

Satellite tracks Zambian goods railed through Zimbabwe

Goods being railed through Zimbabwe from Zambia to South Africa are now being tracked using advanced satellite technology and high-tech transmission units installed in Beitbridge-Bulawayo Railway locomotives.

The tracking system enables the management to monitor from its control centre the movement of goods throughout its network in Zambia and in transit through Zimbabwe right up to Beitbridge.

The system, which has been in use for about six months, has already reduced speed-related accidents and thefts, according to BBR Head of Operations Department, Mr. Alex Sibanda.

BBR and RSZ are both subsidiaries of NLPI Limited, a Mauritius-registered investment holding company with subsidiaries in Zimbabwe and Zambia specialising in Build-Operate-Transfer investments. In terms of these BOT investments, the company, through its subsidiaries, invests in the construction of infrastructure, operates it for a given period and then transfers ownership of it to the country's government.

In Zimbabwe it has built and operates the Beitbridge-to-Bulawayo railway and the new bridge across the Limpopo River between Zimbabwe and South Africa. The bridge is operated by NLPI Ltd (NLPI) subsidiary New Limpopo Bridge (NLB).

BBR, in addition to operating the Beitbridge-Bulawayo Railway, which it built, also operates a goods service between Bulawayo and Victoria Falls, in terms of an agreement with the National Railways of Zimbabwe. This means that goods travelling on the Railway Systems of Zambia through Zimbabwe remain under the control of NLPI subsidiaries all the way up to the border with South Africa, with joint control being exercised between NLPI Logistics and NRZ between Victoria Falls and Bulawayo as per the contractual provision of the Joint Venture Agreement already alluded to.

The satellite-based Traffic Monitoring System installed by the Railway Systems of Zambia enables the RSZ to monitor remotely its rolling stock from its headquarters in Kabwe even when it crosses the border into Zimbabwe.

Mr Sibanda said the satellite tracking system has already contributed significantly to logistical management and train security,

The satellite tracking system was purchased by RSZ, from Car Guard, which specialises in advanced monitoring and surveillance equipment for the transport industry. Hi-tech transmission units were installed in 22 of RSZ's locomotives and in BBR locomotives in Zimbabwe

A 24 hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week satellite monitoring division has been established at the RSZ headquarters in Kabwe. Locomotives are remotely monitored through the receipt of regular reports and alarms either telephonically or via fax and e-mail.

Information collated at a Reception Centre can be used to provide supervisors with a wide range of real-time technical data.

Increased equipment uptime is one of the major benefits of the system, which provides emergency alarms in respect of unscheduled events, sudden temperature changes and travel outside specified boundaries. There is provision too for a driver emergency panic button.

The monitoring system has enabled RSZ to manage train movements more effectively and efficiently, thus reducing operational expenses and enabling the company to place greater emphasis on meeting clients' business requirements.

Describing the introduction of the satellite tracking and monitoring system as a milestone in the company's operations, Mr. Sibanda said the company intended, in line with its refurbishment policy, to launch an innovative wagon tracking system early this year. This would offer improved near-real time tracking and monitoring solutions.