



economic development & tourism

Ministry - Ihhovisi likaNgqongqoshe
KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

REMARKS BY THE KWAZULU MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL MABUYAKHULU ON THE OCCASION OF THE DRAKENSBURG CABLE CAR MEDIA BRIEFING

We wish to start by thanking all of you members of the media for responding to our invitation to be part of today's media briefing which we have called in order to give you the latest developments regarding the proposed Drakensberg Cable Car.

As all of you are aware, the Drakensberg Cable Car project is one of the seven projects which were identified in our Tourism Master Plan as critical for us to unlock the tourism potential of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. However, before we give you the latest information on the project we believe that we should first start with a little bit of background.

As stated earlier, two years ago, as the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, we became the first province in the country which put together a 20 year tourism master plan, which is our roadmap for the tourism industry in the province. In terms of the plan we want to ensure that, at least, by 2020 tourism contributes R65,2 billion to the provincial economy and that it create 183 820 jobs. The tourism master plan was endorsed by the provincial cabinet in 2012 and identified seven projects, including the Drakensberg Cable Car project, as game changers for the tourism industry in the province.

The other six projects are:

- The Breakwater Statue
- Bluff Bridge
- The statue of King Shaka
- The new International Convention Centre
- The Beach Resort and,

- Isandlwana Development Precinct

Accordingly, about two years ago we appointed consultants Graham Muller Associates to conduct the feasibility study on the Drakensberg Cable project. The results of the study were made public in July last year. As part of the study, more than 16 sites within the Drakensberg area were painstakingly looked at to investigate their feasibility for the project. In the end, the study found that it was feasible to build the cable car in the Busingatha site in Mount Amery, Drakensberg.

When we presented the findings of the study we said we had no doubt that this project was going to change the tourism landscape of our province. We said this project would awaken the sleeping giant of the Drakensberg region by serving as a catalyst to attract domestic and international tourism to this world heritage site.

Critically, we also stressed that while we have always understood the fact that we need to develop the economic potential of the Drakensberg area, we needed to strike a delicate balance between environmental preservation and the potential economic fortunes that will accrue out of this project. We also committed ourselves to conducting public consultations with business community, community members, interest groups and all other stakeholders on this project.

This process started late last year when we held a meeting with the amakhosi and their traditional councils on the project as well as all the mayors who are under Uthukela District Municipality. Subsequent to this, we had a public meeting with the affected communities on the 23rd of November 2013, which was attended by more than 10 000 people. We also held a breakfast meeting on the 5th of December 2013 with business people and other stakeholders from the area.

When this process started, we committed ourselves to transparency and openness. Further we also said that, in line with the Constitution of our land, all views, including those which are against the project, will be considered.

We also pledged to, in keeping with the relevant legal prescripts, embark on all the required developmental approval processes, including conducting a full environmental impact assessment with regards to the project. We have also commissioned a draft business plan on this project which we have also made it public in keeping with the ethos of transparency.

Originally, as all of us know, we had intended to end the public consultations in December last year, however, we all know that on December 5, 2013, the country lost our former president Nelson Mandela, resulting in us having to change our plans.

As we speak, we have decided to extend the period of public consultation until the 14th of February this year. We also want to ensure that by the end of February, 2014 we will have a reworked business plan on the project.

We are also in the process of commissioning a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the site. The proximity of the site to the World Heritage Site and the sensitivity of the Drakensberg landscape call for the development of the EIA. The department has thus met with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the National Department of Tourism and the National Department of Environmental Affairs to discuss the project, its implications to the World Heritage Site and the EIA process. At this juncture we want to stress that the actual site of the proposed project is not part of the World Heritage Site.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as the custodians of the Maloti Drakensberg World Heritage Site has pledged its support for the project and have committed in assisting in the EIA process by forming part of the steering committee and also providing advisory services. The National Department of Environment Affairs as being entrusted by UNESCO in overseeing the sustainable functioning of the World Heritage Sites in South Africa has also been engaged. As much as the envisaged project is outside of the World Heritage Site, the department was advised that UNESCO has to be notified of the project and that the UNESCO criterion on EIAs taken into consideration when developing the Terms of Reference for the IEA.

We are constantly in contact with the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism at national level to apprise them of the developments and seek their advice.

The EIA process is planned to commence in March this year. Our Tourism Development Unit is in the process of finalizing the Terms of Reference with the assistance and guidance of the National Department of Environmental Affairs, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Provincial Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, Trade and Investment KZN and Tourism KwaZulu-Natal.

Last week Friday, we met with the Minister of Tourism from Lesotho, Ms Radebe, and the MEC for Economic Development and Tourism from the province of Free State, Mr. Zwane, who all gave their unqualified support to the project. In particular, we undertook to assist the government of Lesotho to conduct its own feasibility study into the possibilities of extending the Cable Way 5km into the Lesotho territory which is still part of the Drakensberg mountain range. At this meeting we further agreed that a technical committee incorporating representatives from Lesotho and the Free State should be set up to identify core issues of partnership and also to advise the political principals on developments around the project. Further, we will broaden the consultation process to include Lesotho and the Free State. As part of the discussion we also agreed that the province of Free State will prioritise the issue of the rehabilitation of the R74 road which is critical for the success of the project.

Ladies and Gentlemen, while all these processes are continuing we want to start a process of market testing before the end of February this year. We will also appoint a project developer whose responsibility is to steer the project and also help us look for a strategic partner in the project. Some of the options we are mulling over are whether to go on an open tender process or to embark on a limited tender process. This process will go simultaneously with the environmental impact assessment. We hope that by the end of August or September we would have found our strategic partner.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have no doubt that this project does not only have the potential to change the tourism landscape of this province, but that it could be the biggest development yet to catalyze the tourism scene in the province. In an intensely competitive global tourism environment only destinations which constantly reinvent themselves will be able to hold their own. As all of us know, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization international tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2013 reaching a record 1,087 billion. According to the organization's forecast, international arrivals will increase by 4% to 4.5% in 2014 and the long term forecast is that international arrivals will increase by 3.8% between this year and 2020. This, therefore, means that as a destination we have to think of innovative ways of ensuring that the province of KwaZulu-Natal is able to benefit from the growth of the global tourism sector. We have no doubt that this project, the Drakensberg Cable Car will be a fillip for the province's tourism's fortunes.

I thank you