

E-MOBILITY

Inside govt's plan to eliminate petrol bikes from Kampala

Kampala's shift from petrol boda bodas to electric mobility signals a cleaner future, but success hinges on how quickly riders respond.

Smart cities. |

DAVID WALUGEMBE

The hum of boda bodas has long defined Kampala's streets; fast, chaotic, and fuel-powered. But in less than a decade, that familiar sound could fade into a quieter, cleaner future.

Government has unveiled an ambitious plan to eliminate petrol-powered motorcycles from the city by 2030, marking a dramatic shift toward electric mobility.

At the heart of this vision is a broader goal: to modernise urban transport, tackle air pollution, and place science and innovation at the centre of Uganda's economic transformation.

For Monica Musenero, the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, petrol-powered boda bodas, a backbone of Kampala's informal transport system, have to give way to locally built electric alternatives.

"By 2030, there shouldn't be any fuel motorbikes in the Kampala city centre," she says, adding that government hopes to reach this milestone even earlier.

The transition is quietly building with government tightening screws on petrol motorcycles, discouraging their importation and local production, while championing a different vision: electric bikes made in Uganda, for Ugandans.

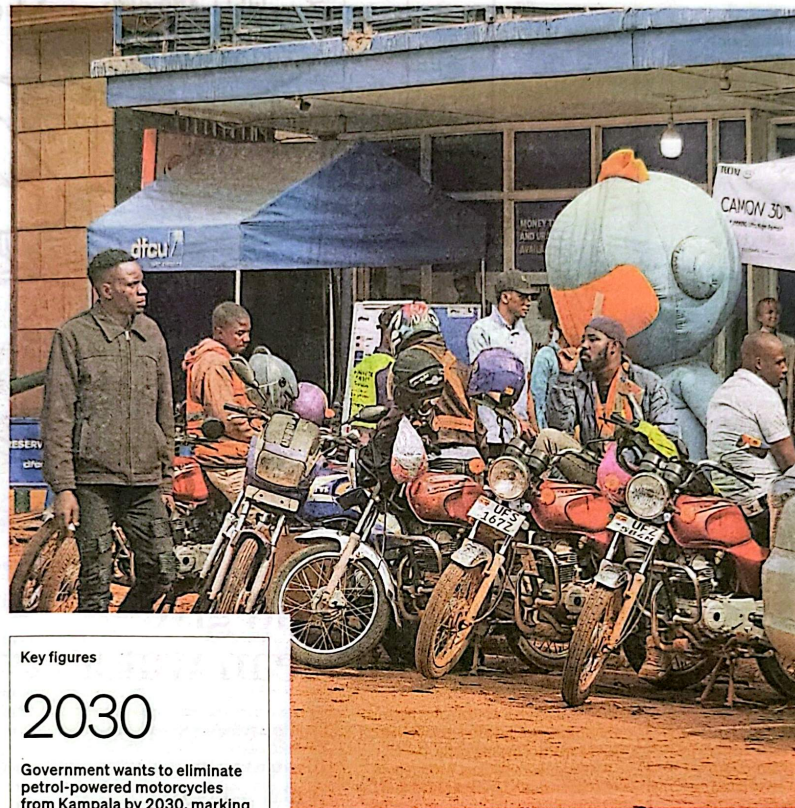
Rather than rely on imports, government is betting on domestic manufacturing, with a strategy that also includes converting existing petrol bikes into electric ones, offering a softer landing for thousands of riders whose livelihoods depend on the trade.

At the same time, government is scaling up its ambitions. By 2030, Uganda aims to produce up to 500,000 electric mobility units annually, ranging from motorcycles to buses and bicycles.

What began as modest production capacity has quickly gathered momentum.

"Last year, we had the capacity to make 10,000 motorcycles. Now it's over 50,000 a year," Musenero says, noting that "we want to reduce fumes and clean up the air for our people."

On the ground, private companies are already shaping this electric future.



Key figures

2030

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Firms like Spiro, Gogo, and Zembo are expanding assembly lines and building battery-swapping networks across the country.

Charging stations are beginning to dot the landscape, hinting at a new transport ecosystem taking shape.

For riders, the shift may also make economic sense. While petrol motorcycles cost between Sh55m and Sh6m, electric

boda bodas remain one of the most prominent features of Kampala's transport system, with the sector experiencing significant growth. PHOTO: EDGAR R BATTE

alternatives average around Sh4m, and are significantly cheaper to run.

Still, the road ahead is not without bumps.

Experts warn that affordability and accessibility will ultimately determine whether the transition succeeds.

Economist Ocira Denish argues that without targeted support, such as subsidies, flexible financing, and rural infrastructure, the shift could leave many riders behind.

"They need financing models that are accessible to all, especially in rural areas," he says. Financial institutions must also step in, offering tailored loan products to help boda boda riders adapt to the new reality.

The opportunities

Yet beyond the challenges lies opportunity. The rise of electric mobility is already creating jobs, particularly for young people trained in assembling and maintaining the new machines.

At industrial hubs like Namanve, a new generation of engineers is emerging, building bikes from scratch and embedding them with digital tracking technology.

"Our products are made by Ugandans for Ugandans," says engineer William Kata. "We are equipping young people with practical skills."

Air pollution remains a silent killer in Kampala, with research linking thousands of deaths in recent years to poor air quality.

Recent research from the Makerere University School of Public Health linked 7,257 deaths in Kampala over the past four years to air pollution.

For many, the shift to electric mobility is not just about transport; it's about public health and the kind of city Kampala wants to become.

As 2030 draws closer, the success of this bold experiment will depend on more than policy. It will hinge on infrastructure, affordability, and the willingness of riders and commuters alike to embrace change.

If it works, Kampala may not just lose the roar of petrol engines, but could gain a cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable future.