

SOPA held



Free State Premier, MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae delivered her second State of the Province Address (SOPA) since attaining the highest office in Free State last year.

SOPA 2025 was held at the Lemo Green Park (behind Lemo Mall) in Bloemfontein on 21 February.

Regarding economic growth, the Premier said 2025 is about unleashing the economic potential of the Free State. She further pointed out that there is a need for inclusive growth, investment, higher income, better living standards, more jobs, less poverty and reduced inequality in turning a new page in the province's economic journey.

She hailed efforts to create employment through public employment programmes such as the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP).

As part of Phase 5 of the EPWP which is currently under way, the Premier said they are committed to creating 30,115 employment opportunities of which 19,792 job opportunities have so far been created. The province has partnered with organizations such as Coca Cola Beverages and National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) to capacitate youth with skills and business support.

MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae highlighted the importance of efficient road infrastructure, stating that highways, railways and access roads connect people, cities, towns and rural areas as well as enhancing prospects of economic opportunities. As a result R1.9 billion will be invested in the construction, upgrading and maintenance of road infrastructure for the 2025/26 financial year and R993 million has

been made available for special road maintenance to address rapid road deterioration caused by increased freight transport.

The Thaba-Nchu to Tweespruit road is also expected to be completed.

Regarding Education, for the 2024/26 financial year, the province has budgeted R335,821 million to ensure access to quality Early Learning Programmes for 75,705 children.

Fifty-eight ECD centres across the province have been renovated and maintained. Construction of a new low-cost ECD centre in Botshabelo is currently under way.

Bergman Primary School in Bloemfontein is under construction and seven new schools are in planning for construction, amongst them is Langenhovenpark Combined School in Bloemfontein, Kgotsa Taole Technical School in Botshabelo and a hostel at Boitumelong Special School in Thaba Nchu.

Upgrades to the Dark and Silver City Development in Bloemfontein are expected to be completed in the 3rd Quarter of the 2025/26 financial year.

According to the Premier, they are in consultations with the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie to return Bloemfontein Celtic to top flight football, while the 2025 edition of Macufe is set to take place.

In photo top: Free State Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae delivering the 2025 SOPA.

In photo bottom: The Police parade before SOPA kicked off.

By Teboho Masakala

