

UNLOCKING SOUTH AFRICAN CROSS-BORDER TRANSPORT CHALLENGES: A CASE STUDY OF BEITBRIDGE BORDER POST

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ABSTRACT

This paper unpacks the cross border road transport challenges experienced at most of South African border posts with particular focus on Beitbridge border. The paper is based on research conducted by the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (C-BRTA) in 2011 focusing on the State of South African border posts and Analysis of Trade Supply Chains. The historic structural and institutional configuration of South African border posts like other SADC border posts manifest deficiencies in terms of facilitating smooth cross border road transport movements. The number of government departments and agencies operating at South African border posts range from five (5) to twelve (12) and the departments/ agencies operates in silos. Customs processes constitute the greatest transit time in undertaking cross border movement in either direction, that is, for both northbound and southbound traffic at Beitbridge border post. Other transport challenges include inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure, misalignment of working hours and lack of coordination between domestic border agencies and other stakeholders. Understanding of the origins and magnitude of cross border transport challenges is a fundamental departure point towards finding ideal interventions to the challenges experienced at Beitbridge. This paper outlines some of the solutions that may be deployed to address the cross border transport challenges experienced at South African border posts.

INTRODUCTION

As part of introducing the configuration of South African borders, it is necessary to define the notion of a border. According to Anderson, “the border is a more broadly defined geographical entity, comprising elements of the natural and built environments that define the boundary and control passage across it” (Anderson, 2013). For purposes of this paper, the main point is that “the border includes a set of things that facilitate (roads, bridges, ferries), prevent (fences, military installations), monitor (cameras, motion detectors) and control (border crossing facilities) movement across the boundary” (Anderson, 2013). In essence, a border post is a build-up facility that enables/facilitates the movement of desirable persons and goods whilst it prevents/blocks the movement of unwanted persons and goods through the use of monitoring devices and control facilities. According to Adebajo (2010), borders within the African continent were arbitrarily drawn as a consequence of European colonial expansion into Africa. The structural configuration of border posts, some dating back as far as 18th century, continues to impact the flow of cross border traffic across border posts. The same also contributes to the transport challenges that are faced at border posts in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. It is the purpose of this paper to unpack cross border road transport challenges experienced at South African border posts in a historical perspective. The paper in particular, focuses on the experiences at Beitbridge border post, arguably one of the major and busiest border posts on the North South Corridor. In order to illustrate the challenges experienced at Beitbridge the paper also looks at freight flow processes, bottlenecks and transit times for traffic crossing the border into and out of South Africa.

BACKGROUND

Geographically, South Africa is located on the southern tip of the African continent, with the bulk of its western, southern and eastern frontiers surrounded by the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. On the northern-side, South Africa has an extensive land borderline, which it shares with six neighbouring countries: Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland. Embedded within South Africa and surrounded by three of its provinces, is the Kingdom of Lesotho. The total distance of South Africa’s land borderline is approximately 3,500 km. There are fifty-two (52) land border posts in South Africa and nineteen (19) of these are designated for the movement of commercial goods. The land borders are rated according to the level of service provided at the border post. In this regard, South Africa makes use of an ‘A’ to ‘C’ system of grading its borders.

An ‘A’ rated border post is where all three primary government departments involved in controlling the movement of people and goods across the border are represented. Where only two of the three are represented, it is given a ‘B’ rating and where only one is present; it is given a ‘C’ rating. There are three primary players at ‘A’ rated border posts namely: the South African Revenue Services (SARS) – the Customs and Excise division, the Department of Home Affairs’ Immigration division and the Border Police of the South African Police Services (SAPS), whose mandate requires that they should be present at all land border posts.

Customs and Excise, is mainly responsible for enforcement of customs regulations and facilitating trade through ensuring speedy movement of goods through South African borders. As such the agency plays an important role in supporting the economic integration of South Africa into the global economy. Immigration designates ports of entry and handles the administrative control of entry and departure of persons. It monitors people entering or leaving South Africa through the border posts by identifying and inspecting their travel documents during the border crossing process. The Border Police (component of the Operational Response Services Division within the South African Police Services) is charged with the responsibility for ensuring effective policing and securing of South Africa's international borders. Their tasks include the prevention of illegal movements of persons and goods by inspecting passports, bills of entry and consignment documents, arresting and examination of cargo. Furthermore Border Police is tasked with maintaining public order, preventing cross-border crime, providing airborne support during law-enforcement operations and carrying out medium-risk and high-risk security operations within the border precinct.

