

Impediments to Effective and Efficient South Africa-Zimbabwe's Beit-Bridge Border Post Management during Peak Periods

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Abstract: Spending time in a queue for services is not desirable because it causes unpredictability and makes it difficult for travellers to plan their logistics. The study documented the experiences of travellers who crossed the Beitbridge Border Post during the December 2017 festive season peak period. Data was collected through observing and interviewing travellers. The results of the study indicate that border agents at Beitbridge failed to effectively manage human and vehicular traffic thus leading to congestion and long waiting periods. The most serious bottlenecks were: traffic jam along the 5 km stretch before the South African side's processing station and the endless queue to pay for Temporary Import Permit (TIP) documents for foreign vehicles on the Zimbabwean processing side. The study concluded that current facilities are dated and have no capacity to handle the masses of travellers. The Governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe were both unable and unwilling to convert Beitbridge into a One Stop Border Post (OSBP). Commitment and political will to engage with international financiers regarding the creation of the OSBP to ensure a new and faster system with capacity to handle more volumes are lacking. The Beitbridge Border management system requires complete reengineering and redesigning benchmarked with international standards. Management need to adopt better queues management strategies, integrating Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems, eradicating illicit operations, and mounting clear signage to guide travellers. Management must design systems and strategies that minimize customers' waiting time and keep queues within tolerable limits.

Keywords: Border congestion, Queues, Peak periods, Beit Bridge Border Post, Border management system, One stop border post.

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I. Introduction

Organisations that have joined the cost cutting euphoria compromise the quality of their service levels leading to customer dissatisfaction which is sometimes reflected by long queues and congestion at service centres. Managers are concerned about waiting in lines for long periods because queues have the potential to cause congestion. This then leads to loss of business, especially in the event that customers either decide to leave the line before they are served or they refuse to wait at all [1; 2]. Although long queue-waiting periods are undesirable, adding more checkout points and servers is not always the most economical strategy for improving queue management services [1]. Border crossing constraints often affect landlocked countries like Zimbabwe because the costs associated with border crossing are added to the cost of the products which are transported to landlocked destinations. Eventually, the costs are recovered from the customer thereby compromising the competitiveness of land locked states ([3]. Therefore, the Beitbridge Border Post management are found in a predicament where they need to identify ways of keeping waiting lines within tolerable limits, employing strategies that do not lead to the accumulation of costs for their organisations. They need to balance desirable service levels against the cost of providing the service [4]. Companies and individuals that use the Beitbridge Border Post particularly during peak periods such as Christmas and Easter seasons have experienced untold suffering owing to the effects of congestion, confusion and delays that characterise the Beitbridge Border Post during peak periods.

Apart from travellers' complaints and indications of inefficiency by Immigration Officials, officials at the highest policy making levels of both the South African and Zimbabwean Governments admit that the Beitbridge Border Post administration does not have adequate capacity to handle large volumes of human and vehicular traffic that pass through the border Post during peak periods. South Africa's Home Affairs Minister, Hlengiwe Mkhize promised to deal with increasing levels of corruption and dysfunctional scanning systems on the South African side [5]. She also hinted that, the infrastructure at the border was old and there was an urgent need for intervention [5]. In a similar note, Patrick Chinamasa who is Zimbabwe's Minister of Finance and Economic Planning announced at the November 2017 presentation of the 2018 National Budget that the army

was going to be dispatched to Beitbridge Border Post to sort out congestion and inefficiency at the border post [6]. He added that, illegal activities caused congestion at the border and this inconvenienced travellers and put off tourists. Other Zimbabwe Government officials have claimed that the border is overrun by touts, vendors and beggars. This consequently slows down the smooth movement of both goods and people, bringing about suffering among traders, travellers and border agencies [7].

Different officials tend to respond in different ways to this moment of truth. The problem is that, increased vehicle and people volumes at the Beitbridge Border Post during peak periods are predictable yet border authorities have failed to come up with firm and effective strategies to deal with border congestion during peak periods. Normal entries and departures are around 20,000 per day and the figure doubles during peak periods [8]. The human and vehicular border traffic during the 2017 festive peak season was however described as unexpected and unprecedented by many immigration officials from both, the South African and Zimbabwean sides.

The introduction of a OSBP at Chirundu border post between Zimbabwe and Zambia in 2009 managed to reduce the time needed to clear a truck from 120 hours to 25 hours. According to the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), the Chirundu OSBP scheme improved the smooth flow of human and vehicular traffic and reduced the costs associated with moving goods across the two countries [9]. However, a similar or better system has not been implemented at the Beitbridge Border Post which happens to be the busiest border post in Southern Africa [7;10]. Mr Nkoma, a station manager at the Chirundu OSBP has admitted that ICT infrastructure development and financial wherewithal are still major drawbacks because, even though the OSBP concept is working, processing systems are still partly manual [11]. The Zimbabwean Government therefore needs to ensure further commitment to the Chirundu project while also spearheading the introduction of a OSBP with South Africa.

