

Address by the Minister of Transport, Mr Jeff Radebe MP at the First International African Conference on Gender, Transport and Development 2006

Boardwalk Casino, Port Elizabeth, 27 August 2006

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EC MEC for Safety Liaison and Transport- Mr Thobile Mhlahlo
Conference Chairperson
Academics and Researchers
Members of the Organising Committee
Members of the Transport Industry
Panellists
Government Officials
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to address the launch of The First International African Conference on Gender, Transport and Development with special focus on women. This conference will give an excellent opportunity to policy-makers, researchers, planners, practitioners, and other organisations from all corners of the world to share global perspectives on issues of gender, transport and development.

Last year the Department of Transport released the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), which revealed that nearly two-thirds of households in South Africa do not have access to public transport. Rural poverty is reflected in the fact that a third of households stated that transport is too expensive in the urban areas. Safety is also perceived to be a problem and it cuts across genders. The transport challenges that face us today include safe, effective and sustainable public transport. Our transport infrastructure, public transport modes such as taxis, trains and buses in relation to gender are matters crucial to policy makers and how they plan them to fit women, girls and scholars in their everyday lives.

Transport as a whole is key to economic growth and development. It needs to be streamlined to balance the challenges of men and women in business, in rural areas and in all sectors of the economy. The development in transport infrastructure and services will enable people in all sectors to contribute significantly to the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA).

There are approximately 3.9 million public transport commuters. The 2.5 million taxi commuters account for over 63 percent of public transport work trips, Bus services account for another 22 percent of public transport commuters and the balance are carried to work by train. In addition to the 2.5million commuters who use minibus-taxis as the main mode of travel, there are another 325 000 commuters who use taxis either as a feeder mode to other public transport services.

With this kind of situation on our hands we need to take note on how women fit in these categories and their challenges regarding these establishments. Hence the participants in today's conference should be able to explore and get solutions on the following:

- Findings of recent research, in particular studies with a focus on women's travel needs, experiences and constraints in developing countries.
- The information needed to come up with equitable and effective transport policies which take into account gender constraints, experiences and needs for socio-economic development
- Innovative research methods and approaches that will address challenges faced by women.

Let me say the roles played by SANRAL, the Department of Transport, and the HSRC in coordinating this conference is a reflection that we have tremendous work to address transport challenges among women. I would like to encourage SANRAL to continue promoting the concept of 'Community Development Programme'. The Capital expenditure under this programme is aimed and focused on adding value to rural communities by providing transport infrastructure and improving access facilities in rural poverty nodes to bring some positive changes in these affected areas.

For Government to plan effectively in bridging the gap between the first and second economies, we need to explore in detail the gender based dimensions of rural women's travel activities, economic experiences and needs in order to provide policy and planning guidelines to the executing authorities.

Various researches revealed that gender bias in many societies in rural transport stems from the roles that women perform. Because of the total workload of a rural household rarely shared equally among its members, the burden of transport falls on women.

Inappropriate and inadequate modes of transport increase the amount of time necessary to perform other roles, leaving rural women very little time to develop themselves in socio-economic activities.

As a transport sector, our major challenges are to respond effectively to the achievement of a six percent economic growth target pursuant to ASGISA, the encouragement of sustainable transport and the promotion of the Expanded Public Works Programmes, with women's full contribution at all levels. Three weeks ago more than 15 000 women marched and gathered at the Union Buildings to express the need for women's emancipation. Women at all levels deserve to be treated with dignity; they need to benefit from all forms of services such as transport, telecommunication, construction and others. They need to be emancipated from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, gender and class oppression.

In the context of our national building, our message as government is 'Age of Hope - A national effort for faster and shared growth'. This message of hope captures the spirit of optimism prevalent in the country and calls all South Africans including women to pursue the opportunities provided to speed up self development and progress towards a better life for all. The challenges that are not unique to all women that we ought to deal with include tools to achieve and develop financial freedom, jobs, exploitation, self - defence against rape, abuse, highjacking and all forms of violence. I want to urge and encourage all women attending this conference to realise and exercise their rights in transport, at work, in politics and all chores of life that they are involved in.

