



A commuter taxi in dangerous mechanical condition. Taxi operators have been encouraged to upgrade to large passenger carriers

DMC taxis banned from city terminals

By Samuel Balagadde

The Uganda Taxi Operators Federation (UTOF) has banned all commuter taxis in dangerous mechanical condition (DMC) from city passenger terminals to ensure road safety.

Operators have been given until the end of June to repair their vehicles to the required standards. Consequently, mechanics in and around Kampala city are reportedly experiencing high traffic as operators rush to fix vehicle defects.

Joseph Mawejje, a specialist in car panel-beating and paint respraying based in Bwaise, a Kampala suburb, says restoring a commuter taxi's body and interior can cost sh4m-sh5m and above, assuming the engine, gearbox, and differential are in good condition. He says costs have shot up because parts such as the boot and passenger doors, which are often mishandled, usually need replacement.

"Some taxi repairs require extensive welding and joinery for rusted parts caused by water and dust from roads entering through the undercarriage," Mawejje says.

Haji Rashid Sekindi, the UTOF chairperson, says the federation is considering both safety and hygiene standards for any taxi allowed to transport passengers. The ban also targets taxis with bedbugs, exposed scratching metals, and dirty seat covers that can transmit diseases among passengers.

"Taxi operators are being encouraged to acquire newer Toyota Hiace [drone] models via hire purchase if they are to remain in business," Sekindi said.

The fourth-generation Toyota Hiace (1989-2004), whose importation was banned due to age limits effective October 1, 2018, has dominated public transport for over two decades and is facing severe deterioration due to age and poor handling.

UTOF's move to streamline taxi safety comes as the Kampala Capital City Authority finalises plans with Kiira Motors to deploy electric buses for city public transport.

Winstone Katushabe, the commissioner for transport regulations and safety in the Ministry of Works and Transport, clarified that 14-seater commuter taxis are not being replaced by buses. Both will remain in operation and work together to transport passengers. He encouraged taxi operators to consider upgrading to larger passenger carriers, saying this is the way forward for mitigating traffic congestion in the city.