Gulu City counts on World Bank as it launches plan to tarmac 28 roads

BY JAMES OWICH

GULU. Authorities in Gulu City plan to upgrade 28 all-weather roads to bitumen standard, with funding expected to be released from the World Bank under the Uganda Cities and Municipalities Infrastructure Development (UCMID) programme.

The multi-billion-dollar road project is expected to kick off in May, with 14 of the 28 roads cleared for construction.

The road construction project will be funded in phases and is expected to be completed within five years.

The roads were tarmacked with funds secured from the World Bank under the Uganda Support to Municipal Infrastructure Development (USMID) programme. Of the top 10 urban centres in Uganda, Gulu is the seventh most populated, with 116,652 people.

Meanwhile, 83.1kms (about 35.8 percent) of the dirt roads are in poor condition, putting pressure on the already limited resources.

Among the roads earmarked for upgrade are Bro Elio, Okidi Dakamoi, Phillip Ojok, Mama Cave, Bishop Wani, Alex Ojera, Peter Abe, Princess, Louis Otika, Lower Churchill Drive, and Ben Ocan.

The road design is expected to be submitted to the contractor by the end of this month, who will, in turn, submit it to the World Bank for consideration.

In the first phase of the project, the World Bank is expected to release Shs11 billion for the construction of four roads in the city.

Mr Christo Balmoyi Omara, the city engineer, said 14 of the 28 roads do not have any encumbrances, adding that the road construction can go ahead once funds become available.

The city authorities, however, face a challenge in dislodging occupants on land for 14 roads after they constructed fences, sanitary facilities, and kiosks on the road reserves.

GULU'S ROAD NETWORK

The World Bank has already funded the construction of 25 roads in the city's central business district in the past 10 years.

In the last four years, the total road network in Gulu City has increased from 249.2KM to 482.3KM. This follows the elevation of Gulu from a municipality to a city status by Parliament in July 2020. Of the 482.3km road network, 71.2km are tarmacked while 411.2km are all-weather roads.

Mr Patrick Lumumba Oola, the outgoing mayor of Bardege-Layibi Division, said some of the locals are demanding compensation, claiming ownership of land, including the road reserves.

But he said some of the claims are baseless since some of the landowners do not have land titles.

The city authorities have since embarked on a sensitisation drive to educate the communities on the benefits of the roads.

Mr Alfred Okwonga, the Gulu City mayor, said the roads will improve security and trade in the city.

He noted that solar-powered street lighting systems will be installed on the paved roads so as to improve security.

"These roads will have solar-powered street lights installed on them. This will improve security and trade," Mr Okwonga said.

He also warned the city's road engineer against altering the road designs during implementation, noting that it would not be tolerated.

"The road design should be implemented to the letter. I will not tolerate any plan to alter the design. Where there are encumbrances, the land owner should be talked to allow the road to go through their land," Mr Okwonga stated.

Mr Innocent Ahimbiswe, the Gulu City town clerk, said there is a need to plant beacons on road reserves to avoid any disputes in the future. He cited the efforts of the Ministry of Works to protect road reserves from encroachment.

"The city should consider planting beacons on road reserves to avert disputes in the future. Even if the land owners are long gone, their children will know the boundary of their land and the public land," the town clerk said.

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