According to South Africa's Transport Minister Joe Maswanganyi, a decision was made in 2009 to develop a OSBP at Beitbridge but no steps have been taken towards implementation to date [5]. The lack of developments is aggravated by a lack of leadership and political will to deal with issues that affect intra-regional trade. This lack of developments is a great disadvantage given that Zimbabwe and South Africa are each other's largest trading partners [12]. Former deputy Minister of Home Affairs, ObedingweMguni once acknowledged that the project to convert the Beitbridge border post into a OSBP was going on at a snail's pace, because the Government of South Africa had no intention to construct a second border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe to help ease congestion problem. Instead he proposed that travellers must use alternative routes such as going to South Africa via Botswana or Mozambique [13].

At 1500 hours, on 24 December, 2017, the researchers joined a long queue of vehicles 5 kilometres before the South African border processing post at Beitbridge. After 5 hours, at 2000 hours, the driver of the vehicle in which the researchers were travelling in decided to follow a trail of vehicles which was travelling on a dusty side road, adjacent to the lanes which were blocked by a traffic jam. From about 2100 hours on 24 December to 0100 hours on 25 December, the researchers waited to be processed and cleared by South African Immigration and Customs officers. Between 0100 and 0900 the researchers and other travellers waited in long queues for processing and clearance on the Zimbabwean side of the border post. All in all they endured eighteen hours of border congestion torture. However, the long stay within the congested border was long enough for one to make meaningful observation and interview some travellers and officials. As a result, the findings highlighted in this study were compiled based on the experiences of travellers who used the Beitbridge Border Post during the December 2017 peak period. The results were a mix of conflicting comments from border officials and travellers. Tarisai, a Zimbabwe Immigration official said that the numbers of people crossing the border reduced significantly on 24 December and as a result the chaos at the border was under control under control. However, [14] wrote an article on "Border Chaos; Christmas Eve Horrors as Zimbabwans fail to Get Home on Time" narrating how travellers experienced congestion and processing delays on 24 December. At the same time another immigration official, ClemenceMasango noted that arrivals were undergoing tormenting delays and he attributed the delays to inadequate infrastructure and processing equipment [15].

The study sought to document observed behaviours and feelings of travellers at the Beitbridge Border Post during a peak period. The researchers observed the behaviour of border agency personnel serving at the Beit Bridge Border Post during a congested peak period. The researchers also sought to document the effects of border post congestion on different stakeholders and suggest ways to facilitate decongestion.

II. Literature Review

a. The queuing theory

Studying the management of border posts is linked to the contemporary management science theory called "queuing theory". The queuing theory was founded in 1909 by a Danish engineer named A. K. Erlang who conducted research about delays in automatic dialling equipment [16;17]. Management should be concerned about long waiting periods owing to the additional cost of creating waiting space for customers,

possible loss of business, possible loss of good will, a reduction in customer satisfaction and the fact that queues cause congestion which can disrupt other business operations and customers [1]. Additionally, understanding the behaviour of queues is essential because customers associate long queues with poor service quality if the wait is long [17]. Therefore, by engaging in “waiting lines analysis” managers attempt to deal with the trade-off between the cost of providing good service and the cost of customers’ waiting time [2].

[4] and [2] propose that “waiting lines performance measurement” focuses on the number of customers waiting in the queue and the entire system, the time spent in the queue and the entire system, the probability that the system is busy and that arrivals will have to wait for services. Improving waiting line operations involves increasing the service rate by changing technology and adding more service channels to serve more customers simultaneously [16]. Furthermore, improvements should include: segmenting customers, telling customers why they should expect to wait more than usual and what you are doing to alleviate the problem, using additional labour and identifying and fixing bottlenecks in the system [18; 2].

b. The objectives of borders

The objective of borders is to provide value added services that facilitate smooth movement of people and goods across borders, hence the need for effective and efficient border management that can facilitate the free flow of people vehicles and goods across borders [19]. According to [20], customs and other border management agencies pay no more than lip service to trade facilitation resulting in inefficient borders. Effective border management encompasses the entirety of border enforcement, border control and border security activities and usually involves customs, immigration and border policing [21].

The increase in the number of travellers and volumes of vehicular traffic and cargo at borders requires a strategic balance between controls and facilitation [22]. Therefore, an effective and efficient border post is expected to have facilities such as offices, operational equipment, warehouses and parking space which are appropriately functional and adequate [23; 24; 22]. In Southern Africa, growing demand for more effective and efficient border posts is based on the fact that 43% of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries are landlocked, forcing them to rely heavily on road and rail networks which link regional and international markets [24]. Travellers need to cross borders fast, and with ease without incurring heavy costs that ultimately affect operations. Delays are not desirable because they cause serious unpredictability and make it difficult for transporters to plan their logistics [25;26].

c. Why do we need better management at borders?

