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Deputy Minister Zikalala and MEC Mokua Inspect Progress On Welisizwe Bridge In Mahikeng



Article by Tseke Masemola, Pictures by Andile Xulu and Shudufhadzo Mudau

On Thursday, 21 November 2024, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Sihle Zikalala, alongside North West MEC for Public Works and Roads Sempe Elizabeth Mokua, visited Mahikeng in the North West province to assess the progress of the Welisizwe Rural Bridge project.

This Operation Siyahlola Ministerial visit forms part of the government's ongoing commitment to improve rural infrastructure and ensure accessibility for communities living in remote areas. Speaking about the initiative, Deputy Minister Zikalala emphasised the importance of these bridges in transforming lives.

"We are continuing with our commitment to build 96 bridges each year, especially in rural areas where rivers overflow, making it difficult for people to cross," said Deputy Minister Zikalala

The Welisizwe Bridge Programme is a collaborative effort between the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, the South African National Defence Force and the Provincial Department of Public Works and Roads. These bridges are designed to provide safer, more reliable crossings for rural communities, particularly during the rainy season when overflowing rivers often isolate villages.

The strategic readiness plan which was presented to the political principals, shows that North West is due for 14 more bridges which are expected to be built and completed between December 2024 and be completed by April 2025.

The strategic readiness plan includes a confirmation of the list of the 14 bridges to be built, an identification of access roads and sites identification, social facilitation and community mobilisation, approvals of exemptions and bridge designs and finally construction commencement. This plan will also include expenditure reports as a means to monitor the procurement of materials for the Welisizwe bridges.

Deputy Minister Zikalala and MEC Mokua expressed a concern about the slow pace of construction and completion of bridges in North West. They encouraged all stakeholders to further improve their construction efforts and enhance communication methods between the provinces and the national departments in order to expedite bridge construction. The MEC also raised an issue regarding the role of the provinces, calling for a remodeling of development and implementation of the project. They made a call for the Province to be more hands on, consistently provide monthly reports and adopt new methods of project management in order to increase efficiency.

Recent heavy rains were cited as some of the challenges that have hindered the speedy progress and quicker completion. Debris had piled up at the construction site and materials had been eroded, disrupting the work and set back the building process.

Another concerning issue which was identified on site was theft of the construction sand. Apparently, sand was being stolen and sold to some members of the community. The political principals warned the community about this thievery, pointing out that this act is sabotage that delays community progress. They asked members of the community to consistently monitor building progress discourage vandalism and theft of building materials as the bridge is theirs.

The DM and the MEC expressed a firm belief in the success of this project and that all the bridges will be delivered by April next year.



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