Govt softens on speed limit and traffic fines

The Ministry of Works and Transport has proposed changes in a move aimed at addressing the concerns raised by the public last year when the traffic laws were briefly enforced but were quickly suspended following a public outcry.

BY ANDREW BAGALA



A traffic police officer stops a motorist on Kira Road in Kampala in 2025. PHOTO/ ABUBAKER LUBOWA

The Ministry of Works and Transport has proposed softer amendments to the suspended traffic laws that will see the raising of speed limit in some sections and lowering of fines associated with speeding offences.

The proposals also seek to increase the duration in which the fines are to be paid.

In the ministry's proposals, the duration for which errant motorists are expected to pay the Express Penalty Scheme tickets should be reverted from 72 hours in the suspended laws to 28 days.

Any dissatisfied motorist can appeal the fine in seven days after its issuance to allow the officers to assess whether the penalty stands or not within the 28 days.

However, the errant motorist can also appeal the fine after seven days but not later than 28 days. If the motorist loses the appeal after the expiry of the timeframe for the payment of the fine, the motorist would be required to pay a surcharge for failing to pay the fine in time.

Mr Winstone Katushabe, the commissioner of Traffic and Road Safety in the Ministry of Works and Transport, said the proposed amendments are aimed at addressing the concerns raised by the public last year when the traffic laws were briefly enforced but were quickly suspended following a public outcry.

Mr Katushabe, who was speaking during consultation with transport sector stakeholders in Kampala City yesterday, said: "The law is about reducing speed and saving road users' lives not about making money or punishing the individual motorists."

In May 2025, the government embarked on enforcing two traffic statutory instruments. The first was Number 56 of 2924: The Traffic and Road Safety (Express Penalty Scheme for Road Offenders), 2024, with the second being The Road Safety (prescription of speed limits) Regulations.

On June 12, 2025, the government suspended the regulations for a month to enable them engage all the concerned parties to resolve their differences.

Again, the government extended the suspension of the laws to allow them scrutiny it more after President Museveni raised criticism of the new traffic laws.

President Museveni said the police CCTV cameras were installed for security purposes not for the collection of the traffic fines.

Early this month, the Ministry of Works and Transport admitted that the review of the laws had found that 90 percent of the issues raised by the public were genuine and promised to make further amendments.

The consultations on the amendments kicked off yesterday in Kampala City, with the ministry officials expected to move across the country to solicit views from more stakeholders.

Speed limits

The traffic laws had lowered the speed limits of motor vehicles, especially those that contribute the highest number of road accidents in the country.

The speed limit for all categories of vehicles on urban roads was lowered to 30km/h from 50km/h.

Mr Robert Kisakye, the senior licensing officer in the Ministry of Works and Transport, said in the new proposals, the 30km/h speed limit would only be enforced on access roads and special zones such as near schools, markets and crowded areas.

Access roads are routes in residential areas, within markets and hospitals.

Mr Kisakye said they proposed the speed limit on urban roads be raised to 50km/h up from 30km/h the traffic law had imposed last year.

In the suspended traffic regulations, fines for speeding motorists had been increased to as high as Shs600,000 in certain circumstances.

DISCIPLINE AT TRAFFIC LIGHTS

Motorists also raised concerns about discipline at the traffic lights where there is insecurity at night, and impunity by drivers of government-owned vehicles that force others off the road to violate traffic lights as they create space for them to pass.

Officials from the Ministry of Works said they are still in talks with relevant authorities to find the right solutions to the problems.

For instance, if a motorist exceeded the prescribed speed limit in an area in excess of one kilometre, he or she would be fined Shs200,000. And if the motorist exceeds the prescribed speed limit by another 30km/h, he or she would be fined Shs600,000.

For instance, if a sedan motorist drove at a speed between 91km/h and 120km/h on a paved highway road, which is an excess of 30km from the speed limit of 90km/h, he or she would be fined Shs200,000.

But if a motorist drove at 121km and above on the same road and zone, he or she would be fined Shs600,000 because he or she has exceeded the speed limit by another 30km/h.

Payment of fines

The suspended law had also shortened the time for the payment of the fines from 28 days to 72 hours (three days). The motorists were also slapped with a 50 percent surcharge upon failure to pay the EPS tickets within three days.

Mr Kisakye said they have proposed to maintain the Shs200,000 fine regardless of the level of speeding, and the law would allow a 10 percent excess above the prescribed speed limit on a given zone or road.

This means a road zone where the prescribed speed limit is 50km/h, the motorist would not be fined if he or she drove at 55km/h on the same road.

The government also proposed to revert to the 28 days duration within which the fined motorist is expected to pay the ticket. The surcharge upon failure to pay the fine will also be imposed after 28 days.

Another contentious issue was on who would pay the fine; whether the driver or the person in whose name the motor vehicle is registered.

The suspended laws had imposed the fine on the registered vehicle owner.

However, Mr Kisakye said they have discovered many of the vehicles are registered under companies' that rent them on hire purchase or rent-to-own and loan programmes.

"In the law, many motorists who bought vehicles on loans, were penalised and the fines were being slapped on the registered owner of the vehicle. Many companies that sell motor vehicles on loan were affected.

"In the proposed amendment, we now have a registered keeper. The companies would indicate registered keepers of the vehicles. Those are the ones who will be fine," he said.

However, owners of the motor vehicles opposed this section saying the government should fine the driver instead of the registered owner.

Mr Rashid Ssekindi, the chairman of Uganda Taxi Operators Federation, said if the fines are imposed on the vehicle owners when the drivers are the ones who committed the offence, it would be punishing an innocent group.

"This doesn't solve the issue of discipline on the road. A driver earns Shs30,000 a day. If he gets a fine of Shs200,000 because of his road indiscipline, he would just abandon the taxi on the road, and find another. Therefore you aren't going to discipline the right person. Just fine the person driving the car at that time."

But the government officials said the CCTV cameras that will be used to issue tickets wouldn't be able to identify the drivers.

Mr Kisakye proposed that the owners of the motor vehicles should have a record of their driver at any given time. And that the system should have a provision where the vehicle owners are allowed to pass on details of the person who was driving the vehicle at the time it was fined so that the ticket is sent to the right person.

Many of the vehicle owners, especially those in the trucking and passenger services, were not convinced by that notion.

The government proposes that once they are done with the consultations and all the processes of approval, the amended laws will first be piloted in the Greater Kampala Metropolitan area to see their effectiveness before rolling them out across the country.

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