According to the [27], we need better management to facilitate smooth and faster flow of cargo across borders because better management promotes trade among countries by enhancing the free circulation of goods, improving predictability and reliability of shipments and reducing transaction costs at the border. [7] estimates that, each delay at customs is equivalent to an additional 85 kilometres between trading countries and such border delays encourage illicit trading and corruption in order to bypass delays at customs and border posts. This petty corruption is often referred to as facilitation payments (small payments to an officer or employee, public or private who is responsible for a nondiscretionary service, for him to facilitate or accelerate a procedure). The corruption practices increase due to lax border control mechanisms and incentivisation of officials [28;10].

Better border management is widely promoted under different themes by international bodies such as the World Customs Organisation (WCO) to promote coordinated border management, the European Union (EU) to promote integrated border management, the World Bank to promote collaborative border management, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] to promote comprehensive border management [29]. The mission of coordinated border management is to encourage border agencies to coordinate their activities in order to improve effectiveness and efficiency of border procedures [29]. The fact that effective coordination allows people to work across portfolio boundaries provides a cohesive Government response to the challenges of border management [30]. Coordinated border management commonly relies on the OSBP concept as the main vehicle for joint border controls, international cooperation among border administrators and exchange of information between related Ministries and border agencies [29]. Research has shown that border management efforts are being made to speed up the customs clearance processes by pre-inspecting goods in the

exporter’s country rather than at the port of entry in the importer’s country, and that pre-inspection drastically cuts inspection time down to 2 or 3 days instead of weeks [31]

d. The state of SADC Borders

According to [32] imports to poor countries, SADC countries included, require nearly twice as many documents and six times as many signatures. A related research study concluded that, imports into Africa face more difficulties owing to excess physical inspections which are a major source of delays and time lapse between accepted customs declarations and customs clearance which takes up to 4 days while in OECD

countries it takes one day at most [33]. Delays at South Africa border posts cost the regional economy about USD 48 million a year [24].

The cumbersome systems, procedures and poor infrastructure both increase costs and lengthen delays to the clearance of imports, exports and transit goods [20]. Accordingly, border clearance processes are among the most problematic links in the supply chain and they frequently undermine competitiveness by increasing costs and reducing reliability. Numerous non customs agencies are involved in the clearance of goods and the lack of proper coordination among these agencies threatens the free flow of goods along the supply chain [34]. These delays make a country less competitive as such delays effectively tax imports and add costs that raise the price of exports [33]. In that same vein these delays create opportunities for administrative corruption [10]. The existence of out dated and overly bureaucratic border clearance processes by customs and other agencies also pose greater barriers to entry than tariffs [20].

According to [28] some of the evidence that SADC border posts are deficient include : inadequate resources and staff complement, lack of coordination between domestic and international border authorities, inadequate infrastructure (hard and soft), too many control, check and payment points, deep rooted corrupt activities, the lack of proper understanding of processes, systems and records, general inefficiency and the lack of speed accompanied by poor harmonisation and simplification of information processes that accompanies goods across borders. In addition there are too many stakeholders involved in border operations; there is lack of information sharing among border authorities, limited coordination of efforts between authorities and duplication of processes and procedures, long border delays and finally a silo approach among various independent border authorities [30; 27; 23].

e. The concept of One Stop Border Post (OSBP)

The OSBP concept refers to the legal and institutional framework, facilities and associated procedures that enable goods, people and vehicles to stop at a single facility where they undergo necessary controls following applicable regional and national laws to exit one state and enter the adjoining state [9]. Reasons for establishing OSBPs include: to expedite the movement of people and goods across borders, to reduce transport costs across national boundaries, to ensure that vehicles stop once to undertake border crossing formalities to exit one country and enter the other, to cut on border processing times, ensuring cargo is offloaded once and inspected jointly, and to bring together all the border agencies for improved efficiencies through streamlined, coordinated and harmonised operations [34; 22].

The establishment of the first fully functional OSBP in Africa began with the Chirundu border post between Zimbabwe and Zambia which was supported by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa [COMESA], the Southern Africa Development Community [SADC], the East Africa Community [EAC] and the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] in 2009 [35]. This was after the realisation of existence of problems associated with congested border posts and the regional bodies' commitment to trade facilitation by simplifying and harmonising cross border procedures [35]. The positive impact of the Chirundu OSBP project were evidenced by the reality that processing time went down from 120 hours to 20 hours for haulage trucks [7].

