Sensitise taxi owners before ban on DMCs

This week, the government announced a sweeping crackdown targeting old and poorly maintained taxis blamed for endangering commuters. Under a 20-day directive issued by junior Works minister Fred Byamukama, authorities will begin removing unroadworthy taxis from the streets starting April 8.

Mr Byamukama said it is time for all taxi drivers to ensure their vehicles meet safety standards, emphasising the directive is intended to reduce accidents.

"There are taxis we don't really need on the roads. You find vehicles full of ropes in front, back, and inside. Others use super glue to support the seats," he said. "Some are dusty, dirty, and emit bad smells. We want to protect passengers from this mess."

The issue:
DMC taxi ban.

Our view:
DMCs should not re-emerge from the garages and parking lots after the government relaxes the enforcement of the ban, as we saw with boda bodas who can now ride freely without helmets and reflector jackets.

That the old and rusty taxis will be taken off the roads of Uganda is welcome news for many public transport users. The words of the minister could not have captured the mess better.

However, Ugandans have also become accustomed to well-intentioned government interventions that only last a few days and fizzle out.

In the 2000s, the government introduced speed governors in a bid to reduce road carnage, especially caused by reckless bus and truck drivers on upcountry routes. However, after uproar among the affected drivers, installation of the devices ended.

Around the same period, the government announced mandatory safety belts for all Passenger Service Vehicles. Today, traffic police only pay attention to – if they happen to – the driver's seatbelt. The rest, they don't bother.

More recently, the government announced the Automated Express Penalty System (EPSAuto), but it was suspended after it was hastily introduced, causing confusion among motorists. The public is yet to find out when it will be reintroduced.

To allow for an orderly implementation of the ban on unroadworthy taxis, the government should learn from the past by first involving all the stakeholders before the ban is implemented.

Taxi leaders who spoke to this newspaper welcomed the move but criticised the minister for not engaging key stakeholders.

"I am learning about this from the media. Our drivers are not sensitised about the directive. Drivers must understand the dangers and be prepared for the way forward," said Mr Rhasid Ssekindi, the chairperson of the Uganda Taxi Operators Federation.

Also, the operation should be maintained. DMCs should not re-emerge from the garages and parking lots after the government relaxes the enforcement of the ban, as we saw with boda bodas who can now ride freely without helmets and reflector jackets. Finally, enforcement of the directive should be uniform, regardless of who owns the taxis.

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