Concern as 12-hour queues choke trade at Busia border

Drivers say the persistent gridlock is increasing transport costs, disrupting delivery schedules.

BY DAVID AWORI

Truck drivers plying the Busia border have decried prolonged delays caused by heavy congestion, saying the situation is crippling international trade and frustrating Uganda's export business.

Drivers say the persistent gridlock is increasing transport costs, disrupting delivery schedules and frustrating importers and exporters who depend on the route.

Mr Lamek Musete, a truck driver transporting tiles from Kapeeka Industrial Park in Nakaseke District to Nairobi, Kenya, said he had spent more than 24 hours waiting to cross into Kenya.

Mr Musete, a Kenyan national, said the time spent in the queue was enough to have delivered the goods to Nairobi.

"The importers have been calling since yesterday, accusing me of delaying delivery because by now I should have already delivered the goods," he said.

He added that prolonged delays are eating into drivers' mileage allowances.

"Each day we are stuck in the jam, my personal costs increase because I have to buy food, water and pay for bathing," Musete said.

Mr James Peter Omaikol, who transports clinker from Kisumu to Tororo Cement, said the congestion is affecting the number of trips drivers can make.

"In a week I am supposed to make three trips to Kenya and back to Tororo, but because of the long hours spent in the jam, I manage only two," Mr Omaikol said.

He added that while it normally takes five to seven hours to reach the loading centre past Kisumu from the border, he had already spent more than 12 hours waiting to cross.

Trucks form long queues through Busia Town last week. PHOTO/DAVID AWORI

Delays have been attributed to ageing scanners used by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), narrow roads and alleged corruption among some border officials.

No progress

Mr Godfrey Oundo Ongwabe, the National Cross-Border Trade chairperson, said despite several interventions by authorities in Kenya and Uganda, delays persist.

"Under the One Stop Border Post arrangement, a truck is supposed to take at least 15 minutes, but now it takes 12 to 24 hours," Mr Ongwabe said.

He warned that the delays risk spoiling perishable exports such as pineapples and pawpaws. He blamed frequent breakdowns of old scanners and narrow export lanes for worsening congestion.

Some drivers allege corruption, claiming tanker drivers pay Shs30,000 to skip queues, leaving others stranded for hours. They also report theft and rising insecurity along the congested stretch.

Local traders and boda boda riders say the jam has hurt business and caused accidents, with trucks blocking access to shops and roads.

Mr Johnson Wafuba, deputy town clerk of Busia Municipal Council, said the Ministry of Works is undertaking a project to widen the road into a dual carriageway and separate traffic flows. He added that the municipality plans alternative routes through Dabani and Busitema, while proposed entry points at Mulwadda and Buteba could ease congestion if implemented.

BACKGROUND

Busia border, like Malaba, lies along the Northern Corridor linking the landlocked Great Lakes countries – DR Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and Uganda – to the port of Mombasa.

Handling between 500 and 750 trucks daily, it is a key route for fuel imports and Ugandan exports.

The border also records the second-highest number of international travellers after Entebbe airport, with at least 12 interstate buses operating daily to Kampala, Juba, Kigali and DR Congo..