The OSBP concept operates based on principles of extraterritoriality which has three require main requirements. The first condition is the extension of the application of national laws outside a country's own territory with the consent of the country where these laws are applied [36]. Secondly, OSBP requires the juxtaposition of facilities where one country's facilities are by-passed in order to carry out all necessary exit and entrance procedures in the entry country [36]. Thirdly, a common one country facility where officers from the two countries' share offices and facilities should be located in one of the two countries which share a OSBP, implying that officers from the two countries carry out control activities together [36].

f. Benefits of one stop border post (OSBP)

In general, a OSBP reduces border post delays which in turn leads to increased trade volumes, higher earnings for the entire corridor, as well as improved facilitation of trade, regional integration and economic development [37; 38]. [38] emphasized that, eliminating a delay in one portion of the corridor only, creates another delay elsewhere on the corridor, thus the net effect will be close to nothing. This entails that, selective or discretionary improvements along the corridor cannot yield the anticipated benefits of an efficient border post which must operate as a system. OSBP improves competitiveness for goods in the region due to reduced processing times which are assumed to translate into reduced costs [39]. OSBP enhances the reliability of the supply chain through streamlined and harmonised procedures resulting in the predictable movement of cargo. Predictability implies environmental stability which gives management an opportunity to plan their strategies in advance [40]. OSBP also allows for the development of optional controls through shared and improved exchange of information among border agencies [19].

The following OSBP benefits were realised as a result of the Chirundu One Stop Border Post project: reduced supply chain costs, increased Government revenue, reduced duplication of efforts, reduced retail prices of consumer goods, increased investment and growth, truck time to cross the border reduced from 2 to 3 days to 2 hours, a fast track pre-clearance system which takes only 15 minutes and a 30% increase in volume of goods traded across the border [7]. The Chirundu OSBP also reduced the processing time for buses, personal vehicles and other forms of non-haulage vehicular traffic.

g. Border management challenges

The major border management challenge which affects SADC states is the use of disjointed and redundant interventions which affect the quality of administrative and support services at the borders (USAID/Southern Africa, 2010). Institutional regulatory framework and political barriers constrain the opening of international transport routes [39]. For example, the constraints faced by drivers of foreign vehicles when they have to pass through many roadblocks and check points after enduring the negative effects of excessive immigration regulations and lack of harmonised standards has over the years demoralised travellers and restricted movement across the Beitbridge border post [41; 26]. After monitoring transit times at the Chirundu border post, [42] noted that the main border challenges were poor infrastructure, expensive ICT connectivity and the lack of pre-clearance systems. [7] cites too many controls and the lack of cooperation and partnerships among stakeholders as the main hindrances. In a related matter, too many controls influence facilitation payments or petty corruption. These are payments to an officer or employee, public or private, who is responsible for nondiscretionary service, in order to facilitate, accelerate or cheapen a procedure [10; 43].

According to other analysts major border post challenges include: inefficient regulation, inefficient management systems, non-harmonisation of standards, unavailability of data, accidents, the silo mentality (each country seeks to advance delivery of own mandate), corruption and illegal checkpoints [44; 38; 26; 10]. At international level, cost and uncertainty are cited as main challenges. For example, a review of 20 key crossing points between USA and Canada revealed that border transit time and uncertainty cost approximately US\$4.01 billion per annum [45]. On a comparative basis, this cost is usually six times higher in an African context owing to rigidity and border congestion [3]. All the above mentioned challenges lead to cause delays and push up transportation costs.

III. Research Methodology

Research on border post management tends to focus on measuring the effectiveness of border management systems [36; 27; 19] the implementation of the OSBP concept [24; 35; 22], and the management of border management systems [21; 20]. There has been no noticeable effort to document how border users behaved during border congestion moments, particularly at the Beitbridge Border Post which happens to be the biggest and busiest border post in Africa [24; 10]. No border management study has been based on observing and interviewing border users and border officials concurrently. In the study, the behaviour of travellers (commercial and non-commercial) and that of service providers were observed and recorded from 24 to 25 December, 2017, a period during which the Beitbridge Border Post was brought to a standstill.

This kind of study brings about new and more realistic captions of how travellers behave when they are caught up in border congestion and it gives insights and suggestions on how border posts could be decongested during peak periods. Although solutions based on border management theories and principles are useful, they cannot be more useful than solutions based on observed reality and direct interaction with affected users. Therefore, knowledge generated by the study and its findings can be useful in assisting different stakeholders (policy makers, border agencies, and travellers) in planning and managing border congestions in future. The research is unique because documenting border users' behaviour during peak period congestion can be used to initiate debate on how best to address customer issues, raise awareness of issues which cause border delays and how best they could be addressed.

Observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, objects, and occurrences as they are witnessed [46; 47]. [47]notes that the advantages of observations include that, the researcher studies customers' behaviour while they shop or experience the service and researchers may watch from a distance as customers interact with a service, or they may identify themselves and talk to the customers. It is better to learn from current knowledge, experience and good practices rather than from knowledge that is a few years old [22]. As a result, observed data is free from distortions, inaccuracies and other response biases [48]. Furthermore, researchers concur that they can use observation method to observe phenomena such as physical activities [the way shoppers move through a shop], verbal behaviour [statements customers make to each other or to the service provider], express behaviour and psychological reactions [non-verbal communications in facial expressions, body language, and the amount of sweat people produced during an event] [46; 49; 50].The limitation of observation is that it is highly selective and subjective [49]. The researcher cannot observe the attitudes, feelings and motivations of participants [50] and what we see depends on what we

are looking for [46]. Nevertheless it is a reality, that the Beitbridge border came to a standstill, human and vehicular traffic both experienced unprecedented delays, and the immigration processing officials from both sides of the border acknowledged the crisis.

According to [50], observation records should capture two important dimensions. First, the description of what the researcher observed providing a rich description of what actually takes place excluding any value judgement. Second, the researcher's reflection about what happened giving his or her own thought or idea about the meaning of what was observed. In the study, a flow chart was used to capture these important dimensions at the different stages of border crossing. In addition, and as a form of triangulation and corroborating observation findings, interviews and focus group discussions were used. Thus, four travellers were interviewed and two focus group discussions held with travellers.

Although observation raises some ethical issues, particularly with participants' consent and right to privacy, no consent was sought in the study for two key reasons. The behaviour being observed, crossing a congested border, is commonly performed in public where it is expected that others can observe the behaviour anyway [46] and the behaviour is performed in a setting in which anonymity of the person being observed is assured, there is no way to identify individuals [49; 46].

IV. Research Results And Discussion

The results presented below are based on observations and interviews.

4.1 Observation results

Table 4.1 Observations of activities associated with crossing the Beitbridge border post on 24 December 2017.

Date & Time	Description of observations	Reflections
24-12-2017 3.00-8.00 PM	Joined long queue 6 kilometres away from border post on the South African side. Traffic police were monitoring the queue but no explanation was given for the long queue. Police were later joined by immigration and customs officers. Suddenly the two lanes from the border to Musina (in South Africa) were blocked by traffic which was moving towards Zimbabwe and the traffic police disappeared from the scene. Upon arrival at the South African side of the border, traffic was directed to different service points and the road ahead was free of any traffic congestion.	Because no one bothered to explain why travellers had to queue before they reached the border, some travellers who were headed towards Zimbabwe became impatient and made a U-turn back to South Africa, some created their own routes to by-pass the official route and others remained in the queue. Some enterprising woman took the opportunity to provide hair braiding business services to other stranded travellers; she completed working on three clients' heads while we waited before reaching the South African immigration processing post. Other opportunists included: food and beverage sellers, mobile phone and car accessory traders. Some travellers kept themselves busy by drinking; eating, dancing and listening to music, never minding the dangerous "bumper to bumper pile up" they were in.
8.00PM to 12.30 AM	At the next point, travellers were queuing to have their passports stamped by South African Immigration officials and to be issued with gate passes by Customs officials. The queue moved slowly up to 11 PM and suddenly came to a standstill until a few minutes towards mid night. We were cleared at midnight and thereafter directed to the last South Africa check point (a police check point). We were finally cleared out of South Africa at 12.30 AM, nine and half hours after joining the queue on the South African side. Upon arrival at the Zimbabwean side we came across Zimbabwe National Road Authority (ZINARA) officials and private security service personnel who were directing traffic into a parking area which had over 250 vehicles at the time when we arrived. Immediately after parking, travellers had to find their way to immigration and customs processing posts. There were different points for immigration procedures which	The long stay here was associated with the changing over of shifts which chewed a complete one hour with no movement at all while mosquitoes and other insects were playing havoc with travellers. What concerned travellers the most was the fact that border agents did not bother to explain to travellers why the queues were not moving normally. It took us 30 minutes to get to the Zimbabwean side. The ZINARA and private security officials disappeared once one got a parking slot. No one bothered to inform arrivals about what they were

