ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE WEZIWE TIKANA, MEC FOR TRANSPORT, SAFETY AND LIAISON DURING THE DEBATE OF THE 2013/14 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EASTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

03 December 2014, Eastern Cape Legislature, Bhisho

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Premier
Honourable MECs and Members of this august house
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Let me first take this opportunity on behalf of the Eastern Cape Department of Transport to express our appreciation to the Portfolio Committee on Transport for their constructive engagement with us during the consideration of our annual report for the 2013/14 financial year.

We are committed to ensure that we provide all the required reports as indicated in the committee report within the stipulated period.

Programme 1 – Administration

Honourable Speaker, as we have indicated during the presentation of our annual report in this House three months ago, we remain committed as the department to ensure that we continue to achieve the unqualified audit report going forward and ultimately have a clean audit.

Honourable Members, indeed, we have reviewed the current model for the provision of scholar transport in the Province and we would like to assure the learners, educators, parents and the people of the Eastern Cape that we are ready to provide the service, when the schools open in the new academic year.

The Department will enter into contract with individual public transport operators to transport identified scholars on the routes and from the pick-up points to the identified schools.

The administration of the Scholar Transport Programme will be done in-house at the Department of Transport’s district offices.

We are working together with the Department of Education and we are all looking forward to January 2015.

The concept document will be forwarded to the Portfolio Committee very soon.
Honourable Speaker, with regard to the finalization of the development of our organizational structure, we are still on track to meet our deadline to implement the new structure in the new financial year in line with our commitment, which we have made through our policy speech. This process has been preceded by the person-to-post matching exercise.

We are currently accelerating the filling of critical vacant posts in order to ensure that we have state machinery that is ready to discharge its mandate of providing our people with “An efficient, safe, affordable, sustainable and accessible transport system”.

To complement this work, we are developing a strategy for Attraction and Retention of human capital in an effort to curb the dire shortage of skilled personnel such as transport planners, transport technicians and transport economists to drive the core business of the department.

In fact, some of these posts have already been advertised recently as we endeavor to ensure that we strengthen the Transport Planning Function and mobilise resources in line with our service delivery model during this term.

Through our Transport Sector Skills Revolution Campaign, we will continue to provide bursaries and internships to young people of our Province, who are interested in these scarce skills.

The ineffectiveness of our internal audit unit has already received attention. The Department took measures to address this including the suspension of the head of the unit; carrying out an external quality assurance review and setting measures in place to improve the unit, including the involvement of Provincial Treasury and a mentoring role.

An acting manager was placed in the role and the unit managed to issue final reports during the year for all projects.

During the year the department also commissioned and completed an external quality assurance review on the unit which highlighted certain weaknesses which the department has commenced to address during the 2013/14 year including taking steps to set in place a quality assurance program.

We are also paying particular attention to the Provincial Government Fleet Trading Entity internal audit unit challenges and the filling of critical vacant posts within the entity.

Honourable Speaker, Resolution 14 is intended to maximise the visibility of Traffic Officers on our roads. The resolution is being implemented although there are challenges, which are currently being addressed together with other Human Resource Management matters affecting our traffic officers by a Special Task Team, which we have established to deal with these issues.

After the submission of the report by the task team, we will be able to provide direction on how we will deal with these challenges going forward.

The Mfundisi and 77 others matter will also receive attention in order to find closure.
 Honourable Speaker, I would like to assure this House that despite the recent labour unrest in the steel industry, which caused some delays in the Mthatha Airport Upgrade project, we are convinced that we are now on track to ensure that we complete this project on time. We appreciate the recent financial injection from Provincial Treasury, which will ensure that we complete the first phase of the airport development programme.

We are engaging the National Department of Transport to deal with the runway challenges and we will keep the committee abreast with the progress.

The sixth (6th) sitting of the Executive Council on 26th November 2014 received the final report of the Mthatha Airport Strategy, which has been developed by the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) to inform the development of the Mthatha Airport Development Master Plan. This strategy will catalyse the development of a new urban node in the City of Mthatha and invigorate the development of the Airport as an anchor logistics hub in the east of the Province.

As part of the strategy roll-out, we are looking at introducing new routes to Cape Town and Durban in the near future. A number of Airlines are interested in flying to Mthatha and the new runway and terminal building will ensure that we are ready to meet all their expectations. This Airport Strategy and Plan will complement the Provincial Civil Aviation Strategy, which is currently being developed in order to reposition our airports in the Province.

The Bhisho Airport will be our second priority in this process. We appreciate the participation of all stakeholders during the development of these strategies and plans.

The completion of the strategy will open avenues for new airlines to apply for the use of the airport and further boost tourism and economic development in the region.

Work with the Eastern Cape Geographic Names Committee is in progress to encourage the people of our Province to participate in the process of renaming the Mthatha Airport and other airports in line with the Liberation Heritage Route Project with the Home of Legends Programme as an overarching framework.

Honourable Speaker, as from the 10th of November 2014, the rural masses of Ngcobo started to enjoy access to a safe, reliable, affordable public transport system through the start of operations with 10 busses by Africa’s Best 350 Ltd to mark the commencement of Phase 3 of the AB350 Ltd bus rollout project. This phase will be completed by May 2015.
AB350 has indicated that it will apply to the Department for the renewal of their Phase 1 and Phase 2 contracts for a further period of five years in order to cover the 12 years allowed on a Negotiated Contract in terms of Section 41(3) of the National Land Transport Act. Once the formal application has been received, it will be considered by the Department.

