BUILDING CAPACITY TO FIGHT CORRUPTION IN AXLE LOAD CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

A main factor in the rapid deterioration of the road network is overloading of heavy vehicles.

The Zambian Road Development Agency established a project in 2004 to curb overloading.

Benchmark tests show significant reduction of overloading from an average of 30 % to below 5% of legal limits. An evaluation study to assess the economic benefit will be finished this year.

The first of 9 new weighbridges was commissioned in February 2007. The standards have been developed to avoid corruptive practise.

Corruption is widespread on the weighbridges and the fight to curb corruption is given political attention from the president of the Republic of Zambia and the Zambian politicians.

The new legislation was enacted in May 2007, enforcing the principle of compensation from registered owners of overloaded vehicles to the Road Fund Agency.

Fighting of corruption is embedded in the program in close co-operation with the Anti Corruption Commission, computer programs at the weighbridges enabling the management to trace corruption in the operations and training and development of new routines combined with a considerable raise in salaries.

Corruption is still found at some weighbridges, but RDA is now improving.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEXT OF THE AXLE LOAD CONTROL PROGRAM

It is recognised that the deterioration of roads and bridges increase with overloading. One of the main factors in the rapid deterioration in the condition of the road network is the overloading of axles and gross vehicle mass of heavy vehicles. A nation-wide system of weighbridges has been established in Zambia over the years in order to control the overloading, but the outcome from these weighbridges has been questionable due to the combination of various factors. Among the factors to be highlighted here are corrupt practise and nepotism and lack of appropriate management.

Zambia has embarked on a program to monitor and curb overloading. The programme appraises and summarises the present situation of operating the Zambian weighbridges and proposes an activity plan with a time frame of four years for the improvement of axle load control. The programme consists of several programme-components linked to each other.

These program components are:

1. Information and Awareness Campaigns
2. Improving Organisation and Procedures
3. A Legal Initiative
4. Changing the present procedures and training
5. Weighbridge Equipment and Sites
6. Minimising Corrupt Practises
7. Establishing a Vehicle Overload Management Information System
8. Commercialisation/Privatisation of Weighbridges
9. Project Monitoring

The programme is regarded as a united effort to take remedial measures for the present situation. A project to organise the task has been established, and the project started in May 2004. The project is owned and managed by the Zambian Roads Development Agency. The central project management staffs are a slim organisation consisting of five members inclusive a technical adviser from Norway.

2. ESTIMATIONS OF ECONOMIC LOSSES DUE TO OVERLOADING

Like in many countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, overloaded vehicles remain a prevalent problem and have an immediate impact in terms of increased road damage, which causes a dramatic increase in road maintenance costs. A baseline study was initiated before the start of the project in 2004 that revealed the overloading rate of heavy vehicles to be between 20 – 40% depending on measured roads. Results from bench mark tests held in 2005 and 2006 shows a significant drop in overload in Zambia on roads where the bench marks where performed. An evaluation study of the socioeconomic impacts of implementing the axle load program has just started in 2007. The outcome of the study will include a framework and indicators for measuring the changes in the road maintenance cost and the socio-economic performance of the programme which can be used by the management. The result of the study will be published late in 2007.

3. LOCATION OF EXISTING AND PLANNED WEIGHBRIDGE STATIONS

Currently there are eight fixed weighbridges on the trunk road network All of these use mechanical scales, some of them between ten and twenty years of age. They require relatively higher maintenance. The weighbridge offices are small, and the available parking areas are insufficient to cope with the increased traffic. The fact that the weighbridges are manual with no possibility of automatic printout of results attracts manipulation of results. These weighbridges are not computerised, giving poor record from operations. Thus, a number of eight new electronic weighbridges have been planned for to substitute the old locations. These new weighbridges will capture the traffic to and from all regions on the main corridors in the country. The first of the new

weighbridges was commissioned in February 2007. These weighbridges have digital weighbridge devises connected by satellite to internet. The local server at the weighbridge replicates all the output from the weighing process to a vehicle overloading management system in the RDA-HQ enabling the central management to monitor the individual weighbridge operator and their performance. Besides the fixed weighbridges, Zambia has commissioned the use of four portable electronic weighbridges connected to the same management system to be used for spot checks on the entire road network and to monitor the performance of the fixed weighbridges.

