



MINISTRY

**HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

REMARKS BY THEMBI SIMELANE

MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, MP

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INAUGURAL WESTERN CAPE MINISTERIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
ROUNDTABLE**

30 JULY 2026

CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE, CAPE TOWN

Programme Director;

Honourable Tertuis Simmers, Western Cape Minister of Infrastructure;

Members of the Executive Council;

Representatives of national, provincial, and local government;

Leaders from development finance institutions, the private sector, academia and professional bodies;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this inaugural Western Cape Ministerial Infrastructure Roundtable.

This Roundtable is timely. Infrastructure is the foundation upon which economic growth, social development and human dignity are built. It lowers the cost of doing business, improves access to markets and services, connects people to opportunity and strengthens the resilience of communities.

South Africa is confronted by a multi-complex, multi-layered and multi-context combination of slow economic growth, high unemployment, poverty, spatial inequality, infrastructure constraints, rapid urbanisation and climate risk. These challenges cannot be addressed through isolated projects or fragmented planning. They require a shared long-term vision,

coordinated investment and disciplined execution across the entire infrastructure value chain.

The value of this Roundtable will therefore not lie only in the projects discussed today. Its enduring value must be the establishment of a sustained platform through which government, development finance institutions, business, researchers, professionals and communities can jointly remove constraints, improve project readiness, mobilise investment and accelerate delivery.

AN INTEGRATED INFRASTRUCTURE APPROACH

The Western Cape Infrastructure Framework, Strategy and Implementation Plan 2050 provide an important foundation for this engagement. Together, these instruments articulate a long-term vision, identify strategic priorities, and seek to translate those priorities into a single integrated infrastructure pipeline.

That approach recognises that infrastructure is more than a collection of physical assets. It is an instrument for expanding economic opportunity,

advancing spatial transformation, strengthening environmental sustainability, and giving practical expression to human dignity.

This perspective is particularly important for the human settlements sector.

Cabinet approved the 2024 White Paper for Human Settlements in December 2024.

The White Paper represents an important shift from a narrow focus on the delivery of housing units towards the creation of integrated, sustainable, and equitable human settlements.

A house does not, on its own, constitute a sustainable human settlement. It must be located on suitable and well-positioned land and connected to water, sanitation, electricity, roads, public transport, schools, health facilities, digital infrastructure and economic opportunity.

Similarly, land without the necessary planning approvals, bulk services, environmental authorisations, and transport connections remains potential rather than delivery.

Simply put: a housing project without bulk infrastructure is a promise waiting to fail.

We continue to see the consequences of projects initiated without sufficient alignment between housing, water, sanitation, energy, mobility and social infrastructure. Projects become blocked or delayed; costs escalate; contractors leave sites; communities lose confidence; and government struggles to meet its delivery commitments.

Nationally, we are implementing a strategy to unblock more than 200 human settlements projects. The lesson is clear: integrated and sustainable human settlements depend on our ability to coordinate land, planning, infrastructure, funding, regulation and implementation around a common outcome.

CERTAINTY, PROJECT READINESS AND INVESTMENT

This coordination is also essential to mobilising investment because investment follows certainty.

Investors and development finance partners require clarity on land rights, statutory approvals, infrastructure capacity, procurement processes,

governance arrangements, funding models and implementation timelines. Communities are entitled to the same certainty: when construction will begin, what will be delivered and how the development will improve their quality of life.

The Western Cape's Single Integrated Infrastructure Project Pipeline therefore presents an important opportunity. But an integrated pipeline must be more than a consolidated list of proposed projects. It must provide a credible account of each project's readiness, infrastructure requirements, financing arrangements, implementation capacity and intended developmental impact.

For every Human Settlements project, the pipeline should enable us to answer a set of practical questions:

- Is the land legally available and suitably located?
- Does the project align with national, provincial and municipal spatial-development frameworks?
- Have land-use and environmental approvals been secured?
- Is there sufficient bulk water, sanitation, energy and transport capacity?
- Is the project designed and ready for procurement?
- What public funding has been confirmed, and what financing gap remains?

- What role can development finance institutions and the private sector play?
- Which institution is responsible for resolving each outstanding constraint?
- What social, economic, and spatial outcomes will the investment produce?

These questions help us distinguish between conceptual projects, projects under preparation, procurement-ready projects and projects that are genuinely finance-ready. Without this distinction, a pipeline may create the appearance of progress without providing a credible route to implementation.

Our plans must be credible, fundable, and implementable. They must demonstrate how allocations will translate into infrastructure, how infrastructure will unlock development and how development will produce visible and tangible improvements in communities.

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The integrated approach reflected in the Western Cape strategy is significant because it treats human settlements as part of a wider infrastructure and economic-development system. It shifts the focus from measuring progress solely by the number of houses built.

We must also measure whether our investments:

- improve access to water, sanitation and energy;
- connected households to employment and public transport;

- provision of access to schools, health facilities and community services;
- support for local enterprise and employment;
- strengthen security of tenure;
- reduce households' transport and energy costs;
- improve climate resilience; and
- contribute to spatial transformation.

Strategically located human settlements investments can boost the construction sector, support local factories and suppliers, generate jobs, grow municipal revenues, as well as attract additional private sector funding.

Well-located human settlements investment stimulates the construction sector, supports local manufacturers and suppliers, creates jobs, broadens municipal revenue bases, and attracts further private investment. Human settlements development is therefore not only social infrastructure; it is an essential component of inclusive economic growth.

The scale of demand remains substantial. The most widely cited sector estimates place the national housing backlog at between approximately 2.1 million and 2.4 million units, while approximately 3.4 million households are registered on the National Housing Needs Register. The Western Cape is among the provinces facing the greatest pressure, driven by urbanisation, population growth, household formation and migration.