I must stress that although women represent an increasing share of the world's labour force, they still remain at a disadvantage in many areas of our respective economies. Wage differentials, occupational segregation, high unemployment rates and their disproportionate representation in the formal and subsistence sectors limit women's economic advancement. In addition, whilst women's travel patterns are different from that of men, transport is an area that affects women's everyday lives and the gendered nature of transport is still a much-neglected area of policy.

This conference should strike interventions as to why the household responsibilities of women are heavier than those of men and typically result in women combining more activities in the course of trip making than men do. Whereas women's journeys are multi-purposed, men's journeys are mostly characterised by a single purpose. For some reason, public transport arrangements and private household transport arrangements have often been designed and organised primarily with needs of men in mind.

In view of the aforementioned, it is thus heartening to host a Conference of this nature where the negative equity and efficiency consequences of the gender bias in current transport arrangements are being addressed. It is clear that policy makers are increasingly beginning to take stock of the need for fundamental change in transport organisation.

Following on the Department of Transport's National Household Travel Survey in 2003, the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL) commissioned the Gender and Development Unit of the HSRC to conduct a study in the Eastern Cape with the aim of determining rural women's travel needs. In these surveys the most common constraints identified were:

- Physical access to transport was a key constraint, especially for disabled men and women travelling with children
- Lack of safety, particularly at night
- Abuse
- The cost of using transport emerged as an issue of concern for women.
- The timing and routes of public transport services also proved to be important.
- The overall lack of consultation with women regarding travel patterns was viewed to be a widespread constraint

Our country's policy framework for human rights and gender equality in particular is rated amongst the best in the world. Our constitution entrenches gender equality as a fundamental principle and the South African Government is determined to industrial practise and reinforces these policies. Consequently, we are gathered here for the First International African Conference on Gender, Transport and Development: Bridging the divide between development goals, research and policy in developing countries. The general aim of this Conference should be to sensitise policy makers to the required amendments in travel design patterns with a further view of immediate implementation.

Transport infrastructure and services have a strong influence on delivery of basic services, facilitation of economic growth and empowerment of vulnerable groups such as women. More than half of our population is female and the extent to which women and girls benefit from development policies and progress has a major impact on our country's overall development success. We do not assume that all women are the same, or that they feel the same about transport infrastructure and services. However, there are significant differences between women's transport demands and experiences, as opposed to those of men to justify addressing women's travel requirements as a separate area of focus.

The South African Government recognises the important role in the transformation of South Africa into a democracy and their contribution towards our economy. We honour and acknowledge the participation of women in their communities and their cultures, in education and in Government. The Department of Transport is therefore determined to assist in alleviating any duress of South African women.

Already, I have asked the Department to work towards increasing investment in public transport infrastructure, to restructure current subsidies in order to promote integrated settlements and to develop public transport projects that will improve access to opportunities for the urban and rural poor.

I am extremely interested in the outcomes of the Conference and the way in which policies can be developed around the transport needs of women. This Conference ultimately is an attempt at equalising the rural transport burden with its negative consequences for women - and the results are sure to have a domino effect on policy making.

Your attendance and contribution is highly appreciated and you should realise that your efforts to address the social and political exclusion of women in rural areas will go a long way in addressing human development; especially in view of the impact implementation programmes could have on the lives of women and children. Much of our policy formulation and planning at government level lacks the spice of academic critique; and conversely, much of the academic discourse does not interact with the experience of government policy implementation especially in the marginalized and rural environments. In view of this, the Department of Transport is privileged to be associated

with this Conference as the intentions over the next few days will be in line with the Department's strategic objectives which are to improve access to transport, reduce travel times and work towards the reduction of infrastructure backlogs.

I am confident that your participation will avail you with an opportunity to share research and practical realities that will enable us to find solutions to contribute to the development of structural approach to gender transport needs. Your participation will also identify mechanisms to address those requirements, and assist in ultimately implementing an appropriate transport policy framework, which will have a great impact on lives of women and men around the world. Participate, contribute and enjoy the Conference all of you.

I THANK YOU!