

REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, REV. MUSA ZONDI

**BOARD OF AIRLINES REPRESENTATIVES OF SOUTH AFRICA (BARSA)
SUMMIT – EVENING COCKTAIL NETWORKING FUNCTION**

5 MARCH 2026

ZIMBALI CAPITAL RESORT

Honourable Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Mr. Thamsanqa Ntuli;

Minister of National Department of Transport, Ms. Barbara Creecy;

His Worship Mayor of KwaDukuza Local Municipality, Cllr. Sidduzo Gumede;

His Worship Mayor of Ilembe District Municipality, Cllr. Thobani Shandu;

Chairperson of BARSA, Ms. Bali Mabena;

CEO of BARSA, Mr. George Mothema;

Distinguished airline and aviation executives;

Captains of industry;

Leaders from government and tourism fraternities;

Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen;

Good evening!

It is both an honour and a pleasure to welcome you to KwaZulu-Natal, a province where opportunity takes flight. Tonight, while we enjoy this cocktail gathering, we are here more importantly to celebrate partnerships.

We recognise that aviation is not just about aircraft and airspace, it is about connection, growth, and shared prosperity.

As the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in the province, KwaZulu-Natal stands at strategic crossroads -geographically, economically and culturally.

We are home to:

- Africa's busiest port in Durban;
- A growing logistics and manufacturing base;
- A vibrant and diverse tourism sector -berg, beach, bush and cultural heritage;
- And a young, dynamic population ready to participate in the global economy.

At the heart of this ecosystem lies King Shaka International Airport - our world-class gateway to Africa and the world. The airport is encompassed by Dube Tradeport Special Economic Zone under the leadership of CEO Mr. Hamish Erskine.

Both these strategic joint growth points are also envisioned as an aviation-linked commercial development in the province known as the Durban Aerotropolis.

Since its opening, King Shaka International Airport has transformed the way our province connects. For us, it is more than an airport; it is the anchor of the Durban Aerotropolis - a long-term vision integrating aviation, trade, tourism and investment.

As global aviation evolves toward sustainability, digitisation, and operational efficiency, this airport, given its proximity to the port including the Cruise Ship Terminal and road network, is positioned not as a legacy facility, but as a future-ready platform.

As the Board of Airline Representatives of South Africa, you understand better than anyone that connectivity drives demand and demand drives sustainability.

Aviation and Tourism, are therefore *'two wings of the same aircraft'*

KwaZulu-Natal offers a tourism portfolio few destinations can match:

- The warm 600km Indian Ocean coastline;
- The dramatic peaks of the Drakensberg Mountain Range;
- The wildlife experiences of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi and iSimangaliso and many other big-5 safari game reserves;
- Cultural heritage rooted in the Zulu Kingdom; and
- World-class conferencing and sporting events.

Yet none of these matter without seats on an aircraft.

A direct route is not merely a schedule entry. It is jobs created. It is SMMEs supported. It is hotel beds filled. It seals business deals. It is investment confidence strengthened. When an airline commits capacity to a destination, it sends a powerful signal to global markets: And in this regard, *KwaZulu Natal is open for business.*

We recognise that airlines operate in a challenging environment, rising operating costs, fleet pressures, regulatory complexity, infrastructure constraints, data limitations, visa requirements, safety & security, trade tariffs, and bilateral agreements, amongst many other challenges.

As provincial government, our role is not to control, but to facilitate. We have branded ourselves as Durban Direct, a conglomeration of individual entities to drive and grow air route connectivity as a collective. This body is committed to supporting route development initiatives, aligning tourism and destination marketing with airline strategies and working collaboratively with national departments and regulators to promoting ease of access for international travellers and thereby strengthening the Aerotropolis ecosystem around King Shaka International Airport.

Through collaboration with organizations such as BARSA, we can identify practical solutions that improve competitiveness and stimulate growth.

Airlines require more than inspiration, they require data and viability.

KwaZulu-Natal offers:

- a) **Strong Domestic Base** - Durban remains one of South Africa's most travelled domestic routes, ensuring feeder traffic for international expansion as one of the key 'legs' within what's called the 'Golden Triangle', the popular link between Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.
- b) **Untapped International Potential** - There is significant opportunity for direct connections into Africa. Growth into Middle East has shown good results for us and there is strong appetite for onward connectivity to other destinations. The province has robust trade linkages to Europe & Asia, we cater for the corporate potential travellers, we host many large sporting events and also home to a large diaspora population who always find a way home.
- c) **Cargo Opportunities** - With proximity to the Port of Durban and manufacturing clusters, air cargo growth is a strategic opportunity, particularly for time-sensitive exports. Dube Tradeport operates its Air Cargo Facility out of King Shaka International Airport, they can fill the belly with fresh perishables, automotive components, pharmaceuticals, industrial machinery, live animals, electronics and many other items.
- d) **Tourism Growth Strategy Alignment** - National tourism growth targets align directly with enhanced air access — and KwaZulu-Natal is positioned to absorb and distribute increased arrivals efficiently. Therefore, I can say King Shaka International Airport is 'Built for Growth' within our diverse leisure-focused tourism products that we offer.

Another asset not often spoken about – The province holds a number of regional or secondary airports which includes the likes of Richards Bay Airport, Margate Airport, Pietermaritzburg Airport, Mkhuze Airport and Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi Airport. This plays a vital role in our broader economic ecosystem. In many global markets, aviation success is built not on a single airport, but on an integrated system.

We are actively strengthening our KZN Regional Airport network for better charter, leisure and regional scheduled services that offer niche and undiscovered market destinations to those more adventurous travellers. For airlines, this creates a layered opportunity, not just point-to-point connectivity, but network depth within a province of 12 million people.

My portfolio also includes Environmental Management. Therefore, we can say KwaZulu-Natal is also committed to environmental stewardship. As the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, we recognise that aviation growth must align with sustainability. We support the advent of utilising sustainable aviation fuel, ensure responsible tourism practices, biodiversity and conservation in conjunction with eco-tourism, climate-responsive infrastructure planning. Growth and responsibility are not opposing forces, they are partners in long-term success.

Distinguished guests, the future of aviation in South Africa will not be shaped in isolation. It will be shaped in rooms like this, through dialogue, transparency, and shared ambition. We invite you to see King Shaka International Airport not simply as a destination airport, but as a strategic hub within a growing regional economy.

Let us move beyond discussions of potential and convert them into schedules, frequencies and partnerships. As KwaZulu-Natal, we are ready to partner, support, co-invest and build viable, sustainable routes together.

As you enjoy this evening, and the warm hospitality of our province, I encourage you to experience KwaZulu-Natal not only as aviation professionals, but as travellers. Feel the coastline, engage with our culture, see the investment opportunities and imagine the passenger demand. Because when you choose to grow connectivity into KwaZulu-Natal, you are not simply adding a route, you are connecting people to possibility.

We are grateful to the BARSAs team for choosing KZN to host this event.

On behalf of the Government of KwaZulu-Natal, I thank you for your presence, your partnership, and your commitment to shaping the future of aviation.

Let us take flight — together.

Thank you.