

Reflecting on Port of Durban Decongestion Task Team Initiatives

[Durban, South Africa, 02 December 2020] It has been a year since the inception of the Decongestion Task Team at Southern Africa's busiest port. Headed by General Manager at the Port of Durban, Moshe Motlohi, the Task Team has achieved notable milestones and improvements in port efficiencies and processes.

"As I look back at the enormous work that had been done by fellow colleagues and stakeholders, I bear testament to the power of collaboration and I am proud to have been part of this journey," says Motlohi. It is not the end as yet and there is still a lot of work to be done to take the Port of Durban back to being the busiest port on the continent."

"It has been encouraging to see improvements in key measures of efficiency including ship waiting time, ship turnaround time, reduced truck turnaround time and staging times, improved fluidity on Bayhead Road leading into the container terminals and improved rail turnaround time. But we know we must not rest on our laurels and will continue collaborating with all role players to sustain these improvements," he said.

Looking back

It was during the launch of the District Development Model in October 2019 in Durban, that President Cyril Ramaphosa was made aware of the concerns of businesses regarding the Port of Durban, among them the horrendous congestion experienced in Bayhead and neighbouring roads. Representatives from the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) shared their dissatisfaction around port congestion and inefficiencies, Nigel Ward of the DCCI said that while significant progress had been made, there was a need for initiatives to be expedited.

The City of Durban and the Port of Durban were mandated to form an integrated multi-disciplinary stakeholder structure, in the form of a working committee, to join forces and develop sound solutions to deal with the truck congestion and ultimately facilitate business within the port.

About 12 months ago when the task team was formulated, Bayhead Road was plagued by heavy truck traffic congestion attributed mainly to operational inefficiencies at the container terminal. The Decongestion Task Team began to drive more robust collaboration with public and private industry stakeholders to develop initiatives to assist in addressing the challenges.

Participants include Transnet, the Department of Public Enterprises, KwaZulu-Natal provincial government, eThekweni municipality, Durban Metro Police, SAPS, organised business through the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the South African Association of Ship Operators and Agents (SAASOA), South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAF), representatives of the shipping lines, private terminal operators, trucking fraternity, depot operators, research organisations and other industry associations and bodies.

The Task Team kicked off by establishing work streams to focus on key areas which were informed by the burning outcry of the businesses. The workstreams 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.

Priorities

The following interventions were top of the priority list when discussions commenced a year ago:

As a global best practice in the container sector globally, terminal operator Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) was tasked to reintroduce the Mandatory Truck Appointment system. At the Durban Container terminals, the project has since been closed out and fully handed over to the operations department of the 2 terminals. The Point terminals also fully implemented the system and it has reached its mature stage. Not only has TPT implemented this system, but many other terminal operators, such as the Bulk Terminal depots, Grindrod and FPT, have started using a booking system to control the number of trucks arriving and exiting their facilities and ultimately control

the truck traffic on the city's roads. In the future, all terminal operators within the port will be mandated to have a booking system in line with global best practices.

To control and standardise the level of conduct within the port, the Task Team ensured that a comprehensive transporters induction programme was developed by the Transnet Maritime School of Excellence in consultation with industry. The programme has since been rolled out and will ensure that all truck drivers and transport company owners are aware of their obligations, responsibilities, port processes, do's and don'ts before being permitted to operate in the port. Transporters are encouraged to take their truck drivers through this programme.

Terminal efficiencies remain a priority for the task team with various improvement initiatives in place over the past year. One of the major root causes identified for poor productivity at the container terminals was the low morale of employees. The container terminal management, working with customers, soon introduced the container terminal incentive scheme. Equipment challenges were also noted as key contributors to inefficiencies. As such, 23 Kalmar straddle carriers were injected into Pier 2 operations and 2 Kalmar rubber tyred gantry cranes (RTGs) were delivered in component form at the Pier 1 container terminal. Many other interventions and initiatives have been introduced which were originally not key priorities, however the task team resolved that quick wins will also help to change the picture of the Port of Durban.

The task team also focussed on increasing rail utilisation. About a year ago, the task team reported that there had been less rail coming to the port and was tasked with ensuring that all rail appropriate cargo was transported via rail. The stream dedicated to this intervention has improved rail supply in the Island View precinct from one train to four trains per week for manganese and chrome and in Maydon Wharf supply also increased to 4 trains per week for grains.

Mega projects are still a priority for this task team, as it looks to the future and responds to market demands through improved infrastructure, rail and port capacity, as well as improving road traffic compliance to prevent intersection gridlocks. The second access road and Bayhead widening projects have kicked off and are all in the inception stages.

Positive Sentiments

At the early stages of the Decongestion Task Team, Chairperson of the Harbour Carriers division of SAAFF, Sue Moodley, said: "The engagement sessions have been very interactive and informative, and it has been enlightening as there are many streams which contribute to the narrative, and this project is starting to take the direction it was designed for. We also have recognised that the feedback provided over the weeks are being noted, and this has created much improvement to the booking system and the quality of reports which are being provided to the trucking industry. There is still much more work that needs to be done by the larger logistics community, and these gaps have been identified and highlighted to incorporate the wider logistics community."

CEO of SAASOA, Peter Besnard, agreed: "We are very pleased that finally we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel."

In an engagement with the MEC: Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs and Leader of Government Business, Nomusa Dube-Ncube which was prior to the implementation of the province's economic redevelopment plans, she shared positive feedback on the progress made by the task team. MEC Dube-Ncube also pledged her support to some of the initiatives which required provincial and national interventions.

The United National Transport Union (UNTU) also mentioned in an article that it welcomed the implementation of the truck appointment system which they said eased the years of complaints around heavy traffic congestion due to trucks in the Bayhead area. Trevor Wasserfall, vice-president of UNTU, said this system will enhance the service delivery of Transnet to its clients in line with the best practices being used by other big ports globally.

Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs (COGTA) Minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was part of the District Development Model (DDM) gathering in Durban a few weeks ago where she indicated her satisfaction with the progress made by the Decongestion Task Team and highlighted the need for the Port of Durban help facilitate job creation.

ENDS

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