SA OPENS SOLAR-POWERED AIRPORT

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Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa has congratulated the Department of Transport on the official opening of South Africa's - and Africa's - first solar-powered airport in George.

Transport Minister Dipuo Peters launched the project that is spearheaded by the Airports Company of South Africa (ACSA) at a special ceremony in the city on Friday.

Most of the airport's energy needs will be supplied through 200 square meters of photo-voltaic (PV) panels. PV technology generates electricity from solar radiation providing a renewable and clean energy source

In its first phase, 750kw will be generated through this clean energy source, which is sufficient to meet the airport's daily needs. This is expected to increase with plant capacity in future.

"This ground-breaking initiative shows that government is well on track in transitioning South Africa

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to a low-carbon, inclusive, resource efficient and climate resilient economy and society," the Minister said.

The Department of Transport is one of the key departments driving South Africa's Green Economy Strategy. Green transport initiatives form part of government's strategy to shift the economy towards cleaner industries and sectors with low environmental impact

"What has been achieved at George Airport is also the result of successful collaboration in the green economy sector between government, entities such as Airports Company South Africa (ACSA), and the private sector.

"The new solar-powered airport will rely on cost-effective, renewable sources to generate energy, and simultaneously support South Africa's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets," says Minister Molewa.

This is in alignment with South Africa's National Climate Change Response Policy whose objective is to effectively manage climate change impacts through interventions that build and sustain South Africa's social, economic and environmental resilience and emergency response capacity.

The 2016 Budget by Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan earlier this week highlighted that South Africa continues to invest heavily in the green economy.

"We have already made significant headway in the uptake of renewable energy, greening our public transport system, and promoting energy efficiency in government facilities, to name but a few," Minister Molewa said.

In the transport sector, initiatives are underway to shifting freight from road to rail, and introducing electricity regenerative braking in locomotives. This is already saving close to 0.5 Mt of CO2 annually.

In addition, 14 000 taxis are being converted to compressed natural gas, with an expected emission reduction of 23 – 27% per vehicle.

"Investment such as at George Airport, must give momentum to other private and public sector entities to reconfigure and retrofit their existing infrastructure in support of more sustainable energy consumption patterns," Minister Molewa said.

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