been challenges with this project, but that has not halted progress. For instance, we understand that illegal occupation of land remains a major challenge on the project, with local traders often operating close to the road reserve.

Not only is this dangerous for community members, but it also imposes serious delays on the progress of the project. SANRAL has tried to mitigate the situation through constant engagement with stakeholders to educate them on the dangers and disadvantages of encroachment.

Land acquisition has also been a rather contentious issue on the R573 Moloto Road project, which in some cases was met with a lot of resistance by affected stakeholders, and we have continued to find amicable paths around our differences.

The challenge may be mainly due to the lack of knowledge around the project and SANRAL processes. One of the ways SANRAL uses to resolve these challenges is through continuous stakeholder engagement, which has always brought us together.

Roads and the economy

As mentioned earlier, roads are a crucial component of South Africa's economy and the delivery of road infrastructure has a direct bearing on the ease of movement of goods and people across South Africa, which impacts on overall economic growth. The impact of this improved road will have a significant impact on the economies of Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng.

Government has placed infrastructure development at the heart of its Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan to secure an economy where there is dignified work for all, inclusive growth and social protection for those in need.

Through the prioritisation of infrastructure development, the construction sector and its supporting industries are set to become one of the biggest employers in the country.

South Africa is on a path to unlock more than R1-trillion in infrastructure investment over the next few years. It is part of our massive infrastructure investment drive to revitalise the economy and create employment. SANRAL, as an organ of the state under the Department of Transport, is a major contributor to this drive.

Road and rail infrastructure are the lifeblood of our economy and as such, any disruption to its maintenance, as well as any disruption to our extensive programme of new infrastructure projects, is a threat to our country's economic growth.

The Department of Transport is committed to expanding the road network in the country so that local communities have far greater access to economic activity and development. With this in mind, government is delivering on its mandate to improve the quality of life for all marginalised communities in the country. What we are seeing here today is proof of this.

Working together

The National Department of Transport remains committed to assist municipalities with the necessary support required to promote excellent service delivery for citizens.

We believe that we, as government, can achieve so much more by working together across all three spheres of government: national, provincial and local.

Provinces and municipalities have the responsibility for roads that fall under their jurisdiction, but SANRAL often gets called to assist provinces and municipalities with maintenance on some of their roads.

The Vala Zonke project is one such example where there is cooperation from all three spheres of government. SANRAL is monitoring it on a national level, but we know that there are efforts being made throughout the country to fix potholes in province and municipalities.

Conclusion

Today we have seen what government continues to deliver to our people. The Moloto Road is more than just a road. It presents an opportunity for communities to help uplift themselves out of poverty by making it easier for them to connect with other communities, towns and provinces.

The cooperation we see here today needs to continue beyond roads and must become part of everything we do.

I hope that we have shared some valuable information with you today, but we have also learned so much from you today. We will share our lessons with the President and hopefully he will be able to provide you with even more information when he hosts his Imbizo in your municipality.

Thank you.