Apart from the three government departments that have a physical presence at the border post, other key role-players in terms of regulatory functions on South African borders are:

- Port Health division of the Department of Health: The division monitors and evaluates all foodstuffs, cosmetics, disinfectants, hazardous substances and medicines entering South Africa through border posts;
- The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: The Department has a wide legislative mandate including to oversee, inspect and regulate the import and export of plants, plant products and other regulated articles such as live animals and animal products when imported into South Africa;
- The South African National Defence Force (SANDF): The Department is mainly tasked to undertake border line control and security;
- The National Intelligence Agency (NIA): The Department is mainly tasked to reduce crime levels in the country, particularly violent crime levels, by establishing operations against domestic and transnational crime syndicates and to develop a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, which guides counter-terrorism operations;
- The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI): The Department is mainly tasked to facilitate and advance trade opportunities between South Africa and other countries; and
- The Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (CBRTA) whose functions are discussed later in detail in this paper.

For illustrative purposes, it is worth mentioning that the following government departments/agencies operate in Beitbridge border on the Zimbabwean side: Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), Department of Immigration (Home Affairs), Department of Agriculture (DoA), Department of Health (DoH), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Department of Veterinary Services, Vehicle Inspection Department (VID), and Environmental Management Agency (EMA). Their respective functions are mostly similar to the functions of their South African counterparts. In light of these similarities, it is unnecessary to delve into their respective roles and mandates.

2.1 The Role of the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency

After many years of isolation due to Apartheid, the first democratic elections in 1994 opened the way for the reintegration of South Africa to the African continent. Soon after the readmission of South Africa into the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the regional economic community, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it assumed a championing role in the development of the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology. Through the protocol, SADC sought “to expand and deepen their co-operation in the areas of infrastructure and services” and to “establish viable and sustainable transport, communications and meteorology systems” (SADC Protocol, 1996). This was done in recognition of the fact that transport has “a regional and global character and [that it is] a prerequisite for the promotion of economic growth and development and the improvement of the quality of life and social interaction of all their citizens within the region, continentally and internationally” (SADC Protocol, 1996). In recognition of the need to actively pursue the realisation of road transport objectives and to champion the development of “a harmonised road transport policy providing for equal treatment, non-discrimination, reciprocity and fair competition, harmonised operating conditions and promoting the establishment of an integrated transport system” (SADC Protocol, 1996), the Minister of Transport, established a dedicated agency, the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (C-BRTA), which was tasked with the responsibility of improving the unimpeded flow of passenger and freight movements across border posts between South Africa and her neighbouring countries. According to the Cross-Border Road Transport Act of 1996, which governs the affairs of the C-BRTA, this Agency was established in order to attend to six strategic tasks. The first task of the C-BRTA is to improve the unimpeded flow of passenger and freight movements across regional border posts. The second task is the liberalisation of market access in respect to cross-border freight transport and the third is the introduction of regulated competition in respect of cross-border passenger transport.

The fourth task, which is related to the first, is reduction of operational constraints for the cross-border road transport industry as a whole. The fifth task is enhancing and strengthening the capacity of the public sector in support of its strategic planning, enabling and monitoring functions and the sixth is the empowerment of the cross-border road transport industry to maximise business opportunities and to regulate themselves incrementally to improve safety, security, reliability, quality and efficiency of services. The landscape of the South African border environment and the pecking order of border authorities within South Africa have profound lessons for the C-BRTA. In essence, it means that the Agency can only achieve its goals through cultivating strategic relationships and partnerships.

STUDY DESIGN

This paper was compiled based on the findings from two studies conducted by the C-BRTA in 2011, namely: The State of South African Border Posts and Towards Trade Supply Chain Analysis. The major aim of the studies was to assess the status quo of South African Commercial Border Posts with a view to identify institutional organisation, border processes, transit times, infrastructure requirements, border posts performance in respect to traffic volumes passing through the border at given times and sources of inefficiencies and bottlenecks hampering smooth flow of traffic across the border posts. Both studies focused on Beitbridge border post. During the two studies data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with border stakeholders, clearing agencies, cross border drivers and passengers. Surveys were conducted targeting cross border drivers and passengers, with a view to establishing transit times for crossing the border. During the surveys questionnaires were utilised to guide the respondents in providing feedback. Physical site tours and observations were also conducted to assess 'on the ground' cross border processing of both freight and passengers. During the site tours checklists were utilised to record observations made at respective points within the border precincts. Thus, this paper was compiled based on findings processed from data gathered directly from border officials, cross border transport drivers and passengers and border observations at Beitbridge border post.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RESULTS

