

Swaziland

JAMES HALL

SWAZILAND ROAD transporters are looking back wistfully at the recent holiday season, not because of the break in routine they enjoyed but because of the lengthened hours of operations at key border posts with South Africa – Lavumisa to the south en route to Durban, Oshoek to the West for Gauteng, and Matsamo and Mananga in the north for Nelspruit and Mpumalanga.

Border opening hours

With the end of the holiday season comes a return to normal and (by the account of the Swazi business community, which wants 24/7 operations) extremely limited hours: from 07:00 to 22:00.

One SA official, former Mpumalanga provincial government head Dr Mathews Phosa, told Swazi business people late in 2007 that South Africa was "not yet ready" for extended border post hours. He cited costs as a factor.

Electronic clearance

Counting its own cost in lost productivity are Swazi importers of consumer goods and industrial inputs from SA. But at least one productivity deterrent – the time trucks spend in a queue at border posts – is to be reduced with the recent introduction of an electronic customs duty system. Oshoek was the first to be connected, with the other border posts soon to be on line.



Trucks outside the Oshoek border post... as busy as it generally gets

Corruption

"Corruption has been a problem at customs," said Customs and Excise official Justin Dlamini. "The finance ministry estimates only a fifth of customs duties due to government are actually collected."

Collusion between corrupt customs workers and fraudulent importers is blamed, but losses are expected to be curtailed by the computerised data collection system.

"If only something could be done about Sars," said the manager of a Matsapha-based road transport firm. Swazi shippers hope this year to have addressed their grievances with customs operations on the SA side of the border, where they say most delays, costs and problems occur.

Truck queues at Swaziland's borders are "annoying, but negligible compared to other countries," one shipper, who seemed to speak for the consensus of opinion, told FTW.

Swazi Rail set to grow transit business

JAMES HALL

MORE CONTAINERISED business and transit traffic will steer growth at Swaziland Railway in the year ahead. Stephensen Ngubane, director of operations and marketing for the landlocked country's 44 year-old rail line, told FTW: "Containerised traffic will be a growth business for us. We are making plans to expand our capacity to handle containers, and this is key to our 2008 strategy."

Continuing growth of the manufacturing sector in the country ensures containerised growth as inputs are brought in from Durban, turned into finished goods, and sent back to port for overseas buyers.

Swaziland Railway's Inland Container Depot, or so-called Dry Port, is strategically located in the heart of the Matsapha Industrial Estate, which was constructed about the time the railway began operations in the mid 1960s. The two have grown together, but the railway is also looking cross border for revenue opportunities.

"We have been in discussions with Transnet Freight Rail to get more transit business through the country," said Ngubane.

This would largely be minerals sent through Swaziland north to south, from Komatipoort en route to Durban. The Phalaborwa mines would provide the mineral shipments, which will make up a new revenue source for the company.

When asked what he was looking forward to in the new year, Swaziland Railway CEO Gideon Mahlalela said: "2008 is a leap year, so there will be an extra day to work to better the rail system." The response says a lot for the company's work ethic.