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Minister Fikile Mbalula: Coronavirus COVID-19 Alert Level 4 transport directions

1 May 2020

We have always been mindful that Transport is not only an enabler of economic activity and access to social amenities, but also a potent instrument, capable of spreading the COVID-19 virus far and wide. After all, it was the aviation sector that enabled the virus to reach our shores. Ours is to ensure that the mobility of the virus through our transport system is stopped dead on its tracks.

Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma has published Regulations that give effect to the Alert Level 4 of the Risk Adjusted Strategy to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which comes into effect today. As mandated by these Regulations, we have made adjustments to our Directions in order to ensure alignment with Level 4. These adjustments have been informed by consultations we have undertaken with industry bodies and authorities in the taxi, bus, rail, aviation and maritime sectors.

Our mandate as a sector is that of a catalyst, which enables mobility in the economy and social setting. However, we are enjoined to execute this mandate responsibly and in a manner that ensures that the preservation of human life remains sacrosanct.

The hard choices we have to make as a nation are premised on the centrality of the right to life and our singular commitment to uphold this right, above all else. Not everyone will be happy with these choices. Some of which will be hard and will change our way of life. However, we must never forget the reason we make these difficult choices in the first place. To preserve human life.

We are equally duty bound to ensure that ours is not a sector that will enable the rampant spread of the virus. The measures that we put in place, and continue to revise from time to time, are meant to mitigate against this spread through various transport modes.

Today, we announce the Directions that will enable the shift to Level 4, insofar as transport operations are concerned.

MARITIME

In respect of maritime transport, there will be no changes to the Directions regulating the movement of ships. The ban on passenger vessels and cruise liners remains in place, and only vessels bringing in cargo are allowed to call on our ports.

However, we will allow the movement of cargo from our sea-ports to either warehouses or final destinations as provided for in the current rules.

AVIATION

The ban on both domestic and international passenger flights remains in place. However, as is already the case, we will continue to allow repatriation flights either bringing back South Africans stranded in foreign countries or transporting foreign nationals to their home countries. The current approval procedures to permit departure or landing of such flights remains unchanged.

The easing of the lockdown to Level 4 means increased economic activity in sectors that are permitted to resume operations.

Due consideration will be given to the mining and agricultural sector to allow limited movement of aircrafts, either to transport essential workers by chartered aircrafts or to spray pesticides on crops. All these movements will be subject to approval and permits will be issued on a case by case basis.

No scheduled domestic flights will be permitted in Level 4. This is determined by the Risk Adjusted Strategy, which guides the easing of restrictions. Once the alert level moves to Level 3, limited movement of scheduled domestic flights will be allowed. It is only when the country's alert level reaches Level 2, that we will fully open our airspace and allow movement of both domestic and international flights.

RAIL

With the gradual resumption of economic activity in certain sectors and permitted movement of freight, we will allow the full resumption of freight rail.

Commuter rail will resume operations gradually on an incremental basis, based on the detailed plans submitted by the passenger rail operators. Limited services with strict measures to ensure social distancing and other mitigation measures, will be introduced.

Gautrain

Gautrain operations will be gradually re-introduced in all rail-based services, covering 8 of their 9 stations. There will be no airport service.

An appropriate load factor will be applied by all operators based on their seating and standing arrangements according to 50% standard coach occupancy.

Gautrain will mark out areas of the station to demarcate where to stand and queue appropriately, based on one passenger per square metre.

The Gautrain seating arrangement will consist alternate seats to allow regulated spacing and control based on average one passenger per square metre.

Operating staff in completion of service, will operate from 5h00 to 12h00 and 15h00 with an appropriate peak hour service. The last trains will depart at 18h00 to clear the system by 19h00.

To allow for travelling of operating staff and completion of service, the Gautrain will operate from 05h00 to 12h00 and 15h00 to 20h00 with an appropriate peak hour service.

Maintenance staff will be permitted to move in and around the system during curfew-hours (22h00pm – 04h00).

Maintenance vehicles will only be permitted to move around the system in these hours only.

PRASA

PRASA will similarly adopt a gradual re-introduction of its services based on its capacity to manage crowds, implement effective social distancing and implement other mitigation measures that include cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, trains and stations.

PRASA will undertake the compulsory testing of the rolling stock during the Level 4 period and only resume with a limited service once the National Coronavirus Command Council declares the risk-adjustment to Level 3, with the return of the Pienaarspoort line in Tshwane and the Southern line in Cape Town.

There will be no immediate resumption of Metrorail commuter services until we have satisfied ourselves that the risk of transmission is manageable on a corridor by corridor basis.

Long distance trains are still prohibited in Level 4.

ROAD-BASED TRANSPORT

Cross-Border Road Transport

Cross-Border road passenger movement remains prohibited. Only essential cargo will be allowed to move across our land borders. The definition of essential cargo has been broadened in the Level 4 Regulations published on 29 April 2020. The SADC Protocol on COVID-19 is applicable. It also details the goods that should to be allowed by member states to move across land borders.