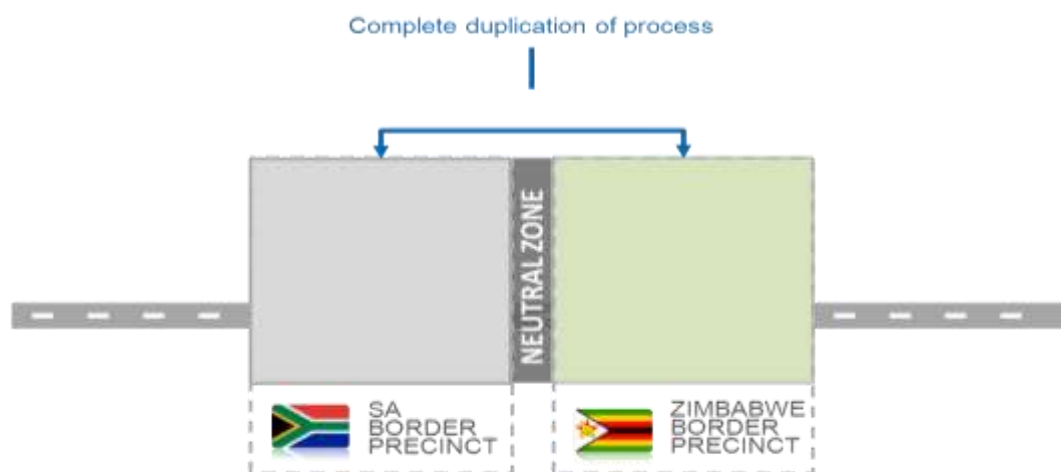
Our assertion is that the most fundamental of the historic challenges in global transport for road-based freight and passenger movements is border crossing. It was in recognition of this fact that the main objective of the Road Transport chapter in the SADC Protocol on Transport, Communication and Meteorology states that: "Member States shall facilitate the unimpeded flow of goods and passengers between and across their respective territories by promoting the development of a strong and competitive commercial road transport industry which provides effective transport services to consumers" (SADC Protocol, 1996). The advent of globalisation coupled with South Africa's strategic role and positioning within the southern African region, has brought ever-increasing numbers of people and volumes that flow across South Africa's international borders. It is also evident that an increasing proportion of passenger and freight transport operators on the SADC corridors have to contend with borders that serve as impediments to the movement of persons, goods, equipment and services within the SADC region.

4.1 An Analysis of the Freight Flows on Beitbridge border post

It is notable that Beitbridge border post is very strategic for both South Africa and Zimbabwe. It is not only the busiest border on the North-South Corridor, within the SADC region, but it is also arguably the busiest on African continent. Most of the northbound freight movements on this corridor originate from South African ports and industrial hubs. Northbound movements entail movements originating from South Africa crossing through Beitbridge border post into Zimbabwe and beyond. On average, the border transit times faced by the northbound traffic are far larger than for those on the southbound (that is, movements originating from Zimbabwe and countries to the north of Zimbabwe crossing through Beitbridge border post into South Africa). Through Beitbridge, South Africa is able to export goods and services to great many countries on the North-South Corridor and to link with the rest of the African continent. The key challenge that pertains to institutional arrangements on the Beitbridge border, which also obtains at other A-rated border posts, is that there is no institutional mechanism that provides for accountability in respect of the functions of the various government departments and their agencies. Given the absence of a designated landlord and the absence of a hierarchy of importance among the various agencies, it is not possible for the different departments/agencies to hold each other accountable.

4.1.2 Typical Freight Flow Processes at South African Border-Posts

For illustrative purposes, this paper will make use of the freight flow at Beitbridge border-post as a way of demonstrating typical processes that would, to varying degrees, obtain at the 19 commercial border posts in South Africa. Figure 1 illustrates the high level description of the border freight process flow. As illustrated, the South African and Zimbabwean Agencies operating at the border are spatially separated from each other.



Figure

1: Border process oversight

According to findings of the study, the design of the border post itself constitutes the most significant freight flow impediment. Secondly, as at the time of concluding the research, the functions carried out on the South African side of the border-post, were mirrored on the Zimbabwean side as well. As yet, there are no tangible changes in respect to the alignment of processes and co-ordination between the different agencies on both the South African and Zimbabwean side of the border. Furthermore, the freight clearing processes and passenger immigration processes conducted on the South African side of the border post are also duplicated on the Zimbabwean side. This means that separate customs clearance functions, freight security checks, and immigration checks and services are conducted by each jurisdiction. There is yet no integrated data exchange and information sharing among South African agencies and also with their Zimbabwean counterparts.

The high-level border flow processes in the northern direction from South Africa to Zimbabwe and the opposite from Zimbabwe to South Africa are graphically illustrated below

4.1.2.1 South Africa to Zimbabwe freight flow (South African side)

Figure 2 illustrates, from the South African side, the northbound border crossing process for South African exports to Zimbabwe.

