

Are old vehicles really the problem?

Removing a working solution without providing an alternative is unfair and disregards the needs of those who rely on it.



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Another Perspective

State Minister for Transport Fred Byamukama recently announced that all old vehicles will be banned from our roads. Owners face having their vehicles forcibly removed and being fined. The government says this is because old vehicles are dangerous for passengers and harmful to the environment due to pollution.



This follows an earlier decision to stop importing vehicles that are more than 15 years old. While the intention is good, these policies have caused unexpected problems. Since the ban, the price of vehicles has gone up sharply. Before, you could buy a decent used car for under Shs10m. Now, even a small used car costs at least Shs15m.

This price increase has hit taxi operators hard. Many taxis serve low-cost routes in the city, such as Mengo-Lubaga and Wandegaya, Mulago, where the fare is only Shs2,000. These op-

erators cannot afford to buy newer vehicles because they would not make enough money to cover the cost. So they are forced to keep using their old cars.

The result is a difficult situation. New vehicles are too expensive, our roads are in poor condition, and passengers cannot pay higher fares. This means nothing changes. The system is not perfect, but it is the only one available.

There was a time when the government ran public buses through the Uganda Transport Company (UTC). Those

buses were cheap and served many people, low-income workers, students, and civil servants. When UTC closed, private companies such as Pioneer Easy Bus tried to fill the gap, but they did not last long.

Unlike health and education, where the government has stepped in to help, transport has been left to the public to figure out on their own. That is how the taxi culture grew. These taxis are old and worn, but they are reliable. They are like a poor relative; you borrow from them endlessly and never pay back, yet they are always there when

you need them.

Think about this. You cannot find an Uber or boda boda that will take you from Kabalagala to the city centre for Shs1,000. But these old taxis will, especially during off-peak hours. For many people, they are the only affordable option.

The minister believes old vehicles are dangerous. But let us look at the facts. Most of these cars cannot go faster than 50 kilometres per hour. They are not likely to cause serious crashes. Their biggest problems are breaking down or leaking when it rains heavily.

The real causes of accidents in Uganda are reckless driving, overloading, bad roads, and poor enforcement of traffic rules. Removing old vehicles will not solve these problems. It only distracts from them.

It is easy for the minister to target old vehicles. His own transport is provided for by taxpayers. But for most people in Kampala, these vehicles are a lifeline. They are the only affordable alternative to expensive and often dangerous boda bodas. For the elderly, the sick, and those who cannot walk long distances, they are essential.

Who will be hurt?

Think about the routes that serve ordinary people. Men-

go-Lubaga, where people go to hospital. Nsambya-Kabalagala. Makerere-Wandegaya, where students travel. On these routes, old taxis charge low fares, almost all under Shs2,000. For thousands of people, they are the only way to get around.

If these vehicles are removed without providing an alternative, the damage will be severe. Low-income passengers will struggle to find transport. Drivers and conductors will lose their jobs. A policy meant to improve safety could end up pushing many people into deeper poverty.

Removing something that works, even imperfectly, without offering something in its place is not fair. It treats the people who depend on that service as if their needs do not matter. When leaders do not understand the lives of ordinary people, they make decisions that may look good on paper but cause real harm.

We must be careful. If we are not, we may end up with a clean, beautiful city that only rich people can afford to live in. That is not progress.

The old taxi is not the enemy. The real enemy is poor planning. Before we clear the roads, we must first think about the people who use them. We need better roads, fair policies that help operators afford newer vehicles, and real solutions to the causes of accidents. Only then can we build a transport system that works for everyone.