

## Nelson Mandela Bay adds smart technology to its arsenal as it cracks down on surging crime



Police minister Senzo Mchunu and National police commissioner Fannie Masemola visited Nelson Mandela Bay and promised to restore peace in the metro. (Supplied/SAPS)

- **Nelson Mandela Bay will make use of smart technology in its fight against crime.**
- **The Shotspotter technology, which has been inactive for almost a year, will be reimplemented.**
- **CCTV cameras will be reactivated across the metro and there will be surveillance vehicles in every area, especially the crime hotspots.**

Nelson Mandela Bay is trying hard to restore its reputation as the Friendly City by curbing crime.

In its latest attempt, Nelson Mandela Bay's Safety and Security Directorate will now implement smart technology to assist in fighting crime.

Stag Mitchell, the MMC for safety and security, conceded that traditional methods of policing had not yet yielded the desired results.

He said capitalising on technology in fighting crime is a priority for the metro municipality. The Shotspotter technology, which has been inactive for almost a year, will therefore be reimplemented in the coming weeks.

A proactive plan is also in place to reactivate CCTV cameras across the metro and have surveillance vehicles in every area, especially the crime hotspots.

Mitchell said:

Working with the private sector, we need to be swift in ensuring that our smart tools are in place with well-capacitated personnel to fight crime effectively.

The Shotspotter technology was installed in Helenvale in 2017 to help curb gang-related crime and, at the time, it reduced the number of gang shootings in the metro's northern areas.

However, it hasn't been working since November last year when the contract expired, resulting in crime surging once again.

Nelson Mandela Bay has become notorious for kidnappings and gang-related murders, with the sound of gunshots a daily occurrence, especially in the northern areas of the metro.

Shotspotter was effective because it alerted the police when a gun was fired and pinpointed the crime's exact location, speeding up response times.

At the time of its implementation, the plan was to roll it out to other parts of the metro if the pilot project in Helenvale proved successful, but this fell by the wayside over the years.

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A Helenvale resident, Marlene Grootboom, said there was some solace when they knew the Shotspotter technology was working.

"It was a sense of comfort knowing that it was there. You were still wary and a little scared to be outside, but it made everything more bearable."

She added that crime patterns in the neighbourhood had significantly changed since it stopped working.

"Suddenly, the constant gunshots were back, and residents went back to feeling helpless," she said.

Gelvandale resident Quinton Arendse said he lacked faith in the metro's ability to reimplement Shotspotter.

He also does not believe they would ever come around to installing the CCTV cameras.

"I will believe it when I see it, but right now, I am way too sceptical," he said.

According to the plan submitted by the city's metro police commissioner, Andrew Moses, they will turn the tide against crime using smart technology, on-the-ground supported community policing, and the collaboration of the entire security cluster.

"The magnitude of what we face demands that we work smarter and closer with our communities. Working CCTV cameras, gunshot technology, mobile surveillance vehicles, biometric access, and metal detectors in businesses and offices are some of the many plans that we can implement," Moses said.

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He explained that the smart approach will only work if properly coordinated and well-resourced.

"In support of the smart efforts and the community policing on the ground, we need a good working Joint Operations Centre as a centre of coordination."

Moses added that he was pleased with the close cooperation and teamwork with the police.

"The deployments, including specialised units, will definitely make a difference."

Moses also emphasised that any policing activity would only work if the communities support the law enforcement structures.

"Community safety forums in all areas are critical. We need a strategy that will suffocate, isolate, and expose the criminals in our own communities."

He added that Mayor Gary van Niekerk was working alongside the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber on several crime-fighting initiatives, which will be announced soon.

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These initiatives follow Police Minister Senzo Mchunu's visit to Nelson Mandela Bay last week, during which he promised to restore peace in the Bay.

Mchunu said he had already deployed 301 additional police officers to the metro, who would be joined by other law-enforcement structures, such as the metro police and community policing forums, to control crime in the hotspot areas.

National police commissioner General Fannie Masemola also announced earlier this week that senior national-level detectives were deployed to Nelson Mandela Bay and Mthatha following Mchunu's visit to these two cities last week.

Both cities have been hotspots for crime, including gang violence, taxi violence, and kidnapping.

The additional team consists of three senior officials from organised crime, specialised operations, and intelligence units. These officers each head up their own teams.

The multidisciplinary teams had been tasked with preventing, combatting, investigating, and arresting those behind incidents of gang violence and extortion.