

BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU

SOROTI. Road users of the Lira-Soroti-Mbale highway have raised concerns over what they describe as the narrowing of the carriageway during ongoing rehabilitation works, saying the changes have made overtaking more risky.

The 340-kilometre stretch from Lira to Tororo is being rehabilitated by Portuguese construction firm Mota-Engil under a contract signed with the government in 2018.

Truck drivers, taxi operators and boda boda riders who ply the busy route say the current state of the road has heightened the risk of head-on collisions, particularly involving heavy trucks and motorcycles.

Mr William Odeke, a truck driver, said the road appears narrower than it was before the rehabilitation works began.

"When one is overtaking, motorcycle riders coming from the opposite direction are forced to veer off the road to avoid head-on collisions with heavy

Motorists raise safety concerns over road works

trucks," he said.

Mr Odeke added that even a slight reduction in lane width can have serious safety implications.

"That small reduction is impactful to all road users. If it is long-distance trucks overtaking, it becomes even more dangerous. The current state of the road is worrying," he said.

Mr Swaibu Mugoya, a taxi driver operating between Mbale and Lira, echoed similar concerns. He said although the rehabilitation works are welcome, the apparent narrowing of the carriageway has forced motorists to exercise extra caution.

"In 2018, we were told the road was due for widening. But what we see on the ground suggests the road has narrowed. When overtaking, we do it very carefully because we know the road has changed," Mr Mugoya said.



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- William Odeke, truck driver

Justification

When one is overtaking, motorcycle riders coming from the opposite direction are forced to veer off the road to avoid head-on collisions with heavy trucks,

The Lira-Soroti-Mbale highway is a vital transport corridor linking northern and eastern Uganda to the Kenyan border at Malaba. It facilitates the movement of goods and passengers and is frequently used by cargo trucks transporting produce, fuel and other merchandise.

Motorists say the road shoulders also appear less pronounced in some sections, limiting escape space for smaller vehicles when large trucks

attempt to overtake.

When contacted, State Minister for Works and Transport Musa Ecweru said the ministry had not received any formal complaints regarding the alleged narrowing of the highway.

He clarified that the contractor was mandated to rehabilitate and strengthen the original road base rather than expand the carriageway.

"I would need to get clear information from the engineers working on the road," Mr Ecweru said.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Works and Transport, Ms Suzan Kataike, dismissed the allegations, maintaining that government policy does not support reducing the width of national highways.

"There is no way the government can narrow a road instead of expanding it. I don't think the government can do such

a thing," Ms Kataike said.

She added that rehabilitation works are intended to improve safety and durability by strengthening the base and resurfacing worn-out sections.

However, road users insist that an on-ground technical assessment is necessary to allay fears and clarify whether the perceived changes are due to redesign, resurfacing adjustments or temporary construction phases.

They have called on the Ministry of Works and Transport to publicly clarify the scope of the works and address safety concerns before the project progresses further.

For now, motorists say they are driving more cautiously along the corridor as rehabilitation continues, wary that even minor alterations in lane width can have major consequences on a highway that carries long-distance traffic daily.