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Truck driver fatigue: a dangerous balancing act

Driver fatigue was recently cited by Western Cape provincial traffic chief Kenny Africa as one of the biggest problems on South African roads. For those that make a living from being behind the steering wheel every day, the problem is even bigger.

South African logistics is still very much reliant on road transport, and therefore on the drivers that operate the vehicles. While there are several regulations that attempt to control the amount of duty hours for drivers, logistics operators struggle to balance regulation with productivity, efficiency, and driver suitability.

As Southern Africa deals with drought conditions through cross-border trade, these regulations become even more difficult to balance with profitability.



“The solution isn’t as simple as many might assume,” warns Gert Basson, general manager of Mobile Solutions at VSc Solutions. “It is far more complex than just assigning a driver to a vehicle, and capping the amount of hours the driver is operating that specific vehicle.”

Each type of transport load is charged at a specific rate, and might need more than just the driver to accompany the load. Certain loads can only be transported by certain vehicle classes, and each driver is licensed to operate only certain vehicle classes.

Combining these factors with hours of work stated in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA), the industry regulations specified by the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight and Logistics Industry (NBCRFLI), and the efficiencies each logistics operator must take into account to turn a profit, the optimisation of driver scheduling becomes an extremely complex task.

“Instead of expecting this complexity to be the responsibility of one individual, logistics operators can make use of smart applications that takes physical regulatory factors into account and optimise these into schedules or routes,” explains Basson.



An optimised driver schedule balances the workload and rotation of the entire resource base within applicable constraints roles and hours. This demands that the number of hours staff worked to date as well as the number of hours staff are due to work the current day are taken into account. This can only be done by comparing progress on current routes with proposed schedules of work planned for the days to follow.

Driver scheduling is often done based on payroll data which takes into account the amount of regular and overtime hours worked. The data does however not always make provision for special circumstance, or regulations relating to a specific route or vehicle class.

“There are multiple role players and rules in organisation that need to be catered for to ensure regulations are adhered to as well as applied in the most effective manner daily and over a working period,” says Basson.

“A safe and effective driver schedule needs to take into account HR, finance, payroll, leave, resource planning, transport management, asset management, licensing, and driver licensing, to name but a few.”

“Very simply, there are some instances where the right app can calculate the intricacies of optimised driver scheduling and route planning better than even the most experienced individual. It would be much better for any employer to rather use that individual in other areas where their experience will have an even greater impact.”

“In the end driver schedule and route optimisation is not just about either turning a profit or just sticking to regulations. The impact of driver fatigue is not only expensive downtime and repairs to vehicles, but in many cases, a tragic loss of innocent life.”

To enquire about the driver scheduler solution call (0)11 523-4800 or email info@vscsolutions.co.za

For more information about our solutions, visit: <http://www.vscsolutions.co.za>