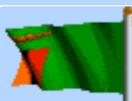


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E-MAIL US

RSZ urges State to review transport policy

By NANCY MWAPE

RAILWAY Systems of Zambia (RSZ) has urged Government to review the current transport policy if the railway sector is to be competitive.

RSZ spokesperson, Charles Phiri, said in an interview that RSZ and Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) pay fuel level annually which goes towards funding of roads development.

Mr Phiri said since RSZ has to pay over US\$2 million as fuel levy annually, this was making the railway sector expensive.

"We all know that trains do not run on the roads but rails. Roads are considered competitive because they are subsidised and can charge far less than railway transporters," he said.

He said RSZ on the Copperbelt has the capacity to run inter-mine traffic cargo within the mining towns, but was being undercut in prices by 50 per cent.

"If we charge US\$50 per tonne, the road user guy will charge US\$5 per tonne yet it's cheaper to maintain the rail than the roads," he said.

Mr Phiri said in order for Government to address road competitiveness, RSZ had asked the Ministry of Communication and Transport to introduce toll gates.

He said the introduction of toll gates would result in competitive charges for cargo transported by road.

"For many years, we in the rail sector have been crying for a level playing field. It's important to realise that transport is a facilitator to trade," he said.

He said the rail and road sectors should not be in competition with each other but complementary.

Meanwhile, RSZ says it has developed strategic alliances with railway companies in Zimbabwe and South Africa to ensure that cargo was

moved quickly to the sea ports.

Mr Phiri said to increase the speed of wagons, there was need to widen the narrow rails. He said maximum speed that wagons could run was between 30 kilometers and 40 kilometres.

He added that management was working on modernising the railway track.

He also assured transporters that wanted to move their cargo by train that security had improved.

Mr Phiri said RSZ now had vehicles that accompanied trains to protect them from vandalism and theft cases.