



Rail comes up trumps for logistics provider

BY Liesl Venter

Rail in South Africa is improving despite ongoing scepticism about efficiency and reliability, says Paul Cunliffe, managing director of 4PL.COM Logistics Cape.

A strategic decision to use more rail is paying off as the company finds this mode of transport not only more cost-effective but also just as efficient as road transport.

"We used rail last year to move our export containers with citrus and were very impressed. There were some issues that had to be sorted out but for the most part it was a smooth operation," he told FTW.

Cunliffe said with the company trying to increase its rail business it made sense to use rail again this year for its citrus exports.

"We were extremely impressed with how the

service has improved from last year and how the problems that we experienced in the first run had been addressed by Transnet Freight Rail this year."

According to Cunliffe, a total of 650 export containers carrying citrus was moved from Tzaneen to Durban and Cape Town with only one incident.

"And the speed with which TFR addressed the single incident was phenomenal. We believe that we will increase our usage of rail even more now as it makes sense to use this mode of transport for fruit."

He said not only was a reasonable cost saving made per container moved, but also the fruit was only handled once – an important consideration for perishable cargo.

"Already chilled in the packhouse, it was handled

once onto rail and moved to the ports in exactly the same amount of time that road would have taken. The service was efficient and reliable."

He said with less of a paper trail, major time

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savings were made in terms of administration that ultimately impact on cost.

Cunliffe said the ability to handle larger volumes at once – 38 containers were moved on one train per week – also contributed to a more efficient service.

"Rail may have been inefficient and unreliable,

but we have seen major improvement in the rail service in this country. While more synchronisation between the various Transnet divisions will improve the service even more, we believe they have come a long way. I believe it is also important for Transnet to look at having a competent service provider to facilitate communication between the various Transnet entities and oversee the operations. Rail in South Africa can work," said Cunliffe.

"At present we are looking at what other cargo can be moved to rail to increase this side of our business even more. We believe that most of our citrus exports in future will be on rail. It makes sense from a cost and handling perspective and also the efficiency was not inferior to road so why not?"