

Busega-Mpigi expressway's sh1.2 trillion land lesson

THE Busega-Mpigi Expressway was launched in 2020 with fanfare at sh547b. Five years later, its price tag has more than doubled to over sh1.2 trillion. The road is not yet complete because of land acquisition bottlenecks and funding gaps.

What was meant to be a four-year gateway to western Uganda is now a sh650b monument to delay. For too long, Uganda's road projects have been defined by two dates: the day they are launched, and the day they stall.

This week, the Ministry of Works and Transport signalled a break from that pattern. It is reviewing borrowing procedures for road infrastructure, with a plan to ring-fence funds for compensating project-affected persons, right-of-way acquisition, and utility relocation. This reform is overdue. It is urgent.

Uganda's infrastructure ambitions run on land, not on good intentions. When the Government cannot secure land on time, bulldozers idle, costs balloon, and taxpayers pay twice — once for the delay, and again for interest on loans that sit unused. The Busega-Mpigi project proves the point.



EDITORIAL

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The ministry's proposal attacks the problem at its root. Today, compensation is an afterthought. Projects are designed, loans are signed, contractors are hired, and only then does the Government begin the slow, contested scramble for land.

By the time disputes reach court, interest accrues,

communities turn hostile, and the rains wash away another construction season. Structuring loans with dedicated compensation components reverses that sequence and forces realism into planning.

If money for land is built into the financing from day one, acquisition becomes a first-order task, not a last-minute crisis. It also gives the Government leverage to negotiate fairly and swiftly with landowners, because the funds are available and earmarked.

This reform reaches beyond roads. Uganda is entering an infrastructure decade. Oil will flow. The Standard Gauge Railway needs land. Bukasa Port needs a lakefront.

Industrial parks need access. If the country cannot master the first metre of land, it cannot build the next thousand kilometres of progress.

To achieve the high-middle-income status that President Yoweri Museveni has promised in his manifesto for the new term of office, projects must start on time and finish on budget. The Busega-Mpigi challenge should be the last monument to delay.