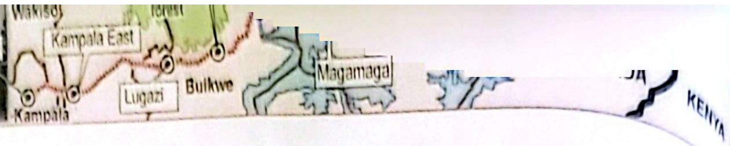
Kampala City Station artistic impression



Railway project to displace 33 schools, five factories

By Taddeo Bwambale

Construction of the $2.3b (sh8 trillion) Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) is scheduled to begin in March as experts finalise the land acquisition process, one of the key requirements before the project starts.

The SGR is part of a major transport network linking East African cities and suburbs in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In Uganda, the railway line will skirt through at least 11 districts between Kampala and Tororo, where it will connect to the same network in Kenya via Malaba at the border.

At least five industrial plants, including a pharmaceutical firm, as well as a number of schools, will have to be relocated or compensated because they are along the busy route from Lugazi to Kampala.

However, sources said at least 33 schools will be affected, with some completely relocated along the entire 273km-stretch from Tororo to Kampala. These include Morkatipe Primary School in Tororo, Victoria High School in Iganga and Crane Junior School in Mukono.

Kenya, which has completed the first phase of the SGR project with a 427km line from Mombasa to Nairobi, is expected to extend the line to Malaba.

Yesterday, works minister Eng. Esther Azuba Ntege and the permanent secretary, Wasswa Bageya, spent much of the day in the sweltering heat, jumping over stiles as they toured the Lugazi-Kampala route.

The Buikwe-Kampala stretch is considered to be one of the most difficult due to the terrain and settlement claims that have pitted residents against some government institutions.

In Buikwe district, changes have been made to the initial designs in which the railway line was meant to cut into Mabira Forest, endangering the ecological environment.

St Phillips Church in Namengo Kasenke and Multiple Junior Academy in Lugazi municipality, Buikwe district, are among institutions affected by the project.

At least 8km of sugarcane and part of a tea estate belonging to Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited (SCOUL) and Uganda Tea Corporation Ltd, respectively, are affected by the railway project.

Around several suburbs of Mukono and Kampala, the proposed areas along the railway route are not only congested, but also fraught with ownership wrangles.

Kyamugambi (second from left) showing Ntege (in green blouse) Crane Junior Primary School, one of the schools to be demolished to pave the way for the new railway line yesterday. Photo by Wilfred Sanya

In Mukono, Omega Construction Company, Lida Packaging, Label World Ltd, Abacus Parenteral drugs (U) Ltd and Crane Junior School are among institutions to be affected. So is Minimax Uganda Ltd, a plastic pipes plant in Mbalala, Mukono.

In Bukasa, where the SGR is supposed to connect to a modern port, the area is heavily built up with new apartments and residents are involved in a land row with the Government, which claims its ownership.

In Kasokoso, a suburb of Nakawa division in Kampala, many structures have sprung up and residents have previously resisted eviction from the land, also claimed by the Government.

The minister vowed that the Government would ensure all those occupying its land that falls within the project route give way for construction to start.

"Government projects will take priority. We want people to get off the land. For those who are living there genuinely, the law is clear. Those living there illegally will leave, but in an agreed way," she said.

Ntege, who has previously toured the project route from Mombasa to Nairobi and Malaba to Lugazi, described the progress on the project as good.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ **The SGR is part of a major transport network linking East African cities and suburbs in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Rwanda and the DR Congo.**

Accompanied by the SGR project team, the minister's site visit was meant to assess progress on the project that is expected to spur economic growth and promote tourism along the outlying areas.

The SGR team is acquiring 60 metres of land (30 metres on either side of the railway line).

According to Kasingye Kyamugambi, the SGR co-ordinator, at least 60% of land acquisition has been completed. All affected residents will receive compensation, which includes an additional 30% as disturbance allowance.

"Land acquisition has been completed in Tororo, Namutumba, Butaleja and Luuka districts, while in Mayuge and Iganga, the process is underway," the SGR's senior public information officer, David Mugabe, disclosed.

"For the remaining districts, we submitted the preliminary report to the Chief Government Valuer and upon approval, we will resume," Mugabe said.

Uganda's section of the SGR will connect to the DR Congo through Kasese and Arua districts, to Rwanda through Mirama Hills in Ntungamo district and to South Sudan through Nimule in Amuru district.

Uganda awarded the contract for the first phase of the project – a 273km railway linefrom the Kenya border at Malaba to Kampala to China Harbour Engineering Company Limited. The project will be financed through a loan from Exim Bank of China. Negotiations with the Chinese government about the financing are yet to be concluded.

Benefits

The SGR is envisioned to expedite economic growth in East Africa by reducing the cost of doing business,increasing connectivity and enhancing regional integration.

Over 95% of all the freight movement in the region is by road, which is expensive, unsafe and unreliable. The 5% is through a dilapidated metre gauge railway system.

Unlike the old metre gauge that has been in existence in some parts of the country since colonial days, the SGR will be an electric rail featuring a wider, more efficient width of 1.5 metres.

There will be 64 major overpasses where the railway line will run across over roads. Along valleys and swampy areas, there will viaducts to support the railway line.

According to the design, 95% will be for cargo and 5% passenger service.

Cargo trains are expected to move at a speed of 100km per hour and passenger trains at 120kms per hour. Unlike the old train, whose capacity is 1,500 tonnes, the SGR's capacity is 5,000 tonnes.

Initial designs for the railway line show that the railway will have a connection with an iconic bridge spanning about a kilometre over River Nile, the longest river in Africa.

Multiple train stations will be built along the route and a modern station at Namanve, which will sit on at least 500 acres.

Apart from overseeing construction of the rail tracks and landmarks, Chinese firms are expected to supply locomotives, freight wagons and passenger coaches.

Residents speak out

Evelyn Nakiwala, who owns a house in Namengo Kiteredde village in Buikwe district, which is affected by the project, said she expects fair compensation.

"The project is good and we are eager for development. But we want fairness in the compensation so that we are able to find a decent place to relocate to," she told *New Vision*.

"I know the railway project will bring development to our area, but that means I will have to find a new house to rent," said Stella Namayanja, a tenant in Namengo, Buikwe district.