01.00 AM to 2.00AM	<p>took ten minutes at most. There were also different customs declaration points for those with nothing to declare and passengers who were travelling with private and public transport.</p> <p>Unfortunately those who were driving vehicles with non-Zimbabwean registration plates there was a long queue for Temporary Import Permits (TIPs) documents.</p>	<p>supposed to do and what was expected at immigration and customs service points.</p> <p>The private security company personnel controlled entry points to immigration and customs building. To minimize congestion inside the building some tasks were performed in make shift offices that were outside the main building. This helped to reduce passport processing time for Zimbabwean passport holders who did not need to pay for vehicle clearance.</p>
4.00AM to 9.00 AM	<p>TIPs are required in order for such drivers to gain entrance into Zimbabwe. The extremely long TIP fee payment queue led to two service points whose machines which were operating dismally owing to technical constraints. Once you joined the queue you would get a number from a security officer. There was a lot of pushing and shoving as travellers strived to reach the front of the queue and this created room for some people to engage in corrupt practices by offering bribes to officials who would then help them to skip the queue. We got our TIP at around 8.30 AM. Thereafter we went to a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) police post for clearance. The process took about 15 minutes. The final process was Customs clearance, which we managed to get done by 9.00AM. Since our travel plans had already been delayed by more than half a day (our initial estimated processing time was 6 hours) we proceeded non-stop to Harare (our final destination). In total, it took us 19 hours to get to Zimbabwe: 5 hours waiting in the queue before the South African side, about 5 hours to pass through South African border processing posts and about 9 hours on the Zimbabwean side</p>	<p>There was no customer segmentation and there was no special prioritisation of customers who were paying for TIPs and vehicle insurance. Ironically most of Zimbabwe's customs revenue comes from insurance and temporary imports fees paid by travellers driving non-Zimbabwean vehicles. Officials refused to open additional service points until people threatened to become violent. New service points were introduced around 6.00AM and immediately there was some improvement. Travellers who had to pay duty for their luggage endured the long wait in queues similar to those in the temporary import permits queue. Customers to Government companies cannot take their business elsewhere hence they have to endure the inefficiencies of these monopolistic organisations [51; 26].</p>

4.2 Interview results

4.2.1 System Failures on the Zimbabwean side

According to people who travelled from South Africa to Zimbabwe during the festive season (20 December 2017 to 2 January 2018), border congestion problems began on Wednesday 20 December. On Thursday 21 December the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) attributed the delays to IT failures with the Automated System for Customs Data World system which they use [52]. ZIMRA Spokesperson, Mudzimu ensured travellers that interim measures would be put in place to ensure continuity and quick clearance of travellers and commercial cargo [52]. Even though IT failures were somewhat rectified, the processing systems at the Zimbabwean side of the South Africa-Zimbabwe border post remained slow. According to an observation of border processes during the peak period, the researcher found that, immigration officials resorted to stamping Zimbabwean nationals' passports without entering their information on the Home Affairs system so as to reduce waiting times for those queuing to get their passports stamped. However, this had minimal effects owing to the absence of a corresponding efficient vehicular traffic processing system.

Below are some of the responses to the question: *“How long did it take you to get your passport stamped on the South African side?”*

Participant 1: *One could join the queue and have their passport stamped within 10 minutes. However, we had to wait in a queue for TIPs for about 5 hours after processing at the immigration. I think the major problem was the processing of vehicular traffic, the queues for passport stamping were not that bad.*

Participant 2: *Getting our passports stamped was not the major hassle. One could join the queue and have their passport stamped in 10 minutes. But getting our car and goods cleared for entry into Zimbabwe took more than 5 hours from the time we reached the Zimbabwean side.*

Participant 3: *Few minutes. It was good but there was a traffic jam.*

Participant 4: *A few minutes. 10 to 20 perhaps. But we were on the bus and we had to sit in the bus for more than 3 hours before our luggage was searched and our bus cleared for entry into Zimbabwe.*

Since the Zimbabwe Immigration Authorities resorted to using manual passport stamping procedures instead of the usual automated system, queue management issues were somehow resolved. However, the alternative manual system did not eradicate the major problem which was faced by travellers during the 2017/2018 festive period. Most participants attributed their long wait at the Zimbabwean side of the border to long vehicular processing processes and luggage search processes. On the South African side of the border, similar concerns were raised.

Listed below are some of the responses to the question: “How long did it take you to get your passport stamped on the South African side?”

Participant 1: *I was not completely satisfied with the service because no one was telling us what was going on. We sat in the car for a good 5 hours before reaching the SA clearance facilities. However, getting to immigration and customs took us another 3 hours but having passports stamped and being customs cleared took less than 30 minutes altogether.*

Participant 5: *We waited too long about 20 kilometres from the South African side. So the first day we decided to find somewhere to sleep before deciding to go to Botswana, then Zimbabwe since people were telling us that the Botswana-Zimbabwe border was less busy.*

Based on the researcher’s observation and responses to interview questions, the major stumbling block was poor management of the queues that eventually led to a congested border post. Adjustments to passport processing systems needed to be complemented by efficient customs clearance mechanisms. Immigration officials from Zimbabwe and South Africa attributed the traffic flows to unexpected unprecedented numbers of people travelling to Zimbabwe, especially around 20 to 22 December, 2017.

