

RFA calls on government to urgently address Beitbridge traffic nightmare

The Road Freight Association (RFA) has called on government to urgently help resolve the Beitbridge traffic crisis as queues of trucks and other vehicles are reaching 20km in both directions and truck drivers are taking up to nine days to cross the border. With no facilities and amenities to accommodate the thousands of people waiting to cross the border, the delays have spiralled into a humanitarian catastrophe, says the RFA.



Image source: www.pixabay.com

“The freight situation at Beitbridge is desperate,” says Gavin Kelly, chief executive of the RFA. “This is the worst congestion in the history of Beitbridge ever. Queues stretch out from the border to Musina on the South Africa side and on the Zimbabwe side, as well as along Beitbridge Harare highway and the Bulawayo road.”

“All the trucks parks are full,” explains Kelly. “Trucks are in every street and all over in the surrounding towns. Although congestion at Beitbridge has been a challenge for some time, the Covid-19 checks and curfews have severely exacerbated this. With proper planning, this nightmare could have been avoided.”

“Truck drivers are being blamed in part for this chaos, with allegations being made that they do not have the correct documentation required and that they are blocking traffic,” continues Kelly. “This is not the case. Transporters are pre-cleared by SARS before they reach the border post. If they are not pre-cleared, they go into a separate queue.”

Growing risks

Drivers in the queue are exposed to many risks and dangers, says the RFA. They are not sitting in their trucks: they are continuously walking up and down the queue trying to investigate what is happening, while others are fighting those who try to bribe their way through. They are not getting sleep as they are continuously fearful of losing out. “Exhaustion is a reality and this impacts on their ability to function effectively and drive safely,” says Kelly. “They are not able to perform at their best and therefore safety is compromised. This is a serious concern.”

Moreover, there are no facilities or amenities to make the delays more manageable or to provide much-needed relief. There is no food and there is no water to drink or to bath. There are also no ablution facilities, says the RFA. Criminals are taking advantage of the situation and trucks and trailers are being broken into and looted.

Bribery and corruption

Kelly says that after spending a few days in the queue that doesn't seem to move, drivers resort to jumping the queue. To be able to do so, they bribe the traffic officials to get in front of others. Those who bribe the officers pull up at the entrance. Depending on the situation at the entrance and the amount of money paid, some drivers get turned back from the entrance and are made to rejoin the queue at the back.



Gavin Kelly, chief executive of the RFA

Some drivers pay up to R1,000 just to skip the queue, he says.

“The more you pay, the better your chance to get clear to the front,” states Kelly. “Those who stand innocently in the queue waiting for their rightful turn, stand for weeks at the same position.”

“This dire situation cannot continue – it is impacting on the lives of our drivers, the surrounding areas, consumers and business,” concludes Kelly. The delays have cost over R700m to date and this figure is going to increase substantially. This crisis could have been avoided. We call on government to take speedy action to address this.”

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