

**NORTHERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT SAFETY AND LIAISON**

**MEC BENTLEY G VASS**

**BUDGET SPEECH: VOTE 3**

**NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE**

**12 September 2024**

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Honourable Deputy Speaker, Mr Mangaliso Matika

The Premier of the Northern Cape, Dr Zamani Saul

My esteemed colleagues in the Executive Council

Honorable members of the legislature

Representatives from the sphere of local government

The Head of Department and senior management of the department

The Provincial Commissioner of Police and Senior Management from SAPS

Stakeholders in the Transport and Safety Fraternity

Representatives from organized labour. Representatives from the media.

All our Residents listening to this Budget Vote on the Community Radio Stations across the Province.

Ladies and gentlemen, Good Morning.

It is an absolute honor to present the budget vote for the Department of Transport Safety and Liaison for the 2024/25 financial year to this August house. The Premier assigned this responsibility to me in the 7th administration.

This department is mostly a regulatory environment and play a role in the daily lives of the citizens of the Northern Cape.

For us to achieve the vision of a modern growing and successful province, our people must feel and live in a safe and secure environment.

Recent media reports in the country highlight the increase in crime, especially extortion. Communities are made to pay some other people to live in a safe environment, this is totally wrong and unacceptable conduct.

A huge number of the people in the Northern Cape make use of public transport, especially mini-bus taxis to work and to other destinations.

This dictates that they must be in public transport that is safe and reliable at all times. Additionally, the Premier assigned the safekeeping and guarding of government property under this department, meaning when people come to access government service at our institutions they must feel safe.

Deputy Speaker, we are here to account and present our road map on how the department is envisaged to deliver on its mandate.

The Department has for the 2023/2024 financial year maintained unqualified audit opinion with findings. It is worth mentioning that the department reduced the matters of emphasis, which places the department on the path to achieve an unqualified audit opinion without matters of emphasis, during the next external auditing cycle. This by no means gives the Department comfort, instead the department remains determined to continuous improvement of its audit outcomes.

Provincial Treasury approved the request for condonement of R668 million during the First Quarter 2023/2024 and a further condonation of R407 million has been granted in the First Quarter of 2024/25 financial year in relation to historical irregular expenditure from Provincial Transport Operations Grant (PTOG).

The Department continue to address the historical irregular expenditure evidently from the recent condonation granted by Provincial Treasury with bulk of amount emanating from contracts with bus operators. The Department further intends to regularize these contracts through a procurement process that will be undertaken once all the relevant conditions have been met.

Deputy Speaker, the Department of Transport, Safety and Liaison has completed the consultation process with organized Labour, in relation to the dispute raised on the implementation of the new organisational structure, signed off by the MEC Bloem in early 2022.

The Department has received the approval of the Director General to implement the organisational structure. The filling of critical vacant funded posts will be identified to be filled over the MTEF improving capacity which will ultimately lead to an improved audit outcome.

To this end, we have successfully appointed a Chief Financial Officer, Deputy Director of Supply Chain Management, and Director of Civilian Oversight. The appointment of the Director Corporate Services will also be finalized within the next few weeks.

Deputy Speaker, with regard to the pronouncement by the Premier on the insourcing of security services, we can report that the launch for the insourcing was done on the 23 of January 2024.

Phase 1 consisted of 124 security officials from affected departments. Uniforms were issued to all insourced security officials in all affected departments, namely DTSL, DEDAT, OTP Health and Agric.

In phase two the Department is in the process of appointing an additional 150 security officers. A recruitment process has commenced after more than 6000 applications were received, with a high number being youth. The high number of applications serves to indicate the need for permanent and quality employment in the province. The department needs to ensure that it is deliberate in the employment of youth, females and people living with disabilities when such opportunities are available.

The Department is also in the process of establishing a Directorate to manage the shared services of security. The entire insourcing process is envisaged to be concluded over the MTEF.

Deputy Speaker, Ladies and gentlemen,

The total budget allocated for the department is just over three hundred and forty-eight million rand (R348 247 000).

Administration is allocated over R128 million (R128 215, 000)

Civilian Oversight received about R30 million (30 106, 000)

Transport Operations is allocated around R87 million (R87 520, 000)

Transport Regulations allocated about R 102 million (R 102, 406, 000)

The compensation of employees will consume just over R188 million while goods and services will spend just over R74 million.

We anticipate spending more than R60 million of the Public Transport Operators Grant. This means subsidizing people of the Northern Cape to go to work, school and other transport needs they might have.

In response to the current precarious financial position faced by the Province, the Northern Cape Provincial Treasury revised the allocation by introducing budget cuts of R4 million, effectively reducing budget to R344 million.

