REMARKS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA AT THE SMART CITIES LAB, 1 OCTOBER 2025

- Programme Director: Dr Bob Wekesa, Director of African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University.
- Acting MEC for Infrastructure Development and COGTA in Gauteng: Ms Tasmeen Motara,
- Mayor of the City of Johannesburg: Cllr Dada Morero
- Prof. Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyana, School of Architecture and Planning, Wits University
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Let me start by conveying my appreciation for inviting me to this crucial gathering to share insights on how we can build cities of the future. We are grateful of this opportunity.

As eThekwini Municipality, we are actively pursuing smart city initiatives to transform Durban into a connected, efficient, and sustainable urban environment.

Over the past decade, we have laid a comprehensive fibre-optic network across the city, connecting municipal buildings and enabling high-speed broadband access for businesses and communities.

Building on this foundation, we are implementing key projects like the Metroconnect Project – expanding our core network to support e-government services and public internet access. We have also rolled out free Wi-Fi in public libraries and community halls, fostering digital inclusion and e-learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we regard technology is central to enhancing service delivery and attracting investment in Durban. We strongly believe that a defining characteristic of a smart city is its use of technology to anticipate challenges and deliver scientific solutions. For this reason, we are currently exploring the Internet of Things (IoT) to manage critical

infrastructure like water and electricity networks, helping us pre-empt issues impacting service delivery.

Creating an environment conducive to business is also vital in our smart city journey. We are proud to have started a smart policing programme leveraging cutting-edge technology to gather data that helps us proactively combat crime and safeguard citizens and investments.

Most importantly, collaboration is key to driving digital transformation. We are currently working with academic institutions and the private sector to tap into their expertise and share best practices. We are also forging partnerships with global cities focusing on smart transport systems, urban planning, and digital governance. Our aim is to learn from pioneers in the field. A notable partnership is with the Open Cities Lab on developing a Data strategy for eThekwini Municipality.

What is encouraging is that our efforts to drive the smart city programme are gaining recognition. This year we received a Municipal Innovation Recognition Awards (MIRA) for using innovative technology to improving service delivery. Recently, we won an innovation award on climate action

for the development of the Westown Smart City at the BRICS Urban Innovation Awards held in Moscow.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in closing, we look forward to discussing the challenges we will need to navigate in building smart cities – including skills gaps, ICT infrastructure constraints, and legislative environments. I trust this engagement will shed light on how we collectively overcome these hurdles.

Thank you.