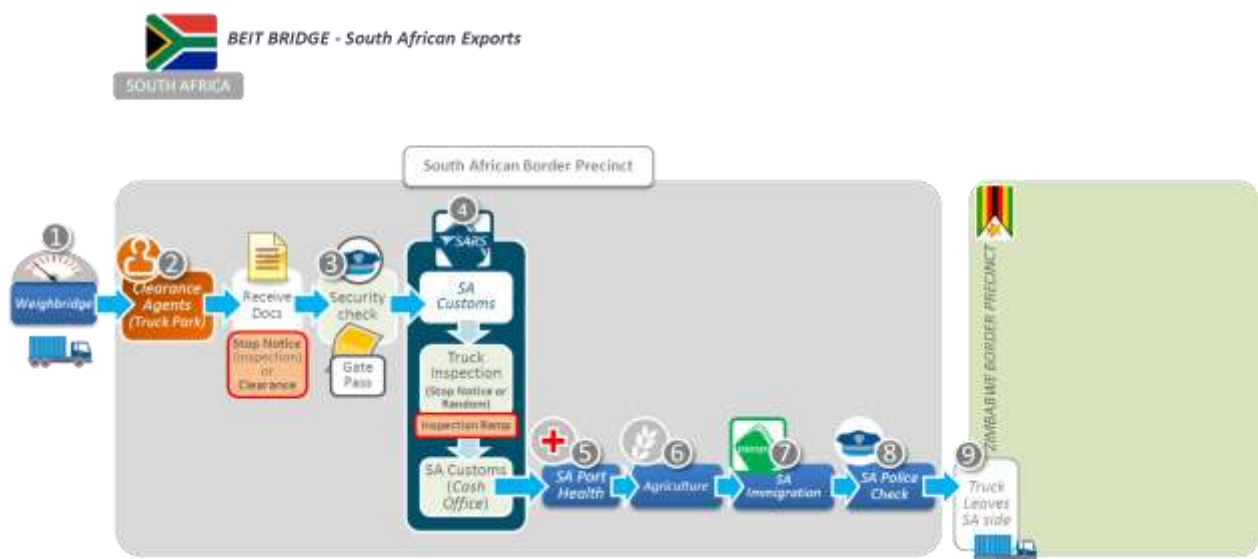


Figure 2: South African exports

4.1.2.2 South Africa to Zimbabwe freight flow (Zimbabwean side)

Figure 3 illustrates the Zimbabwean side of the cross-border freight process for South African exports to Zimbabwe:

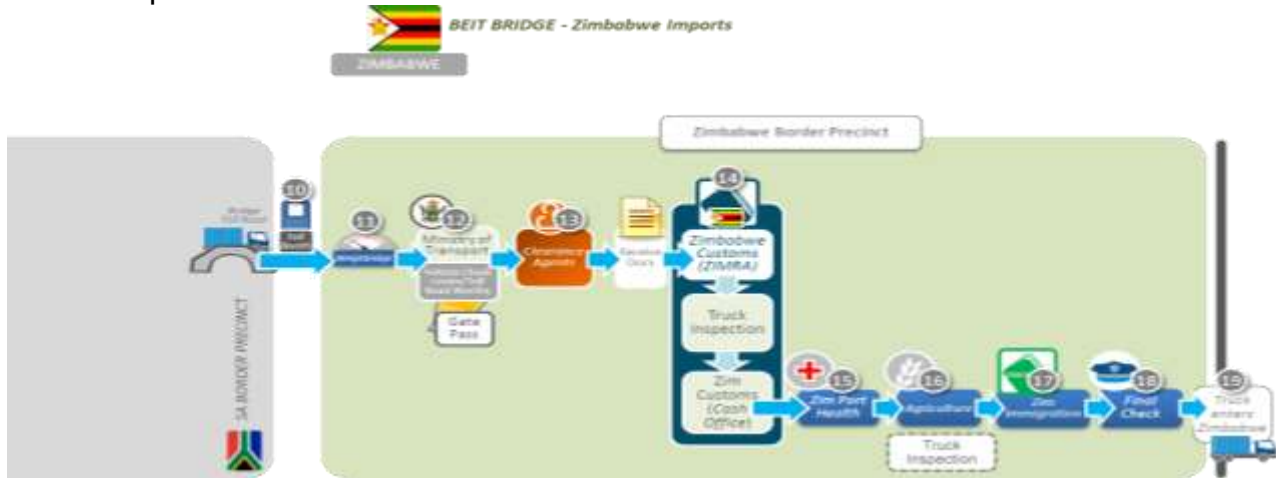


Figure 3: Zimbabwe imports

4.1.2.3 Zimbabwe to South Africa freight flow (Zimbabwean side)

Figure 4 shows the freight border crossing process for Zimbabwe exports on the Zimbabwean side.

