Democratic Alliance speech by

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DA Gauteng Shadow MEC for Roads and Transport

Proper and continuous road maintenance is critical to keep provincial roads in tip-top condition

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Speaker,

Gauteng province has one of two options: we can take a beautiful highway towards our future, or we can choose a road full of potholes, slowing down our growth and performance.

When we look at the year under review, it seems like we are firmly on the potholed road instead of choosing the fast, well-built highway to a prosperous future.

Why do I say this? Well, you only have to drive on any provincial road in this province, and you will see what I am talking about. Our provincial roads are badly maintained and full of massive potholes that do not just kill tyres but also cause serious accidents.

According to the province’s pothole app, at least 13 roads belonging to the provincial government need to be rehabilitated. The reason they have to be rehabilitated is because they were not maintained according to their design specifications. They have been allowed to degrade to the point that they need to be rehabilitated.

Most of our provincial roads have reached a design life of 25 years, so maintenance to keep them operational is more crucial than ever.

Rehabilitation effectively requires the rebuilding of a road because of its state of degradation. This comes at a starting cost of R182 000 per square metre. This is much more expensive than the resealing of a road, a preventative maintenance action that starts at around R55 per square metre. This form of preventative maintenance helps prevent potholes and is much cheaper than filling a pothole at between R700 and R1500 per square metre.

The lack of maintenance of provincial roads does not only contribute to more expensive future repairs but also contributes to other costs in the economy. It is estimated that badly maintained roads contribute to 20% of all road accidents.

If one takes the cost of congestion, accidents, insurance, loss of life, and the increase in logistic costs that contribute to the cost of living, then bad roads cost us even more than the work we have to do to repair them.

Therefore, the lack of maintenance increases future costs for the Gauteng government, where much cheaper maintenance solutions can save us millions of rands. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport, or Logistics, as it is now known, has failed the province and failed to conduct the most basic maintenance on our roads.

A well-known example of where the lack of maintenance led to a disaster is the Hendrik Potgieter Road case. We all know that this main road was washed away during massive storms earlier this year and caused major traffic problems for its users.

I must pause and congratulate the department for repairing the road in record time and putting it back to use last week. I hope we can treat all builds in the province in the future with the same urgency that we did with Hendrik Potgieter Road.

But this disaster could have been averted. For years, residents have complained about the flooding in the area during the rainy season. I relayed many of these complaints to the department so that this perennial problem could be solved. Residents and I also warned the department that if the waterway that passes under the Hendrik Potgieter bridge, which caused the flooding, is not addressed, disaster will strike, and the structures below the bridge will start to weaken.

The department ignored our warnings and pleas and failed to engage the City of Joburg to maintain its waterway to avoid future flooding and the weakening of the structure. The result of ignoring the problem that was growing in stature over time was a disaster that has cost the department millions of rands to repair. Another example of how a lack of maintenance leads to disasters just like the Bank of Lisbon fire.

Speaker,

Gauteng sits with an even greater future problem. Our roads are starting to run out of space for the growing vehicle population they have to carry. Gauteng motorists and logistics companies experience longer travel times between their bases and their destinations every year. The road construction plan will not be able to keep up with the rising demand, and fifteen to twenty years from now, we will become a gridlocked province if we do not do something now.

Gauteng must embark on a major investment in its public transport infrastructure so that we move commuters off our roads onto reliable, safe, and affordable people-centred public transport.

In 2024, the national government will publish its plan to devolve rail to other spheres of government, and this poses an opportunity for Gauteng. If it is managed properly, we can expand our rail network in the province by incorporating the current PRASA network into the Gautrain network.

Our aim must be to improve the PRASA network to match the quality of Gautrain. In doing so, we will attract more commuters who sit in traffic to a more productive form of transport.

Rail offers the highest fare collection rate of all modes of public transport, excluding minibus taxis, and should, over the medium to long term, also replace major medium-distance bus routes.

As a province, we also need to review the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system planning as it has been poorly implemented in Gauteng.

Speaker,

The Road Traffic Management Centre (RTMC) has shown how one can start offering more and more services online, specifically vehicle and driver license renewals. It is time for the department to move into the 21st century and start offering more services online. This will reduce pressure on Driver’s Licence Testing Centres (DLTC) in the province and reduce the frustration of motorists who face forms running out as well as extremely bad service.

We should also expand the renewal of vehicle license service to other service providers as the Post Office slowly goes out of business. It is easy to move this service online, but we still need capacity for those who do not or cannot, use online services.

Speaker,

The department has huge potential as a contributor to economic growth that can accelerate job creation in our province. But for this to happen, we need to see more intent and commitment. We need to see projects that are completed on time and within budget, the appointment of credible service providers, the reduction of legal cases delaying tenders, and improved project management.

We need to conduct a review of the province’s integrated transport plan and come up with a plan that Gauteng’s residents can understand, believe in, and support.

Unfortunately, this is unlikely to happen under the current administration, which is more focused on populist politics than growing our province and restoring its economic standing in the world.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) is ready for the challenge to take over government in Gauteng and in this department so that we can govern with intent, integrity, and honesty and make this provincial government one that truly belongs to the people of this province.

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