4.2.2 Unprecedented/unexpected human flows

Even though it is common knowledge that the Beitbridge border is the busiest border on the African continent, the masses of travellers who passed through the border gates from 20 December 2017 to 2 January 2018 were perceived as unprecedented. One senior immigration official simply attributed the pressure and congestion to unprecedented/unanticipated volumes. She suggested that, ever since the 2008/2009 transition to the Government of National Unity (GNU), Zimbabwe had never experienced such high volumes of return migration and Christmas holiday visits. Some analysts contend that border congestion could be attributed to the transition in political leadership which saw former Zimbabwean president, Robert Gabriel Mugabe resigning and making way for Emmerson Mnangagwa to take over. Change in political leadership gave most Zimbabweans who were residing in South Africa renewed hope and eagerness to return home to review the political and economic situation back home. An additional number of people therefore increased human and vehicular traffic flows through the Beit-Bridge Border post.

4.2.3 Multi-vehicular traffic

As observed by the researchers, traffic towards the South African side of the border post included: haulage trucks, passenger buses and informal transport/courier service providers (popularly known as malaicha), all sharing two lanes, with no distinct lane designations. Members of the South Africa Police Services (SAPS) established traffic control road stands along the 10-15 kilometre stretch before the entry gates. However, anxious and frustrated drivers manoeuvred through traffic lanes to cheat the long vehicle queues towards the border post. SAPS officers were overwhelmed and eventually gave up. What was supposed to be a multi-way road to and from Zimbabwe turned into a one way road (with three columns of traffic) and a narrow blocked strip for vehicles travelling from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Poor traffic control for haulage trucks, passenger transport, malaicha vehicles and private vehicles contributed to the unnecessary pressures. Once one reached the border entry point which was effectively controlled, the queues were split according to types of vehicles, thus making it easy for South African immigration officials to process travellers. After 4 hours of waiting for processing on the South African side, one had to once again deal with the problem of mixed traffic flows on the Zimbabwean side as there were no distinct processing areas for different types of vehicles and travellers.

When asked what they think can be done differently to manage peak season border traffic, participants had this to say:

Participant 3: *More border gates. More staff. Less delays. Simple.*

Participant 1: *The border is too small. It needs to be expanded and clearly divided for different forms of traffic. That way vehicular traffic can be tackled. Also some vehicle searches are unnecessary and frustrating, especially if they are done on both sides of the border. If we could get cleared once and for all as is done at Chirundu, it would be better.*

Participant 4: *Order. Splitting cars, trucks and buses, taxis too. They must also stop unnecessary searches.*

Participant 2: *Stop taking bribes. They must do their search jobs fast and clear people’s vehicles.*

Most of the other interviewed participants kept on suggesting the establishment of a one-stop-border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe in order to end border congestion issues.

4.3 Effects of border delays

4.3.1 Travelling delays

Poor management of border traffic can lead to a decline in numbers of tourists and return migrants to Zimbabwe from South Africa since border facilitation issues negatively affect travellers' experiences. Delays at the borders lead to delays in travellers' schedules thereby negatively affecting their schedules. Travelling delays were cited as a major disappointment by all those who were interviewed for the study. On average, each traveller had to spend at least 6 hours negotiating the queue to the South African border gate, an additional 1 or 2 hours for immigration and customs formalities on the South African side, and another 6 hours on the Zimbabwean side. Further delays were caused by illegal processes at the border post, whereby drivers who had links with some ZIMRA or immigration officials paid their way ahead of others on the vehicle processing queues. Commercial drivers' situation is aggravated by the fact that freight forwarders and clearing agents are not available to clear their vehicles because they do not operate 24/7 basis.

4.3.2 Health effects

Furthermore, spending long hours at the border post can lead to exhaustion, muscle pains, stomach problems, dehydration, headaches, mosquito bites and other physiological effects which lead to travellers' sickness, or even death, in the most severe cases. The researchers observed some passengers exiting their cars to go and vomit or relieve themselves in the bushes along the South Africa-Zimbabwe highway. Some passengers had visibly swollen feet while others were complaining of dehydration and hunger. Some drivers reported that they were exhausted and afraid that their driving ability would be compromised. No wonder why there are many road accidents along the Beitbridge-Bulawayo and Beitbridge-Harare highways, drivers will be exhausted.

4.3.3 Leeway for illicit operations

As indicated in [7; 44; 10] report, the researchers also observed that when travellers are frustrated by lengthy border processes some of them opt to bribe border agents officials so that they can skip queues and proceed with their journeys beyond the border with less hassles.