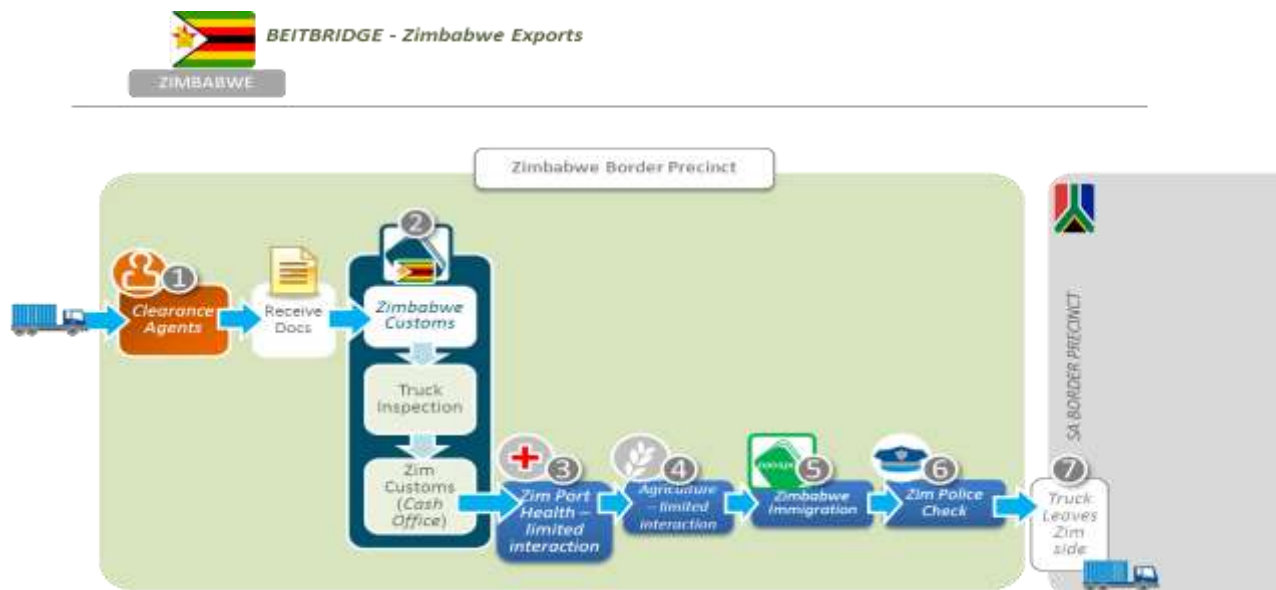


Figure 4: Zimbabwe exports

4.1.2.4 Zimbabwe to South Africa freight flow (South African side)

Figure 5 shows the freight border crossing process for South African imports on the South African side.