Public Transport

With the country moving to Level 4 and more people returning to work, we have revised the operating hours for all road-based public transport modes.

All road-based public transport services are permitted to operate from 05h00 until 19h00, with a grace period of 1 hour in the afternoon to complete their trips and drop off passengers. This includes minibus-taxis, buses, metered taxis, e-hailing services, charter and shuttle services.

No public transport is allowed on the road between 20h00 and 05h00. Sanitisation principles currently applicable to public transport vehicles and facilities remain.

No person is allowed to use of public transport who is not wearing a face mask. We call on the public to ensure strict adherence to this requirement by obtaining their own face masks in line with the guidance given by Minister Dlamini-Zuma. While government may provide limited assistance in ensuring availability of masks, the onus rests on each individual to ensure that they do not leave home without a mask.

Minibus-Taxis

Loading capacity for minibus-taxis remains at 70% of licensed passengers, with social distancing and other mitigating measures remaining in place.

eHailing and Metered Taxis

Loading capacity for metered taxis and e-hailing services remains at 50%. A 5-seater vehicle is permitted to carry a maximum of 2 passengers and a driver.

Buses

Buses will be allowed to transport 70% passengers of their licensed loading capacity, with requisite social distancing, wearing of masks by all passenger and other mitigating measures.

Shuttle and Chauffeur Services

Shuttle and Chauffeur services will be subject to the same rules as other road-based public transport modes. Both the Shuttle and Chauffeur services will only be permitted for transportation of people undertaking essential work and those economic sectors allowed to return back to work under level 4. Loading capacity of 50% is equally applicable to these services.

Charter Services

Charter services will be subject to the same rules as other road-based public transport modes. This service is only be permitted for transportation of people undertaking essential work. Loading capacity of 50% is equally applicable to these services.

A number of companies, particularly in the mining sector, work 3 shifts, resulting in employees finishing work outside the permitted public transport operating hours.

These companies may make use of charter services. Operators of vehicles undertaking this service must be identifiable as such for purposes of law enforcement.

Delivery Services

Delivery Services such as Uber Eats, Mr Delivery and any other similar service are permitted to operate between 09h00 and 19h00 only for delivery of food.

Courier Services

Courier Services are permitted to operate in the delivery of any goods permitted for sale in the Level 4 Regulations.

It should however be noted that the wholesale sector has been allowed to return back to service and amongst the sub-sectors allowed to trade is the e-Commerce that includes on-line shopping for items such as personal ICT equipment and other goods. This sector is reliant on the Courier services to deliver its goods to customers at their homes.

Travel Between Provinces, Metros and Districts

Travel between Provinces, Metropolitan areas and Districts is prohibited, with concessions made for workers who have to commute to and from work on a daily basis, attendance of funerals and transportation of mortal remains.

The Minister of COGTA has published Regulations allowing a once-off special dispensation for persons who were not at their places of residence before the lockdown period and who could not travel between Provinces, Metropolitan and District areas during the lockdown, to return to their homes. Those people are now permitted to travel between 1 May 2020 and 7 May 2020 in line with the COGTA Regulations.

Long distance bus and taxi operators are allowed to undertake long distance travel during this window period. Full compliance with the 70% passenger capacity, wearing of masks by all passengers and sanitisation of vehicles at the completion of each journey is a mandatory requirement.

Driving Schools

Driving schools will be permitted to resume their activities subject to effective social distancing and sanitizing measures. Both the instructor and the learner must wear face masks at all times.

Vehicle Services

Servicing of vehicles of personnel performing emergency services is permitted under Level 4. This also includes the importation of spares for service purposes and for manufacturing. Emergency spares are also allowed to be on sale.

Repairs and fitments to vehicles utilized for emergency and essential services is permitted.

Emergency Services & Roadside Assistance

The Emergency services and roadside services for all is allowed. This also includes towing services and support with breakdown of vehicles.

Drivers' Licence Testing Centres and Vehicle Testing Centres

Drivers' Licence Testing Centres and Vehicle Testing Centres will gradually re-open for essential service workers to renew their drivers' and vehicle licenses.

The opening of the Driver's Licence Testing Centres (DLTCs) will be staggered once inspection and verification of the state of readiness is done on all of them. The Metro based DLTCs will be opened first from 1 June 2020.

We will issue Directions to limit the daily numbers of people that can be attended to, while restricting bookings to online platforms.

Going forward, we are committed to redesign business models, make greater use of artificial intelligence, digital channels, tele-commuting, redesign transport and logistic norms and practices, sanitizing, social distancing, introduce new social norms and practices on masks, gloves, PPEs, transparent screens, as well as human contact (that is no handshakes, no hugging, no pecking/kissing, and ensure minimal contact).

These practices and measures will define the new normal and a new way of doing things for generations to come.

All these Directions we have announced come into effect immediately.

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