

STATE OF THE PROVINCE



OFF THE RAILS: Premier Phumulo Masualle announced yesterday before delivering his State of the Province address in Bhisho that the multimillion-rand Kei Rail project is no longer viable

Kei Rail runs out of steam

By ZINE GEORGE
and ZINGISA MVUMVU
Politics Desk

Praise for Mthatha Airport, oceans economy

THE Bhisho government has abandoned the multimillion-rand Kei Rail project it launched to much fanfare in 2003 because it is not viable.

Premier Phumulo Masualle made the announcement while addressing the media before delivering his State of the Province address (Sopa) in Bhisho yesterday.

Masualle said the train

was meant to relieve traffic use on the roads, but had not proved viable.

The provincial government launched Kei Rail in August 2003 and five years later, injected R117-million after it received its operating licence.

When the then transport MEC Thobile Mhlhlo announced the licence, he described the day as “a great day for

the people of the Eastern Cape” as they would have a safe and reliable transport option.

A one-way trip between East London to Mthatha cost R30 against a taxi fare of R70.

But Masualle said the low cost did not do much justice to the project as it took a whole day for the train to travel between Mthatha and East London, whereas other options were much faster.

He said this made the train unpopular at the time.

Meanwhile, the provincial government has managed to do an about-turn at the Mthatha Airport where the upgrade of its terminal building, as well as the runway lights, were completed in the 2016-17 financial year.

“These developments will help in attracting other operators to open new routes that are crit-

ical for the economic potential for the region,” Masualle said.

The ruling party’s lekgotla three weeks ago identified potential in the oceans economy, considering that the province’s coastal line stretches for about 800km.

The premier announced yesterday that the national Department of Public Works and Transport had started a feasibility study “that

will lead to the construction of the Port St Johns fishing harbour”.

Masualle said Transnet is expected to begin with processes of establishing a maritime training centre at the East London port by the end of June this year.

“This centre will cater for the artisan-maritime skills required to provide quality services to the ships that dock in our ports and to the maritime industry at large.”

— zineg@dispatch.co.za
/ zingisam@dispatch.co.za