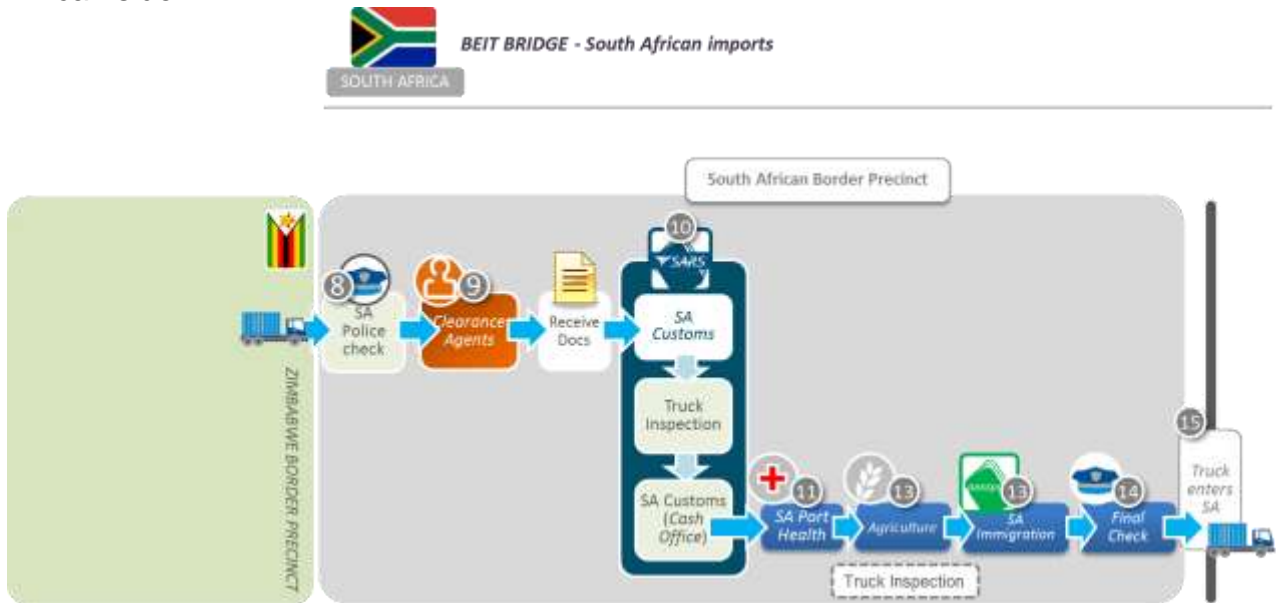


Figure 5: South African imports

4.1.3 Analysis of Border Transit Times

This research also established that there is a substantial difference in the average transit times of north versus southbound traffic. Below are two line-graphs that provide comparative transit times for both northbound and southbound freight movements.

4.1.3.1 Comparative Transit Times for Northbound Freight

Figure 6 shows the transit times observed during the study for northbound freight through Beitbridge.

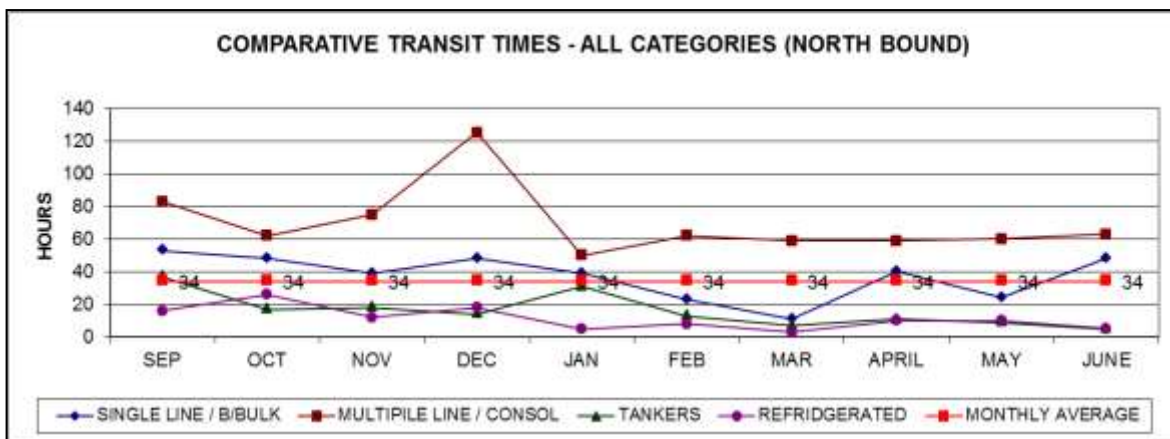


Figure 6: Northbound Freight Flows

4.1.3.2 Comparative Transit Times for Southbound Freight

Figure 7 shows the transit times observed during the study for southbound freight through Beitbridge.

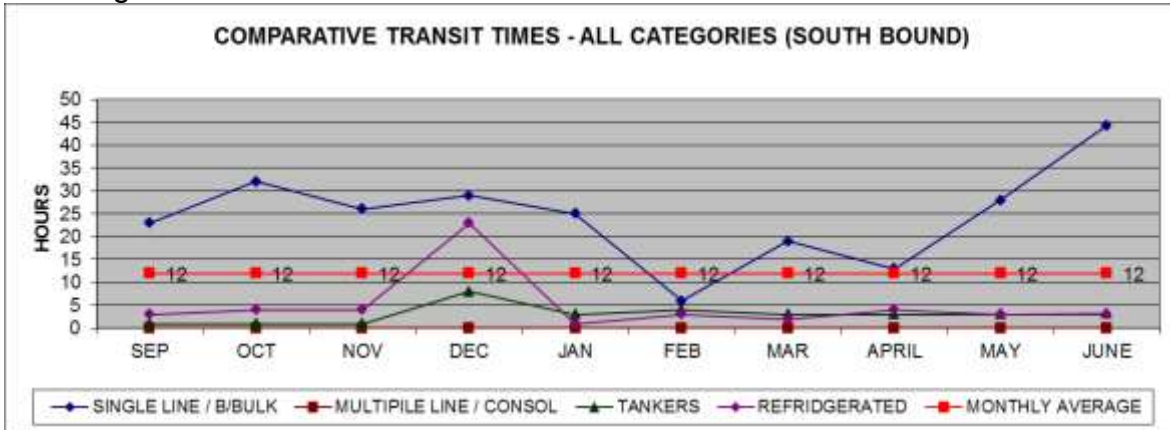


Figure 7: Southbound Freight Flows

4.1.3.3 Summary of Bottlenecks at Beitbridge Border Post

In the case of southbound traffic, the study established that substantial bottlenecks were attributable to customs processes and procedures. The other major cause of idle time is poor alignment of processes between custom authorities and other regulatory authorities. Lack of inter-agency operationally coordinated processes in the border environment also contributes to driver idle times and other delays.

