

Role of Transport Industry in Decongesting the Port of Durban

[Durban, South Africa, 05 August 2020] The transport industry has a critical role to play in supporting efforts to alleviate congestion at the Port of Durban and its surrounding road networks, which negatively impacts communities in and around the port's Bayhead Precinct.

So says the Chair of the multi-disciplinary Port of Durban Decongestion Task Team, which has been working with the transport industry to motivate for depots around the port to be in a position to operate 24 hours a day / seven days a week in line with port operating hours. Trucker compliance and training are another big focus.

Moshe Motlohi, General Manager at the Port of Durban, and chair of the task team of private and public sector entities, said, "In as much as the port is working 24/7, some of the businesses dependent on the port are not really geared towards that. Hence you will have these high peaks when everybody is trying to chase the narrow window that is called normal business hours. So, we have looked at how we can sensitise port users and make them aware of opportunities outside of these normal business hours. I'm happy to report that we are seeing positive results in this regard around truck volume smoothing."

In March Transnet Port Terminals piloted its truck booking system that predetermines the number of slots available in every hour and customers choose their preferred slots. Motlohi said the system has had a positive impact.

"We're beginning to flatten those high peaks and seeing increased utilisation of slots that would traditionally be off peak or after hours, which is encouraging. I hope that we will continue on this trajectory and get everybody to use those windows. Because if we do that, we will have transport companies and truckers realising that it is not necessary for them to come and queue for hours on Bayhead Road. Instead you can come at another time and be in and out of the port more quickly, saving costs and increasing overall competitiveness."

The task team's research has also shown that there is an urgent need to highlight and reinforce the correct desired behaviour among truck drivers.

A workstream within the task team has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the trucking fraternity and law enforcement agencies on the necessary steps to undertake when Bayhead Road is congested.

The stream is working closely with the Transnet Maritime School of Excellence to develop a comprehensive Truck Drivers Induction programme to bring truckers onboard and address pockets of ill-discipline. The programme includes modules related to terminal operations, incident management, the use of correct Personal Protective Equipment, the port's stance on substance abuse, among other focus areas. The next steps include piloting the Truck Drivers Induction although this has been delayed by COVID-19 and there may be a need to look at conducting this training virtually.

Truck owners will also be requested to declare whether they belong to any formal industry association. "We want to have an all-inclusive approach in engaging with independent players as well as trucking companies that belong to the two big harbour carriers' associations. We will allocate equitable attention to these companies and associations so that we have a shared view of how we can all work together. It will also help us gather intelligence on trucking companies and truckers, including a record of behaviour so that we can professionalise and raise the levels of ethics and fairness," says Motlohi.

However, Sue Moodley, Chair of the Harbour Carriers division within the South African Association of Freight Forwarders, said transporters would still have freedom of choice in terms of whether they wish to align themselves with any association.

She also said that the harbour carriers division would continue to engage and provide feedback on the various workstreams which report into the Port of Durban Decongestion Task Team.

Motlohi said the support of law enforcement was critical in ensuring compliance. eThekweni Metro Police continues to be visible on Bayhead Road intersections between 06h00 – 23h00 to help instil law and order including checks on roadworthiness and adherence to traffic rules.

The stream is also working on a project for signage and road markings for Bayhead Road, however vandalism is a major challenge.

The Port of Durban Decongestion Task Team involves a broad range of private and public sector organisations involved in the port.

Through nine targeted workstreams the task team has adopted an integrated approach to tackle the root causes of Bayhead traffic related congestion and to ensure improved coordination, planning, operations, cargo flows and capacity.

To hear Motlohi speak about the role of the transport industry in decongesting the Port of Durban, visit <https://youtu.be/0A00TXxjsk0>

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