



RAILWAY Systems of Zambia deputy general manager of corporate affairs Charles Phiri (centre with lifted hands) explaining to journalists how that stretch of the rail line has been maintained last Friday in Kapiri Mposhi's Lwasemba area.- Picture by CHAMBO NG'UNI.

RSZ spends \$30m to enhance operations

By CYNTHIA MWALE and CHAMBO NG'UNI
RAILWAY Systems of Zambia (RSZ) has invested over US\$30 million to improve operations of the railway line from the Copperbelt to Livingstone since the concession in 2003. And RSZ has urged Government to revise the current transport policy to allow the railway sector become more competitive and minimise investor risks. RSZ chief executive officer Benjamin Even said during a media tour of the company in Kabwe on Friday that more than US\$30 million has been invested in various ventures.

Mr Even said, however, that despite assertions by some quarters that the company has not done much, the company has exceeded the investment of US\$14 million agreed upon in the concession. "We have invested in excess

of US\$30 million in the system and this money is our money. We have never got any money from Government, donors or the World Bank," he said. Some of the projects that the company has undertaken include the upgrade of rail tracks, overhaul of locomotive engines and coaches, refurbishing of stations and the Kabwe workshops.

Mr Even said RSZ has also increased the bulk haulage capacity because of more exports of sugar and imports of coal from Zimbabwe.

"Railway still remains the best solution for customers with bulk cargo due to bulk haulage capacity and corridor concept.

"About 95 percent of coal from Zimbabwe is handled by us. Last year, we moved 45,000 tonnes of sugar, passing the record of 23,000 tonnes since inception," he said.

RSZ anticipates that the almost one million tonnes

that it hauls will increase three-fold by 2012 with the co-operation of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) and other railway firms in the region.

On challenges, Mr Even said there are many obstacles in the sector which include subsidising the road sector.

Mr Even said that RSZ pays an annual fuel levy of US\$5 million which goes towards funding of roads. He said that this makes the railway sector uncompetitive.

"Roads are considered competitive because they are subsidised and can charge far less than railway transporters. Road owners are not ready to pay for the road damage," he said.

He said in order for Government to address road competitiveness, RSZ has asked the Ministry of Communications and

Transport to introduce toll gates which will enhance competitive charges for cargo transported by road.

He said road tolls and weight enforcement will help to keep the roads in good shape.

He said Government needs to harmonise regional co-operation with member states to ease customs and border regulation.

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