

**Remarks by the MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Mr Michael
Mabuyakhulu, on the occasion of the presentation of the Cable Car Feasibility
Study, 26 July 2013**

Programme Director;

The Mayor of Ukhahlamba Municipality, His Worship Councillor Sibeko;

**The Mayor of UThukela District Municipality, Her worship Councillor
Mazibuko;**

Amakhosi present today;

Dignitaries Present;

Ladies and gentlemen;

All protocol observed.

On behalf of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, we wish to express our sincere delight for being part of this occasion where we are meeting to present the findings of the feasibility study for a project which we have no doubt that it will dramatically change the tourism landscape of this province.

Today can be described as the commencement of a long trek, a journey which, upon culmination, would enable us to look back with a sense of accomplishment and pride at having played a part in harnessing the economic potential of the Okhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site.

Additionally, we would have also lent a hand towards successfully nurturing a working relationship between all the stakeholders involved in this project.

Programme Director, we have no doubt that this project, the Drakensberg Cable Car, has the potential to turn this area into a crown in the jewel of our tourism products and 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.

Programme Director, when we first mooted the idea of developing a cable-car which would straddle the KwaZulu-Natal, the Free-State and Lesotho parts of the majestic Drakensberg mountain range, it was precisely our intention to further elevate the tourism potential of this area. Critically, we have always understood the fact that while we need to develop the economic potential of this area, we need to strike a delicate balance between environmental preservation and the potential economic fortunes that will accrue out of this project.

At this juncture, Programme Director, it is proper to recap on how this project came about. As many would recall, this initiative is part of seven projects which were identified as game changers for the province's tourism fortunes by the KwaZulu-Natal Natal Tourism Master Plan which was adopted by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Cabinet in 2012.

The other six areas under the Master Plan include:

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

Accordingly, we chose this area owing to the fact that it is not only one of the world's breathtaking natural wonders, but that it has the potential of further enhancing the competitiveness of the Province with regard to adventure tourism.

As statistics attest, no less than 135,000 tourists visited the Northern Berg area last year and a further 41,000 tourists visited the Golden Gate National Park which is in the vicinity of the Drakensberg.

Indeed, this sentiment is echoed by lessons from elsewhere across the globe where cable cars have been hailed for attracting tourists and bolstering the economy.

Programme Director, in India for instance, where they have introduced a cable car concept not dissimilar to ours in the Kashmir mountain range, they have witnessed a rapid upsurge in tourist numbers as a remarkable economic figures.

It is estimated that since the Kashmir cable car became operational, the region has achieved an additional turnover of \$ 5,490,990.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this pointedly suggests that indeed the construction of the Cable Car in this part of the province could add further impetus to an already existing tourism base.

The project will serve as a catalytic project to attract more international visitors to the Drakensberg region and provide a magnet to a host of other experiences and attractions in the area. The project will also provide an opportunity to link the central and northern Drakensberg tourism nodes. The development of the project will immensely contribute to the GDP of the province as well as that of the country.

Programme Director, we believe that the proposed Cable Car will further enhance visitor experience, achieve geographical spread in terms of tourism product development and unlock opportunities not only for investors but also for the surrounding communities in terms of job creation, employment opportunities and ignite local entrepreneurial spirit.

As all of us know, the National Department of Tourism through the National Tourism Sector Strategy has prioritized domestic tourism as a key driver for tourism growth in the country hence a needs assessment is being undertaken to enhance tourism products around world heritage sites. Furthermore, the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism Master Plan calls for the identification and stimulation of development for key tourism products in an effort to increase visitor numbers to the province.

Also, one of the key government priorities is rural development.

In this regard, it is paramount that the provincial government looks at initiatives that are based in rural areas in order to uplift the livelihoods of the local communities and the broader citizens of the province.

This project seeks to achieve this in a number of ways, through

- Local Economic Development
- Job creation
- Employment opportunities
- Entrepreneurial Opportunities
- Economic node development and
- Promoting regional integration through linkages with Lesotho, Free State Province as well as the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Park

Programme director, one of government's mandates is to create an enabling and conducive environment for tourism to flourish. It is against this backdrop that the Department has commissioned the development of a feasibility study for the Drakensberg Cable Car to investigate the viability of the project thus creating investment platform and opportunities. We have done this precisely because we have a responsibility to develop the economy of our province and make it competitive. Pointedly, our investment into this project is aimed at ensuring that the people of this region, whom we have the privilege to lead, benefit from any development that might happen in this area. Our investment into this venture is not only to grow the tourism industry in this area but to ensure the local community benefits.

Programme director, UKhahlamba Drakensberg Mountain is one of the two UNESCO World Heritage sites found in KwaZulu- Natal. The mountain range, standing at 3, 482 metres, is the highest in South Africa and offers incredible natural beauty. It offers visitors spectacular views, and rich historical value, and is considered one of South Africa's most popular natural attractions. With this being stated, the Drakensberg still lacks much needed development to entice visitors to the Northern Drakensberg area.

The development of the proposed Cable Car will also enhance linkages with Maloti-Drakensberg Transfontier Park and the Maloti-Drakensberg Route which serves as a catalytic project linking KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. Furthermore, the development will cement viable linkages with the Free State province thus opening up much needed tourist traffic flow between the two provinces.

It must also be mentioned that this is a catalytic project that government is going to work on together with private sector.

As all of us know, the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in KwaZulu-Natal stipulates that tourism must be government led, private sector driven and community based. The private sector should therefore own and drives tourism. Public-Private Partnerships that are led by governments are increasingly recognized as solutions for strategic alliance that produce positive results.

Partnerships are particularly important in a global world, where traditional boundaries between what is seen as public versus private responsibilities have become increasingly blurred and effective partnerships can help address some of our most pressing challenges.

It is now accepted that governments can no longer manage social and economic issues alone, the private sector has a wider social responsibility. We therefore call upon private sector to join hands with government in making this project a success.

Furthermore, it must be emphasized that the Department together with its stakeholders will subject itself to the principles of sustainable development and responsible tourism practices. Thus the environmental issues together with social implications will be duly considered to ensure that the development aligns itself to the relevant and applicable development policy prescripts.

In conclusion, we would like to share with you the words of wisdom from Alice Walker and I quote: “Helped are those who create anything at all, for they shall relive the thrill of their own conception and realize a partnership in the creation of the universe that keeps them responsible and cheerful”.

With these few words, it is my pleasure to call upon a representative from Graham and Muller to share with us the findings of the feasibility study.

I THANK YOU

