

National News

Uganda-Congo roadworks ease travel, boost security

The 80-kilometre Mpondwe-Beni road-works started about four years ago.

BY ANDREW BAGALA

Insecurity and travel time between the Ugandan border town of Mpondwe in Kasese District and Beni in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have dropped significantly since the construction of a key cross-border road began four years ago.

Officials say the improvement is already delivering benefits for traders and travellers even before the works are fully completed.

Ms Susan Kataike, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Works and Transport, said the construction of the 80-kilometre Mpondwe-Beni road, also known as the Kasindi-Beni road, has eased transport and strengthened trade links between the two countries.

"Travel time from Kasindi to Beni has been reduced to under two hours from the previous four hours. It is expected to reduce further after applying bitumen," Ms Kataike said.

The Kasindi-Beni road forms part of a broader 220-kilometre infrastructure programme agreed upon by Uganda and the DRC in 2021 to facilitate cross-border movement and trade.

Other road sections under the joint project include the 54-kilometre Beni-Butembo stretch inside the DRC and the 89-kilometre Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma route.

The Kasindi-Beni road has since become the main trade corridor between Uganda and eastern DRC after M23 rebels seized control of the Bunagana border point.

Ms Kataike said a joint delegation from Uganda and the DRC recently inspected the progress of works being undertaken by Dott Services Limited, a Ugandan construction company



Workers prepare to lay asphalt on Kasindi-Beni road, an 80km stretch that links Uganda to Beni Town in DRC. PHOTO/ COURTESY

"The Governor of Beni, Mr Evariste Somo, said due to the improvement in road conditions, traffic has tripled. Business between the two countries has also increased," she said.

According to the Ministry of Works, contractors are expected to begin laying asphalt on the Kasindi-Beni road within the next two months, with about 60 percent of the 80-kilometre stretch already prepared for surfacing.

Officials say the road upgrade is expected to further strengthen relations between Uganda and the DRC by easing the movement of people and goods across the border.

In the early stages of the project, some officials in the DRC expressed reservations and imposed heavy taxes on construction equipment and services. However, as work progressed, authorities began to recognise the benefits of the road in improving security, boosting revenue collections

and facilitating trade.

Two weeks ago, Uganda's Minister of Works and Transport, Gen Edward Katumba Wamala, met his DRC counterpart, Mr John Banza Lunza, in Kampala to review the progress of the joint infrastructure projects.

AT A GLANCE

Project: Uganda-DRC Joint Roads Programme

Total length: 220km

Key roads:

-80km Kasindi-Beni road

-54km Beni-Butembo road

-89km Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma road

Both ministers reaffirmed their commitment to completing the road network, describing it as critical for economic growth and regional integration.

Uganda's Ambassador to the DRC Farid Kaliisa said attacks by Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels targeting motorists and cargo trucks along the route have significantly reduced since the construction works began.

Security along the corridor is currently being provided by the Uganda People's Defence Forces and the Congolese army under the joint military operation code-named Operation Shujaa.

Ms Kataike said the road improvement has already given a major boost to trade between Uganda and the DRC. Before the project began, Uganda exported goods worth about \$578 million (Shs2.1 trillion) annually to the DRC.