



public works  
& infrastructure

Department:  
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## **Media Statement by Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Patricia de Lille, MP**

### **Department of Public Works and Infrastructure and partners complete latest rural bridge to connect communities in Eastern Cape**

I am pleased to announce that yet another much-needed bridge has been delivered in a rural community in the Eastern Cape.

The latest bridge was recently installed as part of the Welisizwe Programme, meaning to help the nation cross over, which sees the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) work with the Department of Defence and government departments in the relevant province to install bridges in rural areas where communities have for years not had safe access to amenities such as schools and jobs.

The bridge was completed in recent weeks as a critical infrastructure project in the Bilatye community in the Chris Hani District municipality in the Eastern Cape.

This project is as a result of a longstanding Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the DPWI and the Department of Defence for the installation of Military-Type Bailey Bridges within the Republic of South Africa. The project was recently renamed as the Welisizwe Programme as these bridges play a critical and lifesaving role in ensuring that children can get to school safely and other residents can get to places of work or access any others services they need to safely.

For years, we have heard of the harrowing stories of people especially children dying due to drowning while crossing river streams to get to school or other amenities.

The DPWI and the Eastern Cape Department of Roads & Transport entered into MOA for the installation of Modular Steel Bridges within the Eastern Cape Province. The collaboration between these two departments has once more proven that when departments work together there is a lot that can be achieved. We are currently in discussion with SANDF to ensure that we speed up the turn-around time for delivery of the much needed bridges.

The DPWI provides coordination and programme management for the implementation of the Welisizwe programme.

Apart from bringing much-needed improved access to communities in need, these projects also have an economic benefit to the local community.

During the installation of the Bilatye Bridge, 40 Expanded Public Works Programme participants from the surrounding communities were employed. In addition, three local companies also benefitted from the project by providing construction material.

The Bilatye Bridge will improve access for the Nyongwana, Esigxeni, Thobile Dyantyi, Bilatye, Kwenxura, Hola and Mbinzana communities in the Chris Hani District Municipality.

The new bridge will also especially benefit pupils from the Mfanta High School which was closed because parents were afraid of children having to cross the river during the rainy seasons. As a result of the bridge now being installed, I have been informed that there are now discussion with the community to reopen the Mfanta High School.

Since the inception of the programme, the number of bridges completed amounts to 24 in the Eastern Cape and 1 was installed in Gauteng. Earlier this year, I visited and handed over another bridge that was completed in the Eastern Cape, the Nkobongo Bridge in the Ngcobo municipality.

While the COVID 19 pandemic has caused minor delays to other projects, the implementation has now commenced and another four (4) bridges currently being installed: the one Fini Bridge in the Chris Hani District Municipality in the Eastern Cape and three (3) Ekhamanzi bridges in the Umshwathi Local Municipality and in the uMgungundlovu District Municipality in KwaZulu Natal. This directly contributes to the Government's District Based Service Delivery Model.

The key areas for intervention in terms of inclement weather and drowning incidents have been identified in the Free State, KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape provinces.

It is my hope that we will continue to see more successes with this programme in many more communities across our country. This project is key example of how infrastructure can save lives, create economic opportunities and reverse the imbalances of apartheid spatial planning by connecting people to the services they need and are entitled to.

In the coming months, DPWI will make further announcements as more bridges are completed in the identified provinces.

ENDS

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