4.1.3.3.1 Summary of bottlenecks (Northbound traffic)

Figure 8 shows the summary of bottlenecks that impede efficient flow of north bound freight through Beitbridge border post

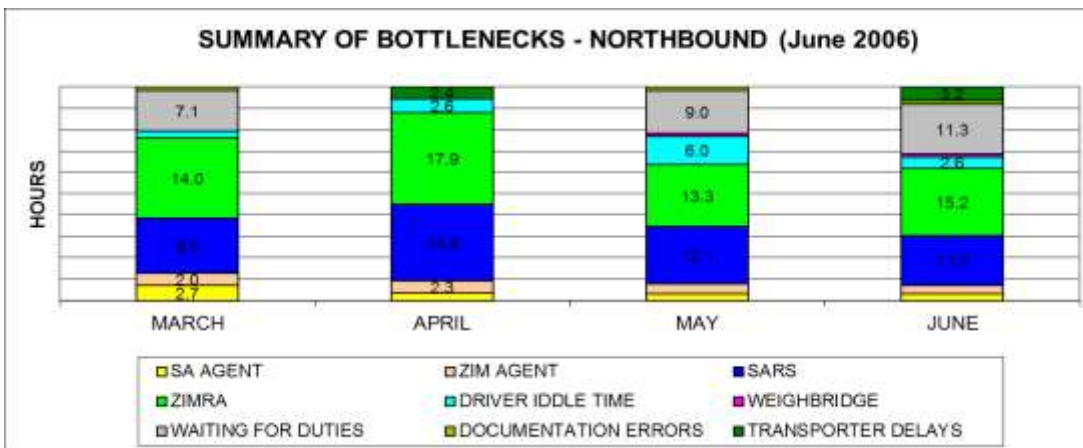


Figure 8: Northbound freight flows

4.1.3.3.2 Summary of bottlenecks (Southbound traffic)

Figure 9 shows the summary of bottlenecks that impede efficient flow of southbound freight through Beitbridge border.

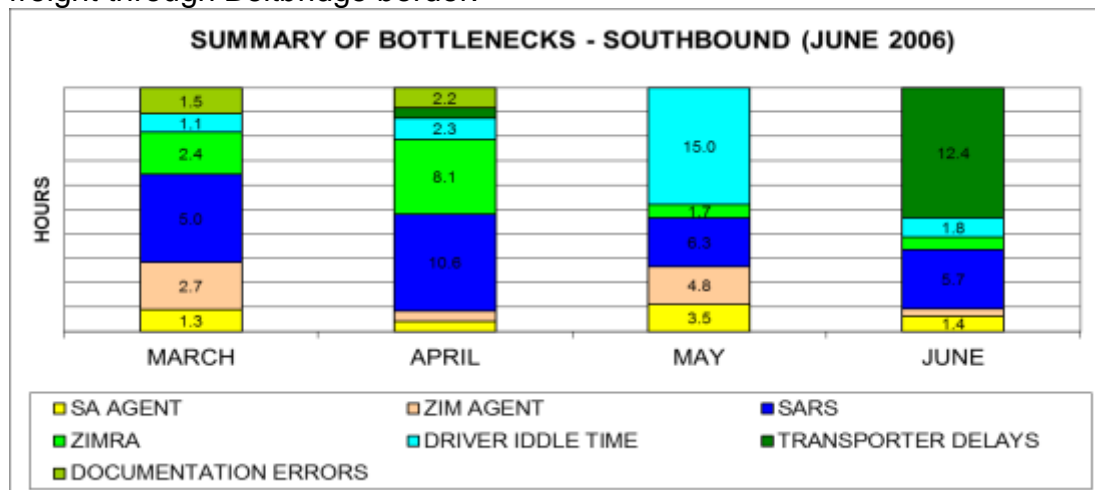


Figure 9:

Southbound freight flows

4.1.4 Key Findings on Freight Flow Impediments at Beitbridge

The purpose of this subsection is to present a summary of key findings on freight flows at Beitbridge border post.

Operational hours

Although the border post is 24 hours operational on both sides, customs agents do not operate on a 24-hour basis. As at the time of concluding this study, customs agents hours were between 08:00 to 16:00, effectively hampering the flow of traffic through the border post by limiting the hours of freight clearing services available to clients. Most drivers spend the night in trucks and join the queue as early as 5:00 am to enter the border precinct. The queuing already creates substantial traffic flow problems in and out of the border precinct due to traffic congestion and the consequential impaired traffic flows.

