How new Naivasha-Malaba SGR will reshape commerce

SGR will boost commerce by drastically reducing cargo transport costs and transit times between the Port of Mombasa and Uganda.

BY ANDREW BAGALA

The construction of the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which starts on Friday next week, will cut the travel time of cargo from the Port of Mombasa to the Uganda border by six hours.

President Museveni and his Kenyan counterpart William Ruto, are to launch the start of the construction of the SGR that will connect Uganda and Kenya.

Mr Ruto said the launch in Kisumu City, Kenya, will be the actual start of the construction of the SGR that will link to a similar project on the Uganda border.

"The Kenya-Uganda SGR agreement signed in March 2025 commits both nations to completing the Nairobi-Kampala link by 2028, cutting the travel time from 14 hours to four hours, and the freight costs by 35 percent. In fact, on 20th of this month, we will be launching the actual construction of the railway in Kisumu, with President Museveni," Mr Ruto said.

In December last year, Mr Ruto had promised the construction of the extension of the SGR would start in January this year.

Uganda has also started constructing the SGR on its side, and they both expect the project to be completed around the same time.

Currently, the SGR that starts from the Port of Mombasa ends at Naivasha Township. The gap between Naivasha, Kenya, and Malaba, the Ugandan border, made it difficult for Uganda to build the SGR on its side, which left it with huge costs of transporting goods to and from the sea.

Such infrastructure limitations have irritated Mr Museveni, saying it is another form of denying Uganda's rights to access to the sea, and making their goods more expensive in the region and on the international market.

On November 11, 2025, during a talk show in Mbale City, Mr Museveni said it was madness for landlocked countries to be obstructed from accessing the sea to export their goods.

"That is why we have had endless discussions with Kenya. This one stops, another comes. The railway, the pipeline, the what, we discuss. But that ocean belongs to me. Because it is my ocean. I am entitled to that ocean. In the future, we are going to have wars. In the future, we are going to have wars," he said.

The Kenya SGR section is estimated to cost over $5.5b, while the Ugandan side will cost $3b.

Uganda has also started on the construction of its side of the 272km SGR, but authorities are still looking for funds for the project.

In January, officials from the Islamic Development Bank held discussions with the Ugandan authorities to contribute a fund of €405m (Shs1.7 trillion) on the SGR project.

Uganda has also kicked off the project for the construction of the SGR from Malaba to Kampala City after securing funding.

Turkish firm Yapi Merkezi has already started geotechnical surveys and infrastructure mapping on the proposed 273-kilometre corridor. Most of the land on which the SGR will be constructed has been acquired.

Uganda is also rehabilitating the metre gauge railway between Malaba and Kampala City.

The metre gauge and SGR can effectively work alongside each other, but the lines of two railways will not use the same path. The metre gauge railway will carry very heavy cargo, like steel. Goods that need to be delivered very fast will use the SGR.

150,000

Employment. The Works ministry documents indicate that the construction of the SGR would create 150,000 jobs in Uganda.

Regional plan

In 2022, President Museveni said they have plans to build an SGR line from Kampala to Kasese in western Uganda to connect DR Congo and later to South Sudan.

Mr Museveni said it would greatly reduce the cost of transporting goods in the region.

Uganda is also working on another SGR project to connect Uganda to the Dar-es-Salaam Port in Tanzania, but they haven't yet secured funding for it.

Mr Ruto said the two countries are also at the tail-end of documentation for the road infrastructure linking the two nations.

"Significant milestones have been achieved on key arteries, including the feasibility study on the Nairobi-Nakuru-Mau Summit highway in Kenya; Kampala-Jinja; and Jinja-Malaba-Busia-Kisumu road corridors in Uganda," he said.

"The market sounding conference for the Jinja-Malaba-Busia-Kisumu sector was held in November 2025."

BY DERRICK WANDERA

Joint security checkpoint[illegible]

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