

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE AS A COST-CUTTING STRATEGY

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South African roads are busy. Very busy. The transport industry contributes to the national economy on a vast scale, and the value of the industry is often underestimated. Those of us within the industry know that without the trucks on our roads, many sectors of the economy which remain alive and vibrant, would simply cease to exist.



Keeping these vehicles running costs a lot of money, as most fleet owners and managers will know. Numerous smaller industries are kept alive as a result of the demands from the transport industry, and many other spin-offs provide sustenance for smaller enterprises. It is important that we remain aware of the massive impact that the transport industry has on many sectors of the economy. These are all beneficial aspects to the industry, and as noble as they may be, there is however a dark side to the equation, and one which we must take great care in addressing.

Road accidents involving heavy vehicles are a daily occurrence on our roads, and often these lead to fatalities involving people that are not active within the industry.



These incidents have a knock-on effect which is perhaps not immediately apparent to the average reader or road user. Delayed deliveries, insurance claims, customer relations, increased premiums resulting in increased costs: all these issues have an impact on the industry, but more importantly, they have

an impact on public opinion. Everyone knows that when a high profile accident involving a heavy vehicle occurs, fingers start wagging and the industry is once again in the spotlight, resulting in serious calls for it to be regulated more stringently, for certain prohibitions (route management) to be put in place, and in general for the industry to be hamstrung by calls from people who have a poor understanding of the industry. These calls for paradigm shifts in the manner in which the industry operates are well intended, but often poorly informed.

Is there another way? Is there more that can be done by the industry in order to substantiate the claims it makes that it is doing all it can to ensure that vehicles are operated safely and by qualified and educated drivers?

It is a fact that in any industry and any situation, there always remains room for improvement, and this article steps out into the void that is the field of properly designed Preventative Maintenance Systems for the Transport Industry.



There are many ways in which fleets are maintained. New trucks are subjected to service plans supported by the manufacturer. Older trucks are serviced and repaired (hopefully) by agents who have skilled workshop staff available, and who should know their trades very well. It appears as if the maintenance of trucks on our roads is not such a big issue after all!

Why then, as is the case in every high profile accident, is the blame cast on only one of two possible situations? Either it is driver error, or a vehicle system that has failed. Are there no other potential culprits in this scenario? I believe that there is, and paying attention to this will practically eliminate the casting of stones during post accident investigations, and the blame game that so easily becomes part of the process.

The maintenance of a vehicle should be a complete system. A system that performs all tasks, and records them accurately. Preventative Maintenance is such a vague concept, but once educated in the mechanics of the system, fleet managers and owners realize that sending their trucks for their scheduled services is not preventative maintenance at all. It is merely doing what the

manufacturer demands from you to do, to ensure that that same wagging finger of blame can be waved at technical staff who perform the services. If anything fails post service, the owner often demands from the servicing agent an explanation, and a no cost reparation of the defect. In these scenarios, relations often become strained, but very little progress is made towards creating safer vehicles and drivers on our roads.

Preventative Maintenance is different. It is a system. It is a program which involves the driver and manages the work on a vehicle in a planned, scheduled, managed and properly costed and recorded format. It has clearly identified outcomes, and it saves money. It saves money because it truly has the potential to identify

The image shows a 'Vehicle Maintenance Log' form. At the top, it says 'Vehicle Maintenance Log'. Below that are fields for 'Vehicle', 'Year, Make and Model', and 'VIN'. The main part of the form is a table with columns for 'Date', 'Mileage', 'Workshop or Dealer's name', and a large section for 'Repair or Maintenance work done'. The 'Repair or Maintenance work done' section has sub-columns for: Oil Change, WASH OF ENGINE TOP, Wheel Adjustment, Tire Rotation, Air Filter, Fuel Filter, Water hoses, Brake Service, Belts & Hoses, Radiator, Fluid Levels, Transmission Maintenance, Spark Plugs, Battery, Other, Amount billed, and Comments. The table has several empty rows for recording data. At the bottom right of the table, there is a 'Total' row. Below the table, the website 'www.AustralianFleetHub.com' is printed.

problems before they cause breakdowns and cost money. They provide peace of mind because they result in more reliable vehicle which are run at a much reduced cost. It is a simple solution to an expensive problem. The driver involvement in the operation of the program has multiple benefits, mostly in that the driver becomes part of the system, performs some of the basic tasks, and learns about the technical aspects of the equipment he operates. This equips him with skills that may result in the resolution of minor problems on the road, once again saving the owner/operator money.

Preventative Maintenance also manages service providers in that it prevents work from being done which was not requested in the first place, but which owners and fleet managers often pay for without questioning. Many examples exist, and it happens daily, where vehicles are submitted to an agency for a repair or work that is supposed to cost R10,000.00, but the invoice returned runs up to R20,000.00, on the basis of "work that needed to be done for defects we found". By this time it is too late, and the work has been done, often without seeking permission, based on the false concept that the technicians knows better. It is often impossible for fleet owners and managers to be able to determine of work was actually required. In this manner, maintenance costs on

fleets run up in an almost uncontrolled and unmanaged basis. It is wrong and it must stop.

Preventative Maintenance manages this process from start to end, and ensures that vehicles are properly checked, serviced, repaired and that no extra costs are added. Inherent in Preventative Maintenance is a quality control aspect which is often not found in other systems. The requirement to provide serial numbers for spares fitted, as an example, ensures that the owner can determine the origins of a spare part that has been fitted to his vehicle and can then have the confidence that it is an OEM part.

Try it and test it. You will find your maintenance bill slashed by substantial amounts.