Metropolitan municipalities and intermediate cities experience particularly high demand for affordable housing because they are centres of employment and economic activity.

The Somerlife Social Housing Project in Somerset West, which I launched in May this year, illustrates both the opportunity and the scale of need. The project is expected to deliver just over 1,000 well-located social housing units, yet the first phase attracted applications far exceeding the number of available units.

The message is unmistakable: people do not require shelter alone. They require affordable, well-located housing connected to transport, economic opportunity and functioning public services.

At the same time, we must confront a constrained fiscal environment. This requires us to use public resources strategically, diversify our delivery instruments and strengthen partnerships.

SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION AND WELL-LOCATED LAND

Spatial transformation must remain central to infrastructure and human settlements investment.

The spatial form of our towns and cities continues to reflect the legacy of apartheid planning. Too many lower-income households remain located far from employment, transport, education and social amenities. Human settlements investment must therefore be directed towards well-located land and areas where it can restructure towns and cities.

Earlier this month, the Constitutional Court handed down a judgment in the Tafelberg matter. The Court set aside the disposal of the well-located public property and affirmed that location is integral to government's constitutional obligations in relation to access to adequate housing and equitable access to land.

The judgment also reinforced the importance of meaningful public participation and cooperative governance, including consultation between spheres of government before strategically located public land is disposed of.

The judgment does not mean that every parcel of public land must be used for social housing. It does, however, require government to treat well-located public land as more than a commercial asset and to assess its potential contribution to affordable housing, spatial justice and the broader public interest.

From a national Human Settlements perspective, three immediate priorities should inform the infrastructure pipeline.

- First, well-located land: Land acquisition and release must be linked from the outset to infrastructure capacity, spatial planning, public transport, social facilities and economic opportunity.
- Second, the completion and unblocking of existing projects: Blocked projects tie up public resources, increase costs and erode public confidence. We must identify the specific causes of delay, whether land, bulk services, planning approvals, procurement,

contractor performance, community disputes or funding, and assign clear institutional responsibility for resolving them.

- Third, bulk infrastructure: Human Settlements grants cannot independently carry the full cost of the water, sanitation, electricity, roads and transport infrastructure required to unlock development. We need integrated investment plans that bring together human settlements grants, municipal capital budgets, sector departments, utilities, development finance institutions and private investment.

DIVERSIFIED DELIVERY AND BLENDED FINANCE

South Africa cannot meet its housing needs through a single delivery model. Our response must include fully subsidised housing, serviced sites, incremental housing, informal settlement upgrading, social and affordable rental housing, First Home Finance, mixed-income and mixed-use development, and the release of well-located land for household-led development.

Different programmes respond to different household needs and require different financing and institutional arrangements.

The state cannot, on its own, resolve the scale and complexity of the housing and infrastructure challenge. Partnerships are indispensable. They must, however, be structured around clear public outcomes, transparency, value for money and appropriate risk allocation.

Public funding should be used strategically to prepare projects, provide essential infrastructure and crowd in finance from development finance institutions, commercial banks, and responsible private developers.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION

The climate crisis adds urgency to this work. The Western Cape has experienced droughts, floods, fires and other extreme weather events that have affected communities and damaged infrastructure.

Climate risk must therefore be integrated into land identification, settlement planning, infrastructure design, building technologies and municipal asset management. We must avoid locating vulnerable households on floodplains, unstable land, and other high-risk sites.

We must improve water and energy efficiency, strengthen drainage systems, protect ecological infrastructure and ensure that new developments are designed for future climate conditions.

Innovation is not an optional addition to human settlements delivery. It is essential to protecting lives, improving value for money, and securing the long-term sustainability of our investments.

A PRACTICAL WORK PROGRAMME

The constitutional mandate for human settlements is shared across the spheres of government. None of these responsibilities can succeed in isolation.

Communities do not experience government as separate constitutional spheres. They experience whether land is released, whether services are

available, whether projects are completed and whether development connects them to opportunity.

I would therefore welcome a practical Human Settlements work programme emerging from this Roundtable. Such a programme should:

- identify a focused portfolio of priority human settlements and associated bulk infrastructure projects;
- align those projects with national, provincial, and municipal spatial priorities;
- jointly resolve land, planning, infrastructure and regulatory constraints;
- coordinate the participation of the HDA, NHFC, SHRA and other relevant entities;
- strengthen municipal project preparation and implementation capacity;
- develop credible blended-finance propositions;
- establish a shared project-readiness and risk-monitoring system; and
- report regularly on decisions taken, constraints resolved, and infrastructure delivered.

This would enable the Western Cape pipeline to connect more effectively with national human settlements grants, the Medium-Term Development Plan and other public and private investment instruments.

CONCLUSION

Programme Director,

Earlier this month, at the United Nations review of the New Urban Agenda, South Africa reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements.

This Roundtable gives us an opportunity to translate that commitment into viable projects that are properly planned, prepared, financed and implemented.

The measure of success will not be the number of project announcements or the quality of our discussions. It will be our ability to move:

- from commitments to implementation;
- from land acquisition to serviced, well-located development;
- from allocations to completed infrastructure;
- from fragmented projects to integrated settlements; and
- from programmes to visible improvements in communities.

Let us use this inaugural Roundtable to build a lasting partnership based on one integrated pipeline, shared priorities, transparent governance, and clear accountability.

Through collaboration, innovation and disciplined execution, we can turn infrastructure into an instrument of spatial justice, inclusive economic growth and human dignity and improve the quality of lives of our people, not only in the Western Cape, but across South Africa.

I thank you.