

OUTA slams statement that it does not oppose e-tolls

Submitted by [AA](#) [1] on 27 January, 2016 - 08:31

Cape Town - The Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance (Outa) said it is "astonished and incensed" by acting chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Transport Leonard Ramatlakane's assertion that the civil rights body is not opposed to Gauteng's e-tolls.

Ramatlakane said in a statement on Tuesday that Outa "is not opposed to e-tolling as people need to pay in order to have good road infrastructure".

He added: "Mr Wayne Duvenage (sic), Outa chairperson, told the committee that Outa supported the user-pay-principle but there was a lack of consultation when the e-toll system was introduced."

In reaction to this, the civil rights body said on Tuesday that it would lodge a formal complaint with the chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Transport as well as the Parliamentary Ethics Committee, seeking an apology and "retraction of elements within their misleading statement".

Said Outa: "It's disappointing that the committee would have to stoop to this level of fabrications in an attempt to try and inject some degree of legitimacy to the defunct scheme."

'Disgust, disappointment'

Duvenage called Ramatlakane's statement "utter misinformation and spin doctoring at its worst".

He explained he said at the outset of Outa's presentation that the body does not oppose the fact that all infrastructure must ultimately be paid for by society.

"It's a fact of life that people's taxes in one form or another is used to pay for all infrastructure. I made this point so as to dispel the myth and comments often directed at us, that 'Outa wants the roads for free', which is clearly not the case," said Duvenage.

He added that Ramatlakane indicated at the end of his presentation that he had contradicted himself by saying Outa is not opposed to paying for roads, yet advocates the scrapping of the e-toll scheme.

"I then went to lengths to explain to him that our position is to pay for the roads through other efficient tax mechanisms, such as general taxation and the fuel levy and that our stance is very clear on the scrapping of the e-toll scheme. It therefore leaves me to express my disgust and disappointment of the committee's blatant misrepresentation of our presentation," said Duvenage.

He explained that he ended his presentation with two important points: the first was that the e-toll scheme should be halted, while the second was concern over the recently proposed amendments to the Aarto regulations.

"Our concern on the proposed Aarto amendments is the attempt to include e-toll non-payment as a traffic infringement with which to withhold vehicle licence renewals. If passed, we believe government will indirectly be providing the motoring public with every right to carry the e-toll tax revolt into the vehicle licensing tax arena," said Duvenage, adding that it would be unwise to "taint" the "justified" vehicle licence tax with what he called the "failed e-toll scheme".

Outa said it had hoped that honest engagement would help it distil some of the real issues and concerns which have arisen around the e-tolls issue. "Alas, that hope has been dashed by the misleading statement emanating from the portfolio committee."

Fin24

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Published on Architect Africa Online (<https://architectafrica.com>)

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