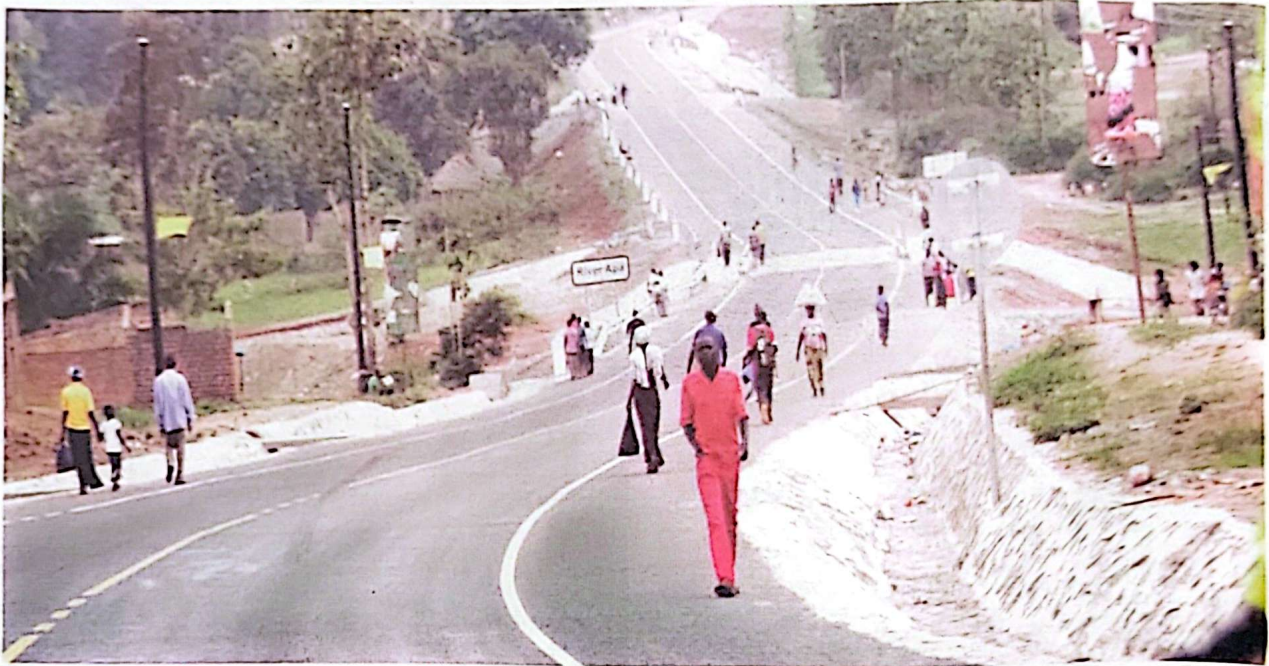


Promise Tracker

New special report. The Promise Tracker is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that will track the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was a realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.

Vurra-Arua-Koboko-Oraba road finally gets off govt to-do list



Complete. The corner of Ayelemba on the road leading to Vurra Customs point. It is one of the promises that Mr Museveni and the ruling NRM made to the West Nile region and fulfilled. PHOTOS BY CLEMENT ALLUMA

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THE PROMISE

On February 6, 2006, President Museveni, while addressing a campaign rally in Arua town ahead of the 2006 general elections, promised to tarmac the Vurra-Arua-Koboko-Oraba road during the period between 2006 and 2011.

The road, a 92km affair, starts at Vurra at the common border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and leads northwards through Arua and Koboko, ending at Oraba on the common border with southern Sudan.

Mr Museveni said that work on the road, a key link between the three countries, would also see the road linked to the Karuma-Pakwach road and the railway line from Pakwach to Juba.

Once complete, Mr Museveni said, it would ease transport and communication, and facilitate the free movement of goods and services between the three countries.

The promise followed complaints from the business and farming communities in the West Nile sub-region that the bad road was denying them access to vital markets in the two neighbouring countries.

But it was not until November 2009 that the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) put out a notice inviting bids for consultant engineers, after which nothing more was done about it.

The road was therefore once again listed in the NRM's 2011 manifesto as one of the 176 roads that would be upgraded from gravel to tarmac

in the period between 2011 and 2016, and it once again became an issue in the campaigns ahead of the 2011 general elections with the opposition seeking to cash in on it as a manifestation of the failings of the NRM government.

A year after the NRM had won the election, Mr Museveni returned to the sub-region on May 11, 2012 to flag off the Shs 132 billion project that would see the existing gravel upgraded to tarmac, bridges and drainage channels built.

The contractor, Chongqing International Construction Corporation (CICO), was expected to do the work on the World Bank funded project in a period of 36 months, which would come to a close in July 2014. The contractor, however, failed to beat the deadline, forcing UNRA to extend the deadline to December 31, 2014.

Some of the hitches that the works ran into were complaints that the road was too narrow for Arua town, a busy business hub and gateway to both South Sudan and DR Congo.

"We shall not have sufficient space for parking if the road remains as narrow as it is now. The dual carriageways should be widened so that

trucks can be diverted to leave other cars on the different sides," the senior municipal physical planner, Mr Moses Findru, said during the road construction phase.

There were accusations that original engineering designs had been tweaked to cut costs. Whatever had been saved, it was believed, had been pocketed by unidentified officials in UNRA and the government.

A copy of a July 2009 "final detailed engineering design report" prepared by the Ghana-based Comptran Engineering and Planning Associates, however, pokes holes in that argument.

"The width of the bitumen surfaced carriage-way will be 6.5m with shoulders generally of 2m width, but possibly reducing to 1.5m in some places (according to the terrain)," the report says.

District chairman Sam Nyakua had a different complaint, saying that the size of the road was not befitting of a town that was nursing aspirations to be elevated to city status.

In the meantime, UNRA and the contractor were experiencing challenges in the areas of

compensation of those who had been affected by the road works and the locations of service lanes for utilities such as water and electricity.

As Mr Davis Kofi, the resident engineer for Chongqing International Construction Corporation later explained, while the contractors were running into trouble because of the locations of the service lanes for utilities such as water and electricity, UNRA was finding difficulties in compensating various people who did not have Tax Identification Numbers.

"We have already compensated the power company to relocate their electricity poles in the town so that we can widen the road, but the other adjustments will also involve costs," Mr Kofi had explained.

Some of the structures that delayed the compensation works included two storied buildings, namely Terego House and another opposite Arua Regional Hospital, a commercial building belonging to an absentee landlord who had at the time been believed to be resident in Egypt, and a swath of land that had until that time been serving as a nursery bed for a tree plantation project based in Aroi Sub-county.

Given that some of the challenges that the contractor had faced were not of their own creation, UNRA was once again compelled to extend the deadline. Even though it had not been completed by the time of the 2016 general election, the road never made it back to the list of what were considered campaign issues in West Nile region.

92km

DISTANCE OF THE ROAD THAT STARTS AT VURRA AT THE COMMON BORDER WITH THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC) AND LEADS NORTHWARDS THROUGH ARUA AND KOBOKO, ENDING AT ORABA ON THE COMMON BORDER WITH SOUTHERN SUDAN.