

Government taking steps to address railway industry challenges

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Government says it is taking deliberate policy decisions to deal with challenges the country's railway industry is currently facing.

Communications and Transport Minister Geoffrey Lungwangwa said government is working towards ensuring adequate investment, fair competition and reduced fuel levies to help promote growth in the railway sector.

Speaking when he officially opened the Southern African Railways Association (SARA) Corridor Multilateral workshop in Lusaka today, Prof Lungwangwa said government is aware of the challenges the railway sector is facing both in the country and the region.

The minister said there is also need to put in place an institutional framework that will facilitate stakeholder participation in order to create an enabling environment which will further promote growth in the railway transport industry.

“The need to put in place an institutional framework that facilitates stakeholder participation in the railway industry becomes paramount. This framework should create an enabling environment which in essence promotes the growth of the railway industry.” He said.

Prof Lungwangwa said the railway industry must be promoted at both national and regional level because of its positive characteristics such as bulk movement of goods at cheaper tariffs, fuel efficiency and environmentally friendly operations.

He urged railway operators in the region to collectively engage in performance improving strategies in view of their available resources to reduce transportation costs and enhance competition on regional products.

And Prof Lungwangwa has urged SARA to engage non member railway operators in the SADC region to reconsider their position.

He said the position taken by such operators not to be members of the SARA is detrimental to the region as it does not promote railway interests in SADC member states.

He stressed that it is only through the active participation of all regional railway that the provisions of the protocol will be fulfilled.

Prof Lungwangwa noted that SARA is a platform for participation and integration of railway operators as it is in line with the railway management groups as enshrined in Article 7.8 of the SADC protocol on transport, communications and meteorology.

“Railway Route Management Groups are enshrined in Article 7.8 of the SADC Protocol on transport, communications and meteorology and as such it is a SADC expectation that all railways in the region participate in these route management groups. Your organization SARA is the right platform for such participation.” said the Minister.

And speaking at the earlier Railway Systems of Zambia (RSZ) Chief Executive Officer Benjamin Even said RSZ plays a major anchor role for most of the corridors because of Zambia’s central geographical position in the region.

Mr. Even said RSZ will continue to play a coordinative role in the movement of both local and international traffic along the corridors it connects.

He commended government for creating a conducive business environment atmosphere and its continued support to the company.

“RSZ is grateful to the government of the republic of Zambia for creating a conducive business atmosphere and is looking forward to continued support.” said Mr. Even.

The RSZ CEO also expressed confidence that its partnership and coordination with government and other stakeholders will help benefit and enhance social economic development in the SADC region.

SARA was formed in April 1996 following recognition by Southern African Development Community (SADC) railway administrations of the need to establish a strong railways lobby group to pursue advocacy for fair surface transport competition.