Infrastructure

There are plans for the separation of commercial traffic from non-commercial freight flow at the main border entrance, but these have not yet been successful. Furthermore, as at the time of concluding of the study, the South African National Roads Agency had completed planning for the construction of freight bypass road. However, the construction of this road has not commenced. Both import and export vehicles share the same inspection ramp on the South African side of the border. This arrangement does not address the inspection demand or the practical difficulty of having to deal with limited space availability with different directions of incoming and outgoing vehicles.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The major transport challenges at South African border posts are summarised below:

Institutional arrangements

The lack of efficient border management governance systems and inadequate coordination and cooperation contribute to the transport challenges experienced at South African border posts.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is inadequate and poorly maintained at most border posts. This negatively affects efficient circulation of traffic into and within the border posts.

Process Flow

The customs authorities of the two countries namely SARS and ZIMRA account for more than 60% of the total border transit time at Beitbridge. ZIMRA is responsible for the northbound loads due to duty payments and SARS for the southbound traffic.

Institutional Matters

According to the findings of this study, inefficiencies also arise from lack of coordination between domestic border agencies and other stakeholders, such as the clearing agents. There is also limited interface between C-BRTA and border management agencies.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the paper reflects on the key lessons on overcoming cross-border road transport challenges derived from the South African experience. These lessons are grouped into four key intervention areas namely political, institutional, infrastructural and functional and process alignment.

6.1 Political Leadership

It is perceived that the singular most critical intervention that is needed to transform the cross-border transport environment is political leadership. It is leadership that needs to engage with the possibilities inherent in the improvement of the cross-border road transport environment for the entire SADC region. Given the insignificant size of the domestic markets served by all the countries within the SADC region, it is only through trade and greater economic integration that most of these countries can realise economic growth. There is therefore a need for the adoption of a coherent programme of action that seeks to overcome identified constraints that are impeding trade and to reduce impediments in the movement of people and goods within the SADC region.

6.2 Institutional Arrangements and Alignment

Governments within SADC need to adopt models that ensure the alignment of processes and procedures within the border precinct. In some cases, this might call for the assigning of the role of border landlord to one of the agencies within the border environment. It could also take the format of consolidation of functions of several such entities under the leadership of a single entity. There is a need to seriously improve institutional arrangements that govern inter-agency relations within and between countries that share borders. In this regard the first prize in SADC border-modernisation efforts should be the establishment of One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs).

6.3 Infrastructural Changes

In general, border posts within the SADC region are in need of proper and adequate resourcing in order to upgrade their aging and poorly maintained infrastructure. Cross-border infrastructure includes the buildings and facilities, roads leading to and within the border precinct and the related transport networks leading to border post. In some cases, such as at the Beitbridge border post, there is a real need to expand infrastructural capacity through the construction of a freight bypass road.

6.4 Functional and Process Alignment

The major area where domestic agencies can make a huge contribution towards the realisation of efficiencies is in regard to the horizontal alignment of their functional processes and procedures. For instance, it should be possible for different agencies that belong to different departments within the same government to share certain information and to link their IT systems. It should also be possible for government agencies to share some of their 'risk engines' in order to profile the risk categories of regular users of the border post. If border agencies are to be successful in meeting inter-agency coordination challenges, more attention needs to be paid to using these cooperative strategic management approaches. The interventions that are called for here include alignment of business processes, integration of systems and alignment of procedures in order to ensure sustainability of cross-border road transport operations.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Cross-border transport plays an important role in facilitating trade flows between member states within the SADC region. No less than six countries in SADC are landlocked, which means that these countries rely on the availability of efficient cross-border transport to reach global markets. The high transport costs involved in shipping goods to global markets should encourage African countries to trade more with each other. Currently trade flows among African countries are measured at between 10 and 12 percent. This tendency reveals that the majority of African exports are destined for overseas markets. This paper also articulated the transport challenges experienced at South African border posts and presented some solutions to the same. As such it proposes that political constraints be addressed through the building of political consensus and trust amongst relevant role-players to increase the ratification of protocols and agreements and to ensure the enforcement of legal instruments and sanctions against defaulting member states. Given the size of the South African economy relative to other SADC countries and acknowledging South Africa's advanced manufacturing, service industries and technical know-how, she can and should play a leading role in driving the regional integration agenda forward. By integrating the region, transport challenges faced at border posts will be reduced further. This will also increase intra-regional and inter-regional trade flows along strategic corridors within SADC and the rest of the continent.

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