The R4 million budget cut is expected to affect all programmes:

* R1,7 million for travelling.
* R1,3 million for goods and services
* R1 million for Cost of employees

These budget cuts, coupled with current cost containment measures in place may affect the achievement of the APP targets if not revised in accordance with financial resources available. The department will undertake a process to review these, but first and foremost we must ensure that we meet the mandate of a safe, secure, and sustainable transport system and accountable police service.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the department is the main revenue collector for the government of the Northern Cape, through the renewal of motor vehicle licences. To this end, we are looking forward to optimizing revenue collection with no commission payable to a third party, especially considering the closure of the South African Post Offices in most towns in the province. The added benefit of job creation is also another major consideration in this process.

Honourable members, on revenue management and collection, we continue to engage municipalities in an effort to reduce departmental debt for Motor Vehicle License (MVL) and renewals.

The purpose of these engagements with municipalities is to have repayment plans for arrear debt and put measures in place to prevent further escalation of the debt. We are looking forward to optimize revenue collection as we gradually take over the motor vehicle licensing (MVL) function from the post office and local municipalities.

In addition to the current sixteen (16) cashiers that were appointed during the pilot stage of the project (takeover of MVL function from agencies).

Fourty (40) more unemployed young people will be appointed in various local municipalities within the province to effectively execute motor vehicle licence function, this is consistent with approved Revenue Enhancement Implementation Plan for the Department.

The Provincial Treasury has allocated funding to the Department of Transport, Safety, and Liaison for the appointment of additional revenue clerks during this financial year, 2024-2025.

Deputy Speaker with regard to the function of Civilian Oversight and in particular in the area of strengthening community partnerships with Community Safety Forums.

We intend to unblock the challenges preventing the establishment of the Sol Plaatje Community Safety Forum (CSF).

I already had an engagement with the Executive Mayor and leadership of the Sol Plaatje Local Municipality and all relevant stakeholders, in preparation for the launch of the Safer City Campaign. Engagements with Hantam and Richtersveld Municipalities were held for the launching of their respective Integrated Community safety plans.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we are of the firm view that crime happens in a street, a ward, a neighborhood and a local municipal area. It is therefore important that local municipalities are actively involved in the fight against crime and to keep our communities safe. Our failure to have local government involved in crime fighting will only lead to an increase in violence and crime in the province. We can report today that we have the support of SALGA to ensure that we establish community safety forums in all municipalities, by the end of this financial year.

In Gamagara, Hantam and Richtersveld Municipalities, Community Safety Forums have been officially established as per local council resolutions. Ga-Segonyana Municipality, is at a point of readiness, with inductions underway in other municipalities. Inductions of these forums have already taken place with the assistance from the National Secretariat. Eight additional Safety Forums have been assessed for functionality and this function is indeed work in progress.

Deputy Speaker, another area of importance that contributes to the reduction of poverty in our communities is the area of Extended Public Works Program.

In contributing to this the department has recruited and appointed 76 young EPWP Safety Participants, with 46 of these compensated from the equitable share and 30 from the incentive grant, for the current financial year.

Thirty (30) EPWP Safety Participants are placed in thirty crime priority police stations in and around the province for the Provincial Integrated Social Crime Prevention, Gender Based Violence and Femicide programs to build safer communities.

Deputy Speaker, as part of our civilian oversight function, plans are in place to engage in a program called Court Watching Brief.

Through this program we visited and analysed charge sheets at the Keimoes, Kenhardt and Pampierstad District Courts. It was found that 14 cases in total at the above courts were struck off the court roll due to incomplete investigations. The withdrawn cases were mostly assault GBH and one GBV case. This concerns us as we must be seen to be stepping up the fight against violent contact crimes and GBV.

This function entails the following amongst other duties: observing police functions in the courts, like police investigations, reporting on the cases removed from the court roll and the reasons thereof, for practical intervention to mitigate challenges arising from such weaknesses. This is indeed a helpful approach, especially considering the high number of GBV&F cases being withdrawn without proper explanation. If found that cases have been withdrawn unprocedurally and without proper legal reasoning, DTSL then ensures that such cases are re-enrolled into the court roll.

Deputy Speaker, this past Monday, 09 September 2024, the Premier, Provincial Commissioner of SAPS Lieutenant General Otola, and myself presented the provincial crime statistics and the following can be said about that report:

The crime statistics reflected on all the 17 community reported crimes as well as the crimes detected as a result of police actions, with some having increased and others decreased. It is noted that more joint efforts are needed to deal with the crime holistically as a community, and therefore the call is:

*“Let us all say no to crime and no to taking the law into our own hands, and allow our justice and security cluster to continue with their constitutional mandates of investigation and prosecution”*

The crime stats as reported depicts this picture: All Districts reflected decreases for the first quarter of this financial year.

Deputy Speaker, what is most disturbing is the publicly reported allegations in both the electronic and print media that relates to the involvement of our police officials in crime, with the most being the recent incident of a senior SAPS Officer who allegedly sexually assaulted a fifteen years old girl.

This matter that was covered widely in the media is now being investigated by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and they will at an appropriate time report on the progress. Let us not lose hope and trust in the law enforcement agencies.