We hope that Honourable Members will appreciate the fact that AB350 Ltd continues to be a shining example of BBBEE not only in the province, but in the whole country. Today AB350 is one of the biggest 100% black-owned bus companies in the country and the second biggest bus company in the Eastern Cape behind Algoa Bus Company operating in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality.

As provincial government, our support is clearly stipulated in the undertakings that we have made through the Aligned Transport Sector BEE Charter for the Bus Sub-Sector, where we committed ourselves to, amongst others:

- Actively support the bus industry as a core component of the transport industry in South Africa;
- Engage the bus industry with a view to expand its desperately needed services;

This phase has been part of our plans since 2007, but we were only able to implement it in this financial year. The budget for this phase is R20.8 million.

We must also appreciate the support of the taxi industry in the AB 350 operations, which assists us to realize our vision of ensuring that by year 2015, 70% of bus and taxi operators work harmoniously together to explore and exploit business opportunities in the transport sector for provincial economic growth which will benefit themselves, the commuters and communities at large.

Honourable Speaker, with regard to the Shova Kalula Bicycle Project, the Department had budgeted an amount of R650 000 for the purchasing of bicycles. Due to the reported procurement difficulties, it was decided not to continue with the project. The funding was utilised for Provincial Regulatory Entity activities in order to accelerate the consideration of Operating Licenses.
However, we continuously engaging the National Department of Transport for support. As a result we have recently postponed the handing over of bicycles by the Deputy Minister of Transport to a school in Elliotdale due to the examination period. But we are committed to go back in January 2015 as part of our “Go Back to School Campaign.”

Mayibuye Transport Corporation

Honourable Speaker, the Department is supporting Mayibuye Transport Corporation, as it is represented on the Board of Directors by a Senior Manager, while the Department’s Chief Financial Officer is a member of the Audit Committee of the Corporation.

We hope that this House would appreciate the progress made by the new Board of the corporation to improve the situation in the corporation.

As a result, we have appointed a new CEO Ms Madyibhi, who has vast experience, which we believe that will help us to improve the administration of the corporation.

Her appointment, together with that of our new Head of Department, Ms Irene Nomalungelo Mpolweni, is a clear demonstration of commitment from the ANC-led government to the African Union’s declaration of the period between 2010-2020 as the Decade of African Women in an effort to preserve and build on the African women’s strength. MALIBONGWE IGAMA LAMAKHOSIKAZI!

Programme 3: Transport Regulation

Honourable Speaker, as we have indicated in our policy speech six months ago, the department remains committed to assist municipalities with the establishment of fully functional Driving Licence Testing Centres (DLTCs).

We have allocated R297 000, which will help the Mbashe Municipality to finalise its DLTC establishment. Working with national government, we will advocate that more DLTCs be assisted during the term in order to improve access to drivers’ licences for our people, while simultaneously helping municipalities to improve their revenue base.
Already in my programme, we have plans to officially open the Nyandeni DLTC, and another DLTC and a Vehicle Testing Station at Koukamma Municipality.

Through our Road Safety Year Programme, which we launched in October 2014, we are planning to install permanent cameras along the identified roads including the notorious N2 and N6.

Honourable Speaker, as part of my programme, we are ready to officially open the new permanent traffic stations at Humansdorp and Zwelitsha to play a pivotal role in our Operation Kwan ele N2 Special Intervention Law Enforcement Project in order to make the N2 corridor, which is about 927 km from Tsitsikama Toll Plaza from Western Cape border to Brooknek on the KwaZulu-Natal border the safest corridor.

Honourable Speaker, six months ago in this House, we committed to build more weighbridges in this Province between now and 2019.

The fourth Executive Council Meeting since the start of the new government term, which was held on 17 September 2014 adopted the long overdue Eastern Cape Freight Transport Strategy aimed at focusing on the balance of rail, road, maritime and aviation freight in the province.

The provincial Freight Transport Strategy will also ensure improvement in the overload control efforts in the Province as we target to increase our weighbridges by the end of this term in line with Road Safety Programme. This includes ensuring that the Mthatha Weighbridge is fully functional.

Furthermore, we have advertised a tender to get a service provider to develop a Road Safety Management Strategy in accordance with the newly developed National Road Safety Strategy driven by the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC). This strategy will also address some of our key road safety challenges as the Province, which include:

- Enforcement
- Engineering
- Overload control
Better utilization of Road Rangers in order to ensure that there is value for money in the services they render.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to assure this House and the people of our Province that our traffic officers are ready to work day and night to protect road users during this festive season.

We have a clear plan, which has been supported at all levels and by our stakeholders. We will unveil the plan, when we launch the 2014/15 Festive Season Arrive Alive Campaign in Aliwal North on Monday 08 December 2014.

We invite all Honourable Members to join us in this launch and support us throughout the campaign.

We have budgeted for the overtime of traffic officers and 108 vehicles have been procured through the support from the Road Traffic Management Corporation in order to improve our officers’ visibility.

A total of 62 vehicles have already been delivered by the suppliers – a process, which was facilitated by our Provincial Government Fleet Trading Entity.

All these suppliers are based in the Province of the Eastern, because as the “Detroit of Africa”, we have a responsibility to support the automotive sector, which has been the backbone of the provincial economy.

In conclusion, we appreciate the efforts and contribution of everyone both within and outside the department.

Indeed, working together we can do more and help to move South Africa forward.

I thank you