

A Monumental Arrival: Second Tunnel Boring Machine Reaches Lesotho for LHWP Phase II



On 5 July 2025, a sense of national pride filled the air at the Caledonspoort border post as a convoy of 15 abnormal load trucks crossed into Lesotho carrying the main components of the second Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) for Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). The arrival of this massive piece of equipment marks a critical milestone in the construction of the 38-kilometre Polihali Transfer Tunnel, which will connect Polihali Dam to Katse Dam—strengthening water security in the region and propelling Lesotho’s development goals forward.

Like its predecessor, Khoiti ea Ngoaha Kholo 2, the new TBM will soon be named through a national competition, once again inviting the public to take part in shaping a piece of history.

The TBM’s global journey began on 3 May 2025, when its components departed Shanghai, China, aboard the Kong Que Song, a vessel specifically designed for transporting oversized cargo. After docking at Durban’s Maydon Wharf on 16 June, more than 100 components—including the massive cutterhead, main drive, and shields—were offloaded with meticulous precision. Coordinated efforts by port authorities, engineers, and logistics specialists ensured the equipment was ready for the demanding road trip ahead.

Beginning on 25 June, the heaviest parts were carefully loaded onto 15 abnormal load trucks for the cross-border leg of the journey. Each vehicle travelled under strict supervision, escorted by police and authorised through special permits along routes approved by traffic authorities in both South Africa and Lesotho. Lesotho-based Orange Primate Logistics, in collaboration with Contractor KKM, spearheaded the convoy through the mountainous terrains of Mokhotlong and Leribe. The effort reflects LHDA’s ongoing commitment to empowering local businesses and building capacity within the country. Harsh winter conditions—including heavy snowfall and black ice—delayed the convoy by up to three days, but through careful monitoring and a strong emphasis on safety, the heaviest components arrived safely at the Polihali site on 9 July. Lighter components continue to arrive under standard customs clearance procedures.

The border crossing itself became a symbolic moment of celebration. Representing the Minister of Natural Resources, Honourable Mhlomi Moleko, the Honourable Pitso Lesaoana, Minister of Gender, Youth and Social Development, officiated the occasion. He was joined by South African High Commissioner Constance Seoposengwe, South Africa's Chief Delegate to the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission (LHWC) Teboho Nkhahle, and Mr. Reetseng Molapo, representing LHDA Chief Executive Tente Tente. Members of the LHDA Board, LHWC, contractors, and local communities were also in attendance. The atmosphere was one of unity and shared achievement, recognising the TBM's arrival as more than a logistical triumph—it was a symbol of collaboration and forward momentum.

Manufactured by China's CCCC Tianhe and designed by Robbins of the United States, this double-shielded TBM is engineered to tackle the demanding basalt rock of Lesotho's landscape. Its role in constructing the Polihali Transfer Tunnel is vital. Once operational, the tunnel will increase the LHWP's water transfer capacity from 780 million to 1,270 million cubic metres annually—securing critical water supply to South Africa's Gauteng region and unlocking development potential for Lesotho.

Building on the public enthusiasm from the naming of Khoiti ea Ngoaha Kholo 2, LHDA will soon launch a nationwide competition to name this new machine, further embedding national pride into the project.

"This is a critical step toward realizing the Polihali Transfer Tunnel, a cornerstone of LHWP Phase II," said Mr. Reetseng Molapo. "The TBM's arrival is a testament to the resilience, expertise, and unity of everyone involved." As the TBM prepares to begin its work deep beneath Lesotho's mountains, it carries with it the promise of long-term benefit, regional cooperation, and the bold aspirations of a nation determined to shape its own future.

