

# Auto Insurance: 'Stop Talking And Let's Get It Done'

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By Neil Hartnell, Tribune Business Editor

A leading Bahamian insurer says the industry and government must “stop talking and do it” over plans for vehicle insurance policies to be electronically uploaded into Road Traffic’s system. Anton Saunders, RoyalStar Assurance’s managing director, told *Tribune Business* that both sides needed to finally bring discussions on a much talked-about matter to a “conclusion” that all were happy with.

Responding after Renward Wells, minister of transport, told the House of Assembly on Monday that the Bahamas Insurance Association (BIA) had again agreed to meet with officials to discuss information sharing, Mr Saunders warned against “putting the cart before the horse”.

He pointed out that reforms to the Road Traffic Act were required to give legal effect to the electronic transmission of motor insurance policies from the broker/agent to the Road Traffic Department’s TMS system in a bid to help the authorities more easily identify drivers who lack the necessary coverage.

And, acknowledging that the COVID-19 crisis has forced the Government to look at ways of doing business more efficiently, Mr Saunders questioned whether it had truly embraced the digital age in recalling how RoyalStar’s efforts to place insurance certificates on a debit/credit sized card had been rejected two years ago.

“I know there was an initial meeting a year ago, but there was no follow-up on either side,” the RoyalStar chief said of the proposed information sharing with Road Traffic. “I’d be happy to start meeting again, but if we start it, conclude it.

“The BIA and Road Traffic can get together, agree the parameters and move forward with specific details and say: ‘This is the outcome we want’. Because we have this [COVID-19] situation, everyone understands there are things we can do a little differently, and we’d be happy to continue discussions with the government to the benefit of all concerned.

“But there has to be a commitment by both sides. It cannot be a speech from Parliament,” Mr Saunders added. “I’m happy they’re [the government and Road Traffic] on this road, but there are certain things in the Act that they have to change. Don’t put the cart before the horse.

“Let’s sit down, change the things we need to change, and RoyalStar and the BIA will be a willing partner to make sure we do things more efficiently and more effectively in this country.”

Mr Wells, in his House of Assembly address, said the Road Traffic Department's system will be able to receive vehicle insurance certificates and other information from Bahamian motor coverage underwriters by May 1.

He added that the digital sharing of insurance policies would enable the industry to advise the Road Traffic Department and police as to motorists "whose insurance has lapsed automatically", thereby enabling the authorities to crack down on drivers who are either not insured or improperly insured.

Mr Saunders, though, said he and RoyalStar had yet to see the Government's commitment to the digital economy. "We came out a couple of years ago with a credit card-sized insurance certificate. We placed the information on the plastic card so you could put your certificate in your wallet and show the police if asked. That was rejected because it was digital.

"Don't talk; let's do it. I'm happy they are thinking of ways to do business in this country more efficiently, but it cannot be talk. Let's get the mandate, get this thing done and with goodwill from all of us make life easier for the Bahamian people out there."