



public works  
& infrastructure

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**Speech by Minister Patricia de Lille, MP, at KZN Welisizwe Rural Bridges handover**

Deputy Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Noxolo Kiviet

KwaZulu Natal MEC for Transport, Peggy Nkonyeni

KwaZulu Natal MEC for Public Works, Jomo Sibiya

KwaZulu Natal MEC for Cooperative Affairs and Governance, Sipho Hlomuka

Mayor of uMgungundlovu District, Thobekile Maphumulo

Mayor of the Umshwathi municipality, Godfrey Mandla Zondi

Traditional leaders

SANDF chiefs and staff

Head of infrastructure investment in the Presidency and Acting head of Infrastructure South Africa, Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa,

Officials from the various departments and spheres of government

Most importantly, our community members

Good morning, molweni,

It is my great privilege and honour to be here today at the launch of this very important infrastructure project for the Ekhamanzi community and surrounding communities.

The Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme which means to assist the nation in crossing over is one of the flagship projects which the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure and the Department of Defence has been rolling out and has been hugely successful in the Eastern Cape.

We know that for so many years, our children, mothers and fathers have had to cross dangerous river streams to access the basic and important social amenities such as schools, clinics, government offices and even to get to work.

It has always been the most heart breaking thing to me when we hear on the news of young children especially who drown while crossing a river to get to school.

Early last year, I saw such a sad photo of a young boy crossing a river stream here in this area and it touched me so deeply when I saw the scared look in the boy's face as he crossed the river without any shoes or trousers.

This is because pupils from Ekhamanzi Primary School have to partially undress in order to get across the river to school without wetting their clothes.

Seeing this picture of this young boy just broke my heart and I told officials that we simply must get this project to KwaZulu Natal.

There can be no excuse that 27 years into our democracy that we cannot build bridges for our children and our communities.

The excuse that there is no money must never be used again when it comes to an intervention that will not only make access to government services easier but will also give our children and people dignity and save lives.

As the Minister responsible for infrastructure, I have always said that infrastructure is a basic need and a service which all our communities are entitled to.

Infrastructure is not just about cold, hard buildings but if we look deeper, we can see that as with the case of these bridges, infrastructure is about reversing the legacy of our apartheid past by giving people access and dignity.

Infrastructure is about people having water to drink, decent roads and a bridge to cross to get to school, to work or access government services like clinics. Infrastructure is about changing people's lives for the better.

Infrastructure is about giving people dignity, it is about giving people access to opportunities for education and work, it is about improving the socio-economic conditions in our communities and eliminating barriers for our people to get where they need to get safely so that they can succeed and make a meaningful contribution to our country.

There is no justification and excuse for children still having to fight their way through water and risk their lives just to get to school.

In May last year, Cabinet approved South African's Infrastructure Investment Plan which brings together all infrastructure projects in the country into one central point.

The Infrastructure Investment Plan is also a clear priority in the President's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan as announced by the President Ramaphosa in October 2020.

Infrastructure development is not only about bringing much needed social infrastructure to communities but it is also a sector that creates much needed jobs for our people.

We have also identified a number of labour intensive public programmes that will see the building of rural roads, building bridges and cleaning of our towns and cities.

Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa is the head of infrastructure investment in the Presidency and also the acting head of Infrastructure South Africa (ISA).

The Infrastructure Investment Plan is about achieving spatial and economic justice by connecting our people, integrating our communities and bring people closer to work opportunities.

This project is demonstrating how through the Infrastructure Investment Plan, all three spheres of government are working together to get the job done and provide the community with what they need and are entitled to.

Today we are near the site of three of these completed bridges in Ekhamanzi while four bridges have also been completed in Mangwenya, one bridge is also nearing completion in Amanzimtoti and the bridge in Mthoqotho is half way through construction.

Through this project, we have also been able to provide much needed jobs for local residents through the Expanded Public Works Programme with 40 participants recruited for the Ekhamanzi project, 60 participants for the Mthoqotho bridge and 20 participants for the Amanzimtoti project.

What makes this project even more impactful in terms of creating jobs is that DPWI recruited 496 Engineering graduates as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus programme to work on the Welisizwe bridges project across the country.

I am also very proud of the fact that of those 496 graduates, 52% of them are females.

For the KZN Welisizwe project, 25 of these engineering graduates were deployed to the projects in the various districts in the province.

MEC Nkonyeni, I have to commend our teams from DPWI, the Department of Defence and the teams from the provincial Transport Department for the level of urgency they have worked with.

I am so proud of the teams and this project and that is because it is one of the few and very impactful projects that can be delivered in matter of weeks.

To the community we want to say that it is not right that you have had to wait so many years for these bridges and we are happy that we can finally hand over three bridges to you today.

These are your bridges, this is your infrastructure and what you have been crying out for years.

We know that it has been frustrating and a long journey but today we celebrate with you as you finally have this much needed infrastructure.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here to serve our communities and the pride that we feel today must motivate us to deliver fast and deliver more.

As the President said: "**Khawuleza**". We must hurry up, the patience of our people is running out.

Please guard and take care of this infrastructure and report any vandalism to your councillor.

Thank you to each and every person who worked on this project and for completing it through the pandemic.

Let us now move with haste to complete the remaining six bridges in KZN and I will be back soon for handing over the last of the 14 bridges to this beautiful province.

Enkosi to everyone again and God Bless.

ENDS

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