

Challenges ahead for SA fleets: Port congestion, road degradation, and the call for road safety education

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19 Dec 2023

The transport industry plays a crucial role in the movement of goods. Without a reliable road freight industry our economy would collapse. According to Bridgewater Logistics, the industry employs roughly 336,000 employees and is predicted to grow by 4% in the next 5 years. However, the transport industry is also faced with numerous challenges that can jeopardise the growth of the industry.



Source: Supplied

Thousands of trucks clog South African border points and ports, causing shipping companies to levy congestion surcharges.

The enhancement of roads and a well-functioning rail system would enable fleet operators and business owners to unlock the full benefits of virtual technologies

Fleet managers must enforce safety rules, develop comprehensive training programmes focusing on early warning systems and AI-powered technology

Big election year

The upcoming year, 2024, looms heavy with geopolitical upheaval and economic instability, setting the stage for what could be the greatest election year of our lifetime. The general elections will be held in the dark in many places, as load shedding persists.

The intense conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East provide a tense backdrop to the global struggle to control energy resources.

With national debt strangling the South African transport sector's ability to invest in road improvement, fleet managers contend the triple threat of rising fuel costs, a heightened risk of fatal incidents, and violent social unrest, which usually first targets transporters.

Port congestion

Inadequate investment in road, rail, and port infrastructure has left tens of thousands of containers stranded off the coast of Durban Harbour.

Critical cargo equipment shortages mean the bottleneck won't be cleared for months. Until then, thousands of trucks clog South African border points and ports, causing shipping companies to levy congestion surcharges and customers to double their transport costs using air freight.

Road degradation

A well-functioning rail system would ease the burden on roads, giving room for upgrades without increasing crashes at work sites. Enhanced road surfaces and increased capacity would enable transport providers to unlock the full benefits of onboard and virtual technologies.

Road user education

While fleet operators advance driver training to optimise vehicle features and AI-powered telematics capabilities, education across the fleet value chain, from control room managers to other motorists, is crucial.

Fleet managers must enforce safety rules, develop comprehensive training programmes focusing on early warning systems and AI-powered technology, organise workshops for hands-on experience, and provide periodic updates on system upgrades. Simple guides like brochures that explain system functionalities, can further enhance understanding.

By learning, exploring and utilising the full functionality of these systems, fleet managers can better support drivers. At the same time, society needs to make driver education a much greater priority, and even introduce it as a subject in school syllabuses, with a primary focus on overall road safety.

Even more important than advancing driver assistance technologies, fleet managers must navigate challenging external conditions while refining their own processes.

Ultimately, without effectively informing and upskilling all road users, no amount of technological advancement or infrastructure investment will be able to deliver the intended benefits of alleviating costs, cutting operational costs and most importantly, saving lives.

By harnessing AI, fleet managers can automate maintenance scheduling based on factors such as vehicle age, mileage,

and usage patterns. This optimisation includes routine procedures like oil changes, and predictive algorithms can identify assets likely to break downs.

Proactive maintenance measures help avoid costly repairs, highway breakdowns, and enable timely parts ordering to improve fleet utilisation and extend asset lifespan.

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