

President Ruto warned that despite Kenya being a major trade route for several EAC countries, poor infrastructure is making it shaky.

BY ANDREW BAGALA

Kenya's President, William Ruto, has warned Kenyans that their country's position as a key trade route for the East African states to and from the Indian Ocean is neither permanent nor guaranteed unless they invest in infrastructure projects to ease the movement of cargo and people to their neighbours.

Ruto made the remarks at the launch of the construction of the second phase of the Naivasha-Kisumu-Malaba Standard Gauge Railway in Narok County, Kenya yesterday.

"Today, Kenya serves as the primary gateway, but that position must be secured and strengthened. By extending this railway to Kisumu and ultimately to Malaba, we are consolidating Kenya's role as the logistic backbone of East and Central Africa. That is why, on Saturday, we will break ground on the 107(Km) SGR phase II C section linking the Port City of Mombasa to the border town of Malaba through Busia in Busia County," Ruto said.

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

Uganda has also started construct-

Kenya might lose its key trade route - Ruto



The SGR is a major development to help Kenya secure its place at the centre of Africa's continental trade. PHOTO/FILE

ing 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, to 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 President Museveni, saying it is another form of denying Uganda's

TRANSPORT TIME

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rights to access to the sea, making their goods more costly in the region and on the international market.

On November 11, 2025, during a talk show in Mbale City, President 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.

Uganda also started to look for alternatives to the sea. Two weeks ago, they signed a memorandum of understanding with Tanzania to extend an SGR to Uganda and link it to DRC and South

Sudan. This is a major economic threat to the northern corridor trade route, which Kenya largely controls.

Ruto said on Thursday that 70 percent of the cargo from the Port of Mombasa is destined for Uganda.

"The demand for transport is rising. Transport cargo from Mombasa reached 7.37 million tonnes in just six months of 2025. Yet today, cargo still takes 80 hours from Mombasa to Malaba, and over 100 hours to Kampala. A slow transport corridor, inevitably loses business and weakens our competitiveness as a nation," he said.

"Ultimately, this project is about the future of trade in the great lakes region, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which depend on efficient access to the sea," he said.

He said once the project is complete, it would secure Kenya's place at the centre of Africa's continental trade.

Kenyan officials told their president that in the project, they are to establish an economic trade zone at Malaba border at the major railway station to facilitate trade between the two countries.

The Kenya SGR section is estimated to cost over \$5.5b (Shs20.7 trillion) while the Ugandan side would cost \$3b (Shs11.3 trillion).

Ugandan authorities are still looking for funds for the 272km SGR project.

In January 2026, officials from the Islamic Development Bank held discussions with the Ugandan authorities to contribute a fund of Euro405m (Shs1.7b) 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.