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Expect to pay Swazi tolls by next June

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SWAZILAND'S MAIN east-west highway may start collecting tolls as early as June. Parliament finally passed legislation last week setting up a company to manage toll plazas located near the Oshoek border post, used for traffic to and from Gauteng, the Ezulwini Valley east of Mbabane, and a third station west of the Matsapha Industrial Estate.

Road freight traffic headed for or leaving Matsapha from Mozambique and Durban will pass through the eastern toll plaza.

The Ministry of Transportation and Public Works has decried MPs for the delay in passing the enabling legislation, but in fact there has been no hurry. Tolls cannot be collected until the highway is finished, and a main section – a bypass road around

downtown Mbabane – is still under construction.

The first portion of the bypass road, which has stalled traffic for years, opened as a one-way one lane artery last week.

Toll fees for commercial and private vehicles have not been announced, but transportation experts say it is unlikely that famously stingy Swazis will gladly pay them. They're likely to opt instead for the old national highway running through Ezulwini to Matsapha.

"They'll travel at highway speeds through residential areas. There will just be carnage," predicted the owner of one Matsapha-based road freight firm.

Minister of Transport Elijah Shongwe said tolls were needed to maintain the highway and pay off loans from international lending bodies that financed construction.