

Speech notes by MPL Vicky Knoetze – Annual Budget Vote 2016/17 Financial Year – Department of Roads and Public Works – Plenary (31 May 2016 – 2 June 2016).

Transport Programme could be severely affected by the AGRI EC court finding against the Department of Roads and Public Works

- **Operation Bring Back must be a key focus point in this financial year.**
- **Proper planning will be essential to manage the impact on the transport programme after the adverse AGRI EC court finding.**
- **The Department must ensure that issues surrounding late and non-payment of EPWP workers are attended to as a matter of urgency.**

Honourable Chair of Chairs, honourable premier, honourable members and guests.

PROGRAMME 1: ADMINISTRATION

The allocation for the department amounts to R 4 459 139 Billion for the 2016/17 financial year, 1.7% less than the previous financial year. This is concerning since in the previous financial year the DPRW received an increased budget, 6.8% more than in 2014/15 revised estimate. The Department will have to conduct proper planning especially in the transport programme as the this programme as well as EPWP received 5.5 % and 1,8% less respectively.

Honourable Speaker, throughout considering this report, we must keep in mind that the aim of the Department of Roads and Public Works is to provide and manage the provincial roads network and the building infrastructure as well as to drive the implementation of the EPWP. This department of roads and public works was mandated to become the provincial nerve centre for infrastructure delivery and a driver of socio-economic development.

It was clear after meetings with the Department that they are more serious about developing itself into the infrastructure nerve centre for the Eastern Cape. The DA is

pleased that after 8 years the Department of Roads and Public Works now has an approved organogram. I trust that this will assist the DPRW greatly in filling critical vacancies and appointing skilled personnel in critical posts. This is most definitely a step in the right direction.

One question that still needs clarity is if and when the Roads Programme will be handed over to the Department of Transport. The major concern at this stage is: How this will affect the newly approved organogram that was 8 years in the making?

The transfer of the roads programme will have serious administrative repercussions and will require strong political leadership. It is absolutely critical that stakeholder engagement takes place as soon as possible in order to ensure a smooth transition of the transport programme to the Department of Transport. Honourable Speaker, feedback to both Departments will be absolutely essential to ensure a smooth transition.

Honourable Speaker, there is also a need for a significant internal restructuring process to shift towards strategic operational alignment so that resource allocation responds to critical areas of service demand and the needs of core programmes.

PROGRAMME 2: PUBLIC WORKS INFRASTRUCTURE

Honourable Speaker, the DRPW must be commended for the progress made in terms of Operation Bring Back. This programme will assist greatly in identifying property that is owned by the Department that is currently vacant and or illegally occupied.

Among these Honourable Speaker, is an amount of 1 241 properties that are in the ownership of the Department which is zoned as residential. Of these, 346 properties are vacant and under the custodianship of the Province, only 535 properties are subject to valid lease agreements. This leaves 360 properties unaccounted for. It is a fact honourable Speaker that many of the properties owned by the DRPW are

illegally occupied and the Department is receiving no income from these properties whatsoever. R 7 260 223. 59, this is the amount to which these properties are in arrears, this is astronomical.

The DRPW must ensure that superfluous, non-core immovable assets which are not required for service delivery is disposed of in terms of the Government Immovable Asset Management Act, having regard for land restitution claims and other claimed rights of tenure. This process must be completed within the next 36 months. Thus far 229 properties have been identified and recommended for disposal by the Intergovernmental Provincial State Land Disposal Committee.

Properties identified for disposal are in areas, including, Alice, Butterworth, Dutywa, East London, Hamburg, Keiskammahoek, Middledrift, Peddie, Seymour Cofimvaba, Umtata, Port Elizabeth, Queenstown, Whittlesea, Lady Frere and Grahamstown.

The Department must further ensure that state owned buildings are maintained and not vandalised, there is no clear plan of how the department will look after its own assets as this is further complicated by the fact that much of the maintenance budget resides with sister departments.

PROGRAMME 3: ROADS INFRASTRUCTURE

Honourable Speaker, the Department must in terms of this programme be commended for the establishment of the Infrastructure Procurement Unit as well as the Rapid Response Units. The Rapid response units will focus on problem areas and hotspots without having to appoint a contractor from scratch. This initiative will assist tremendously in emergency situations and will speed up service delivery if it is implemented correctly. Further, it is promising that the Project Management Office was established by the Premier in order to give effect to the DRPW to function and operate as the nerve centre for infrastructure.

An amount of 456 Million has been ring-fenced by Treasury for the SANRAL projects in the province. The fact that SANRAL has taken over some of the major problematic routes has lifted a heavy burden from the DRPW. This will further assist in terms of the struggles with capacity that the Department has been experiencing for the past years.

Honourable Speaker, emphasis must be placed on the maintenance and upgrading of the rural roads network. Last year I noted that we cannot have a situation again as in the 2014/15 financial year where we are 8 months into the financial year and the rural roads maintenance contracts are not awarded yet. There are still issues in this regard Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, the Agri EC court findings can have major repercussions for the Transport Programme. Agri Eastern Cape won a ground-breaking case against the MEC and Director-General of Roads and Public Works in Grahamstown in earlier this month.

An organisation of farmers, together with nine other applicants, had to take this Department to court to force them to carry out their duty in respect of road maintenance, a lack of which resulted in the poor state of roads in the province. The roads in the EC are considered to be among the worst in South Africa.

The Department of Roads and Public Works were ordered to submit a written report to the registrar of the High Court within 30 days. This is 13 days away Honourable Speaker.

In this report, steps must be outlined as to how the Department will repair and maintain the roads and a timeline for the work. They were also ordered to clarify who will carry out these repairs.

In addition, the department must specify what urgent steps should be taken by individual farmers if the state of their access roads has fallen into such a state of disrepair that they cannot be used safely.

Honourable Speaker, the situation out there is critical if the public is forced to take a Department to Court so that the court can mandate it to carry out its core function. This programme will without a doubt be seriously affected by this court decision. We look forward to seeing the requested report to the court in order to comprehend how exactly the Department will find the budget and capacity to honour this order.

PROGRAMME 4: EPWP

Honourable speaker, this flagship programme of the Department was to be commended for achieving its targets over and above what was set out.

The focus must now however be on ensuring that EPWP workers are paid on time, every time. Being paid late can be fatal to a worker earning minimum wage. This situation must be attended to as a matter of extreme urgency.

In conclusion, the DA will play an important oversight role in terms of monitoring the expenditure as well as the allocation of funds as it is an indicator to determine whether the department is spending the tax payers money in the most efficient and effective way possible and in doing so is achieving its objectives in terms of service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, the DA supports this report.

Thank you.