

New tarmac road boosting business in western Uganda

Easy. Traders now find it easier to access market for their goods due to the smooth road.

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FORTPORTAL/KAMWENGE. The completion of the 206km Fort Portal-Nyakahita Road is boosting business and tourism in western Uganda.

The last section of the road, the 66 km Kamwenge-Fort Portal stretch, was completed recently.

New businesses, including eateries, lodging facilities among others, are springing up along the new road.

Before the completion of the Ibanda-Fort Portal road, there were only two minibuses plying the Fort Portal-Mbarara route. There are now 13 minibuses plying the route.

Also, in the past, many travellers would connect to Mbarara District via Kasese District, which would make the journey longer by 50kms.

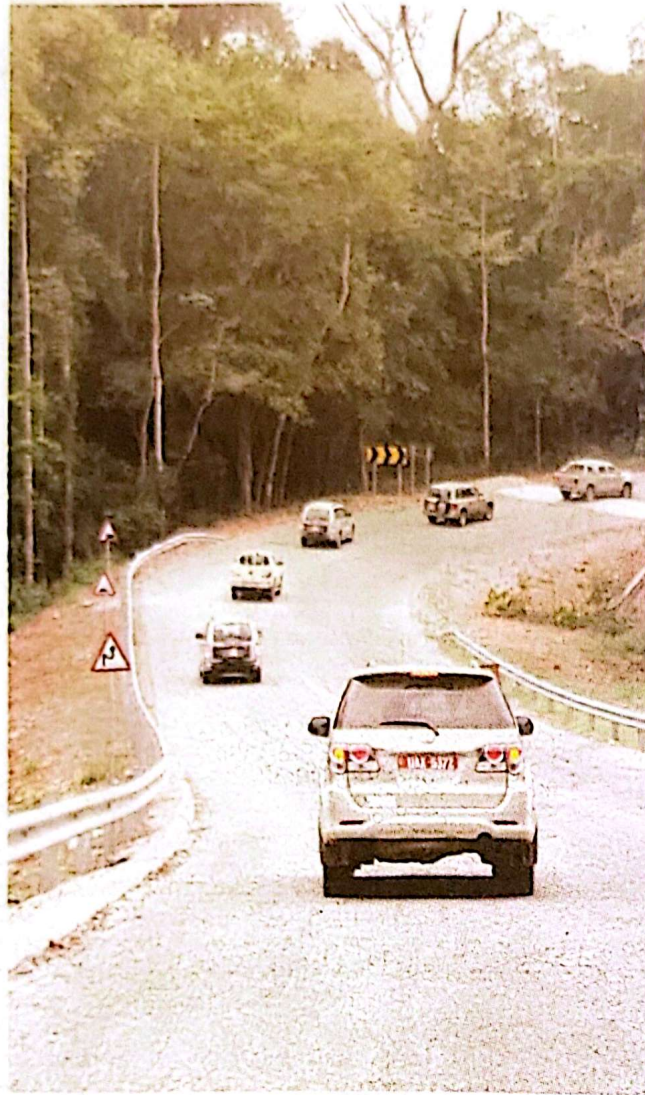
Many farmers, commuter minibus drivers, vendors and residents say they are optimistic business will boom and that they will reap the benefits associated with tarmac roads.

Ms Agnes Kobusige, a farmer from Bukwali, East Division, Fort Portal Municipality, said five years ago, transport was very difficult on the Fort Portal-Kamwenge Road.

She said the road had very many potholes and was always impassable in the rainy season as vehicles would get stuck on the muddy road for hours.

The traders would have to wait for the road surface to dry before they could resume the journey. This could sometimes take days, and in the process, some goods, especially fresh produce, would get spoilt.

Ms Kobusige said now that the road has been upgraded



Smooth. A section of the new Fort Portal-Kamwenge Road. PHOTO BY FELIX BASIIME.

DELAYED

Works on the road was delayed in 2016 after the World Bank withheld funding following reports of sexual abuse and misconduct by the construction workers.

from murrum to tarmac, farmers find it easy to transport their produce to the market.

"We are now able to access markets for our produce outside Rwenzori sub-region," Kobusige

said.

Mr Sunday Tadeo, 40, a taxi driver on the new Fort Portal-Kamwenge Road, said before the road was upgraded, they would not drive up to Mbarara Town because the road was so bumpy.

He said it now takes them one-and-a-half hours to drive from Fort Portal Town to Kamwenge District, unlike in the past when the same journey would cost them at least three hours.

"We are now earning more

profits because we make [more] return journeys, which was not the case in the past," he said.

He added that the cost of repairing their cars has also reduced since they now rarely breakdown.

Passengers are also benefiting from the upgrade of the road since taxi fares, for instance from Fort Portal to Kamwenge District, have reduced from Shs15,000 to Shs10,000.

Mr Robert Mugabe, a trader at Kabudaire Market in Fort Portal Municipality, said his business of buying produce from Kamwenge has been boosted by the new road as farmers can easily deliver the goods to him.

According to the records at Kibale Forest National Park, many tourists now find it easier to access the park through Nyakahita-Ibanda-Kamwenge-Fort Portal road.

The Kamwenge District chairman, Mr Aggrey Natuhamy, said the upgraded road has boosted business and tourism in the area.

"We are now receiving more guests at Katonga Game Reserve, Lake George, rivers Mpanga and Dura, Kanyancu Tourist Centre and Bigodi wetlands sanctuary," he said.

He added that the new road has also boosted business for lodging facilities such as Mantana, Nkingo and Bigodi Resort, all in Busiriba Sub-county, Kamwenge Guest home, Tides Motel, Club Afreka and Cape hotel in Kamwenge Town Council.

The Ibanda District chairman, Mr Melichiadis Kazwengye, said the new road will increase the pace of development in the district.

"Now many traders from Kiruhura and Kamwenge districts make stopovers in Ibanda, thereby boosting business here as well," he said.

Reported by Felix Basiime, Alex Ashaba & Fedinand Tuhambe.