4. CORRUPT PRACTISES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF WEIGHBRIDGES

It is well known in Zambia, as in other developed countries, that weighbridge operations attract corruption. In fact, weighbridge operation is regarded in recent history to be among the most corruptive areas of governmental activity in Zambia. Haulers can benefit by making arrangements with weighbridge operators or officials on higher levels to avoid having their vehicles weighed at the weighbridges. There is evidence of such practise of collective and individual arrangements, and thus the Government has tried by various means to curb the corruption by engaging the Anti Corruption Commission in Zambia. The Axle load Control Program deal with corruption in various manners.

5. WHAT CAUSES THE PROBLEM?

Corruption is a general problem in the Zambian society generated and developed in the recent two decades in the republic's history. There are several reasons for this development, where the decrease of the general economy in the republic, leaving a lot of the public without financial resources to survive, as one of the reasons. Another reason can be found by analysing the political will that was wanting in the country to establish a broad support for an axle load control system on the road network. Corruption is caused by two parties, one representing a benefit available for sale, and one representing the buyer of the benefit accepting the additional cost by paying the key money.

6. MEASURES TAKEN TO CONTROL AND MINIMISE CORRUPTION

The present Zambian president, Mr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, has embarked on a program to fight corruption within all fields of the Zambian society. Thus, it was natural by developing the Axle Load Control Program to include programme components to the fight corruption. The programme has a separate main component called: Minimising Corrupt Practises, but all the other programme components have a sort of anti-corruption embedded. Remedial measurements have been introduced in the amendment of the new legislation stating the penalty for corruptive weighbridge staff as high as US$17.000 or up to five years imprisonment if corruption is revealed. Road Development Agency has contracted new weighbridge operators with ten times higher salaries than the previous group, which has been laid off. A comprehensive training program for the new staff has been performed with sensitisation of corrupt practises.

Officers from The Anti Corruption Committee have been trained in all legal and operational weighbridge routines to help out in the fight together with the program management.

The Vehicle Overload Management System (VOMS) has been designed to monitor among other possibilities the individual weighbridge operators and their performance in their duties. The new weighbridge routines are embedded in the computer program and the weighbridge records are automatically recorded without human interference. Abnormal abortion of weighing procedures will automatically be stored with the last records from the weighing process and can be used the check-up corruptive practice.

A certificate of compliance is being issued to all loaded vehicles at the weighbridge stations.
The certificates are automatically processed at the electronic weighbridges
The certificate is called a weighbridge certificate, and is issued to all legally loaded vehicles. By countersigning the certificates at all subsequent weighbridge stations, it is possible to keep track on the various loaded vehicles. A vehicle without a valid certificate is deemed to have absconded from the weighbridge and will be charged with US$2000 in absconding fee. This practice is verifying correct weighbridge routines and enables the control of the practise at other weighbridge stations. It meets the needs of the internal control of weighbridge activities.

7. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN INTRODUCING ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES

Corruption is still rampant at the weighbridges. Practice has revealed that it takes a short time to contaminate even a new educated weighbridge officer. We think that the general acceptance of corruption in the Zambian society is promoting corruption even if sensitisation is performed. We also think that some of the operators have applied for the job to make a fast fortune. However, practice from the last year has revealed the fact that this acceptance seems to be on decrease. Information from the haulers association and various individual haulers have enabled us to pinpoint the culprits and to take remedial action by suspending officers awaiting investigation from ACC. The new anti corruptive legislation will be mandatory in court procedures in the future.

8. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

Corruption is still found at some of the weighbridges, but the introduction of new routines new legislation and new technology has enabled the management in RDA to improve the monitoring of the activities and to take action in individual cases. The income from fines from overloading is higher than expected and show that the efficiency at the weighbridges has improved significantly. However, the mode of corruption is steadily changing. The challenge in the future is to be in forefront of the development and to see that necessary tool at hand is being developed timely and to an affordable cost. By recognising the problem of corruption a lot has been achieved. By accepting the cost of an anti corruptive program as we have done in Zambia, it is possible to manage the corruption and slowly bring the situation back to a normal level.