Deputy Speaker, our resolve to fight crime was strengthened by a total of 554 constables who completed basic training in December 2023 and are continuing with their workplace exposure program as they are placed at their respective permanent Stations and Units in the Province on 01 August 2024.

A further 226 Student Constables were recruited in line with the National allocation to the Province for the first intake of the 2024/2025 financial year and are busy with training at the SAPS Basic Training Colleges. Another recruitment phase will take place in February 2025.

To enhance the work of the Police, plans are underway for the designing, supply, delivery and installation of solar – inventer battery backup system at a total of ten police stations in the Province.

The SAPS are also prioritizing additional accommodation and Victim Friendly Facilities at the Kagisho and Windsorton Police Stations.

A total number of 58 police vehicles were purchased by the SAPS to the value of 38 million rand. A total of 30 vehicles have already been delivered and the detectives were prioritized. The remaining 28 vehicles will be allocated for visible policing upon delivery.

Deputy Speaker with regard to Transport Operations we must state the following:

That we have established a new Provincial Regulatory Entity (PRE) in 2023 after consultation with all stakeholders in the public transport industry.

The PRE-members have been inducted, trained and are performing their duties.

Deputy Speaker, it is important to bring to the attention of this house that we have received the investigative report on the illegal issuance of public transport operating licenses from the Public Service Commission and Public Protector.

The Department of Transport, Safety and Liaison is in the process of implementing all recommendations made in the report and a project plan has been drafted in this regard.

The Department has already contacted the Office of the State Attorney for proper legal advice on how to prosecute some of the recommendations in the investigative report.

Deputy Speaker, local government is key to the provisioning of safe and reliable public transport. To this end, the department continues to assist municipalities with the drafting of Integrated Transport Plans (ITPs) as well as consultations with municipalities in relation to the amendment and addendum to the Provincial Land Transport Framework (PLTF).

We have ongoing consultations with Renosterberg Local Municipality for the review of its ITP, whilst the John Taolo Gaetsewe ITP was finalized with the assistance of the Department of Transport, Safety and Liaison.

Deputy Speaker, the department must also ensure that it provides services closer to the people. Following the successful and fully operational decentralized offices in Namakwa, JTG and ZFM Districts, the department is preparing the launch of the fourth decentralized office in the Pixley Ka Seme District during the current financial year. Whilst decentralization of public services is important, the department is aware of the inherent risk of possible wrong-doing in this regard. The department will therefore put stringent administrative checks and balances in place to identify and eliminate administrative wrong-doing.

The decentralization will allow operators and the public to access the service close to where they operate.

Deputy Speaker, the Shova Kalula Bicycle programme aims to improve access to education by learners staying between 3-5 kilometers away from schools, especially in our rural areas.

During the previous financial year, we handed over 256 bicycles and will hand over 345 in the current financial year.

It is important to note that since inception of this program in 2004 we have handed out more than 20 000 bicycles in the province. This has proven as an effective intervention by the department as the records of the Department of Basic Education reported increased numbers of learners attending school, as a result of them not having to walk the long distances to and from school anymore.

Deputy Speaker, this department is also mandated with the function of Transport Regulation. It is important to report that the last time the department recruited traffic officers was in 2008, and over a period of time, the number of traffic officers have drastically reduced due to resignations, natural attrition and death. This is an important function, as it deals with the safety of all road users in the entire province, on all the roads.

In response to this challenge the Department put together a presentation in this regard, after which the Provincial Treasury committed an amount of ten million rand (R10 000 000) that was used for the recruitment of 50 traffic trainees during the 2023/24 financial year.

These traffic trainees are comprised of youth from the entire province and this is an attempt to provide quality, sustainable jobs.

The appointment of these traffic officers in January 2025 will have a positive impact on service delivery, improved visibility and subsequently the reduction of road crashes and fatalities.

The department also successfully procured six more vehicles for the enhancement of Traffic Law enforcement on our roads.

Deputy Speaker, we maintain zero tolerance on fraud and corruption in the Northern Cape.

Our Provincial Monitoring Unit inspects Registering Authorities, Driver license Testing Centres and Vehicle testing stations to ensure that these institutions operate and comply with the National Road Traffic Act (NLTA)

Deputy Speaker, vandalism and criminality coupled with the aged infrastructure of our weighbridges is negatively affecting our operations.

The department envisages refurbishing the weighbridges on the N1 and N12 in order to increase overload control and to increase the revenue of the province.

Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, I want to plead with all the residents of this Province, to work with the government to address crime and criminality in our Province.

Our development hinges on us working together to create a safer Province and Country for all of us.

Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the DTSL Team led by HOD Rodney Pieterse,

The Portfolio Committee on Transport, Safety & Liaison, for the advice and support since the start of the 7th Administration.

The support staff at the Ministry, led by HOM Mayenzeke Mbekushe,

The continued support of my family and trust of the movement that deployed me to this position, the African National Congress.

Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members, I present to you the Department of Transport, Safety and Liaison Budget Vote 3 for your consideration.

I thank you for your attendance and attention.