Some participants had this to say:

Participant 2:*Our bus drivers paid some of the border authorities a little cash so that they would not do the routine bag searches. So we crossed a bit faster than other travellers who were on buses.*

Participant 5:*I am a malaicha. I lost a lot of money while trying to get through the border with the goods I was supposed to deliver to people's families back home. It was worth the loss in the end because no one searched my vehicle. But these things of bribes must stop. It's a huge loss for business people like me.*

Participant 1:*I don't like bribing officials. So I stayed at the Zimbabwean border for more than 6 hours. Hoping that the corrupt officials and buses would quickly get through. It was not fun.*

Based on the aforementioned accounts it is clear that illicit operations contributed to the border congestion problems on the Zimbabwean side. This is not to say similar problems did not occur on the South African side, but none of the interviewed participants indicated any illicit dealings on the South African side. Informalisation of the border activities has seen an increase in the numbers and activities of touts, vendors, and beggars. These informal elements are the breeding ground for corruption and they tighten the congestion as officials prefer to serve those who pay them bribes first.

V. Conclusions

Although border agencies work to address similar problems border management tends to be complex because the different border agencies operate independently resulting in task duplications, wastage of resources, conflicting priorities and ultimately congestion that inconveniences travellers and other stakeholders. This has impact on transit times and uncertainty which cost countries billions of dollars [45].

Prior to the 2017/18 festive season the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) issued a statement indicating their readiness and anticipated challenges with regards to border traffic management between South Africa and Zimbabwe. It indicated that border traffic increases during the festive season were due to increases in the numbers of tourists, school and work holidays, cross border shoppers and annual visits by cross border employees [53]. It is also clear that the delays experienced by travellers are not new; these are repeat problems that tend to be seasonal. It can therefore be concluded that authorities anticipated the delays which people experienced at the Beitbridge border post but management did not have a plan to deal with the anticipated delays.

Management of the different border agents particularly, immigration, customs and the police were at work 24/7 as usual but they got overwhelmed by the demand for service. One can conclude that Beitbridge

border post infrastructure, equipment and staff are not adequate and sufficiently adjusted to deal with the problem of congestion during peak periods.

No meaningful investment has been made at the border post since 2009 when the two countries entered into a joint venture agreement to develop a OSBP at Beitbridge. It can be concluded that the two countries have got no capacity to develop a OSBP or at least they are not willing to commit resources into the project. According to [54], there are strategic alliances between the two Governments but there is lack of alliance strategies.

VI. Recommendations

The fact that authorities from Zimbabwe and South Africa issued statements about their readiness to deal with anticipated increased volumes during the festive season confirms their knowledge about the need to effectively manage the border post. However, effective management can only happen if the border post is managed as a system. Managing a system requires the identification and removal of all system bottlenecks [17]. This can happen if the parties agree to implement a comprehensive automated system to for the purpose of checking and clearing of travellers. In Angola such a system cut costs by 150% [7]. Pre-clearance and front inspection of goods by customs has potential to reduce time spent at the border and cutting costs too [39].

The fact that current staff and infrastructure were overwhelmed by demand requires the two Governments to involve international financiers to facilitate development of this important intra-Africa trade route [35]. Roads into and out of the border from either end require dualisation to create more lanes that could accommodate more traffic. Related to this redesigning ZIMRA and SARS systems need to be integrated and their procedures need to be harmonised. All this can only happen when both Governments have political will and commitment to see this regional border post being turned around. The Beitbridge border post project has the potential to be a billion dollar project therefore a strong team of qualified and experienced professionals must be assembled to manage the project professionally. Since the two countries may not have the capacity to finance the project on their own they can consider the following funding options: Build-Operate and Transfers (BOTs), Build-Own Operate and Transfers (BOOTs) and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

Informalisation of the border activities can be addressed by enforcing border management rules and putting new tighter controls where they are required. Since delays create administrative corruption [10] effective communication and sharing of information is required because travellers are tempted to corrupt officials because they do not have access to all the information they need to clear their own vehicle and goods. One of the main causes of cross border corruption is the fragmentation of bodies at national and global level with limited coordination and resources [44]. This needs to be streamlined. There must be clear signage to inform travellers about border procedures and the offices must not be congested at any time. Therefore, management need to create additional facilities to serve travellers or at least have waiting areas that are properly controlled by their staff. The informal elements must not be permitted in the immigration and customs clearing areas.

Governments must not merely tell people to use Mozambique or Botswana entry points into Zimbabwe because travellers have their own reasons for using the Beitbridge border post. For example, South Africa hosts the majority of Zimbabwean migrants in the world; therefore it makes sense for them to travel between Zimbabwe and South Africa using the Beitbridge border post, which is the only border between Zimbabwe and South Africa. Furthermore, the Beitbridge border post is directly linked to the Beitbridge-Chirundu highway which is the busiest highway in Zimbabwe. Saying people must use the Botswana route is very ironic because if Botswana finds resources to develop its Kazungula to Zambia highway the Beitbridge Chirundu route will become a white elephant with Zimbabwe losing millions of dollars in potential revenue. Business opportunities must be harnessed and taken advantage of while they are still ripe.

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