

uThukela's seven Bell TLBs boost service delivery

The uThukela District Municipality in northern KwaZulu-Natal covers a very large district of some 11 500 square kilometres and has as its vision to provide a stable, sustainable and prosperous district with committed servants who serve with excellence in governance, service delivery and economic development.

And when it comes to service delivery, the uThukela District Municipality has turned to a truly South African brand to assist it in achieving that goal.

Founded in 2000 during the time of transforming South Africa into a new dispensation, the uThukela District Municipality houses around 669 000 people in over 147 000 households, as per the census figures of 2011.

"All these people live in five municipalities, one district management area and probably around 80 small villages," says Jabulani Mkhonza, Communications Manager for the uThukela District Municipality. "To give you an idea of the vast size of the area under our mandate, we have 1 820km of paved roads and over 8 100km of gravel roads."

"Our main focus in terms of infrastructure and service delivery is water and sanitation and this sees us supplying water to our citizens from water treatment plants via a system of pipes but also managing sewage to treatment plants and storm water," he adds. "Roads are maintained by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport and some local municipalities."

Mondise Sithole is currently responsible for the uThukela District Municipality's Fleet Management, overseeing a vast fleet of vehicles and yellow machines numbering 135 and comprising utility vehicles, 16 000 litre water tankers, tractors and trailers and some new Bell 315SK 4x4 Tractor Loader Backhoes (TLBs).

The Municipality used to outsource the services for water tankers and TLBs but often found that the equipment was not reliable and this had a negative effect on its service delivery to the citizens. The Municipality then decided to purchase seven TLBs, and this has significantly reduced costs and improved efficiency.

Communications Manager, Jabulani Mkhonza (left) and Mondise Sithole, who is responsible for Fleet Management, with a map of the uThukela District Municipality.



Mondise points out that although he is not privy to all the criteria the Municipality's supply chain management set, he would think that price, reputation, local content and an established dealer network to ensure proper maintenance would all have played a role in selecting an appropriate original equipment manufacturer (OEM).

According to Fleet Management, the Municipality is very happy to see that Bell Equipment, with their Bell 315SK 4x4 TLB, was the preferred and successful supplier as this is a machine which has certainly made its mark on the local market. The Municipality took delivery of seven of these machines in July 2015 and has not looked back.

The seven Bell 315SK 4x4 TLBs have been deployed across the length and breadth of the uThukela District Municipality's area and attend to digging up water pipes that need repair, digging and backfilling trenches for water supply and sewage lines and drainage ditches.

"With the current drought, we need to repair any water supply lines very quickly or else our citizens will suffer but having these Bell TLBs available all the time is a real bonus. Their subsequent utilisation is high because of that," Mondise explains. "Even though the machines are still under their standard warranty, we've happily had no technical issues and their mechanical availability is top notch."

Mondise is keen to point out that operators adhere to strict pre-startup and post-operation checklists and believes this will add to the longevity of the fleet of Bell TLBs. "With any machine or piece of earthmoving equipment, downtime has a negative effect on production or in our case, service delivery," he says.

"Despite the fact that our fleet of Bell machines is still new, we've had no such issues and we put this down to the quality design and build of the machine, and to our operators taking care of the equipment. We also believe this care adds to the very reasonable fuel burn of less than 8 litres an hour."

We spoke to one of the uThukela District Municipality's TLB operators at a site where water lines were being repaired. "I found that the Bell TLB is really easy to operate as the cab is roomy, the all-round visibility is better and the controls are all within easy reach and very smooth," smiled Excellent Cele.

According to Mondise, Bell Equipment offered basic training to the Municipality's TLB operators at the handover of the machines. The Municipality is however considering further advanced training from Bell Equipment for its operators and is contemplating a maintenance contract for the fleet.

"We believe we did the correct thing in buying our own fleet of Bell TLBs as our citizens see we operate a locally produced machine, which in the long run adds value to our prime goal of sustained service delivery," he says. "As our population grows and demand for especially potable water grows, we may need to increase our fleet and Bell Equipment, with their excellent machines and legendary backup service, will certainly be foremost in our minds," says Mondise.



Excellent Cele behind the controls of one of the Municipality's new Bell 315SK TLBs.