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Eastern Cape finance MEC Mthunzi Mvoko has thrown his weight behind a new smart academy that the Automotive Industry Development Centre hopes will revolutionise the automotive industry.

Mvoko attended a briefing at the offices of the automotive development centre in Port Elizabeth on Tuesday on the proposed Africa Smart Industrial Academy.

The centre hopes to see the 5000m² academy built by November 2021 next to China’s Baoji Automotive Group Co Ltd (BAIC) in the Coega Industrial Development Zone.

The academy will help in developing the necessary skills needed for the fourth industrial revolution.

But overall it will act as a catalyst in increasing the amount of locally produced components used in assembling vehicles, assisting new players in the market and also helping to grow existing companies.

This is in line with the government’s SA Automotive Masterplan 2035.

The automotive development centre is a wholly owned enterprise of the Eastern Cape Development Corporation and is mandated to assist the automobile industry to remain viable and become more globally competitive.

The briefing with Mvoko was led by the automotive centre’s board chair Weza Moss and CEO Hoosain Mahomed.

Moss said the automotive sector needed to position itself to contend with the impact of certain trends such as autonomous driving, digitisation and electrification.

"One of the major initiatives planned is the Africa Smart Industrial Academy in Port Elizabeth," he said.

Moss said the automotive development centre was working with VWSA, Jendamarsh, the department of trade and industry, the provincial government, academia and other international partners to launch the country’s first smart industrial academy.

"Access to cutting edge technology, research, training materials and support from our German partners and the international network of academies or similar centres around the globe will ensure the region secures jobs and growth by developing a highly skilled labour pool to deal with smart technologies," he said.

Mahomed said the academy would assist in meeting the goals of the SA Automotive Masterplan 2035.

"We want to increase local content in South African-assembled vehicles to 60% from 40%," he said.

He said various partners had already signed up, with VWSA and Mercedes-Benz SA acting as the anchor partners in the venture.

"The Deutsche Messe Technology Academy in Germany has also agreed to assist with the project."

The German academy operates worldwide and focuses on areas of technology that are transforming entire industries.

Mvoko described the proposal as “very exciting.”

“I can’t commit to anything now, but we will go to the premier (Oscar Mabuyane) and talk to him,” he said.

After the briefing, Moss said submissions for financing had been made to structures such as the government’s economic stimulus package and the department of trade and industry.