Transport hit hardest amid global conflict

Commuters have rejected any planned increment of transport fares while boda boda riders say customer numbers have dropped sharply, with many people choosing to walk.

BY MONITOR TEAM

Rising fuel prices linked to global tensions, including the ongoing war in Iran, have taken a toll on Uganda's transport and trade sectors.

This is forcing boda boda riders and taxi operators to either shoulder higher fuel costs or give up work entirely.

Commuters, on the other hand, have rejected any planned increment of transport fares that transporters and cyclists intend to charge, citing hard economic times.

In Kisoro District alone, about 20 percent of boda boda riders have returned their hired motorcycles as fuel prices surge, transport fares and commodity costs are rising sharply across multiple districts, a situation traders partly attribute to international supply disruptions from the Middle East conflict.

Mr Baker Batamukoraho, the general secretary of the Kisoro United Boda boda Operators Association, expressed concern over the rising fuel prices.

He said a significant number of members riding hired motorcycles have abandoned their work and returned the bikes to their owners.

"We are worried that boda boda riders who are leaving the industry due to high fuel prices may resort to criminal activities, such as mugging people at night," Mr Batamukoraho warned.

He added: "This sector employs more than 5,000 people, including youth and university graduates and is a vital source of livelihood for many families."

Petrol prices have surged sharply since last month, rising from Shs4,500 to Shs5,600 per litre in Kisoro Municipality and reaching Shs6,000 per litre in rural areas.

The Kisoro Tax Transporters Association Chairperson, Mr Cyprian Ntamuheza, said rising fuel prices have forced traders to raise the cost of goods, given that higher transport costs are squeezing their profits.

The Kabale Central Taxi Operators chairperson, Mr Saturday Byamugisha, said rising fuel prices have hit members hard. "We are going to announce the planned fare increases on radio because petrol prices have risen by Shs1,000 per litre. We will also hold a meeting to set fair rates and ensure the public is not overcharged," Mr Byamugisha explained.

In Kanungu, transport fares have increased due to a hike in fuel prices, gradually driving up the cost of goods. Petrol prices now range between Shs6,000 and Shs6,400 per litre at some filling stations, up from Shs5,500 before the crisis.

Mr Comfort Ahimbisibwe, the manager of Japs Petrol Station in Kanungu Town, said they were forced to raise pump prices because suppliers increased their costs. They attributed the rise to global fuel supply disruptions linked to the war in Iran.

Meanwhile, some filling stations in Kanungu District did not receive fuel from their suppliers in the past few days, forcing some of them to close.

The Total filling station in Kanungu has been closed for more than two weeks now. Mr Jimmy Tumukurate, the manager, explained: "We placed our order, but the delayed supply has affected our operations. We cannot serve our customers now."

In Arua City, petrol prices average around Shs6,000 per litre. At Gill filling station, fuel costs Shs6,500, while Paps sells at Shs5,580 per litre.

At the Shell filling station, a litre goes for Shs5,550. Mr Richard Ojandu, a boda-boda rider said: "Many people now prefer Shell because their price is lower. Even roadside jerrycan sellers have raised their fuel prices to Shs6,500. We pray that prices drop soon."

Ms Loyce Ayikoru, who commutes five kilometres from Ewuata to Arua Town for work, said: "Boda boda fares from my area have risen from Shs3,000 to Shs4,000. Now I spend Shs8,000 daily on transport to and from work."

Taxi operators under the Jinja City Taxi Operators and Drivers Association said they are losing Shs500 on each passenger as fuel prices continue to rise.

The association chairperson, Mr Kalidi Muyingo, said the price of diesel has risen to Shs5,080 per litre, up from Shs5,000 previously.

He noted that transport fares remain unchanged despite the fuel price increase, forcing operators to run at a loss. "Adding Shs500 to the existing fare would match the rising fuel prices, but nothing has been adjusted, meaning our profits have dropped by Shs500 per passenger," Mr Muyingo said.

He explained that transport fares cannot be increased due to the low number of passengers. He attributed the decline to the trade order operation, which has forced many people to vacate businesses in major urban areas, where transport demand is high.

Declining daily earnings

Boda boda riders in Kagadi Town Council have raised concerns over declining daily earnings due to a sharp increase in fuel prices.

Mr Hamza Ategeka, the chairperson of boda boda riders in Kagadi Town Council, said the rise in fuel costs has forced riders to increase transport fares.

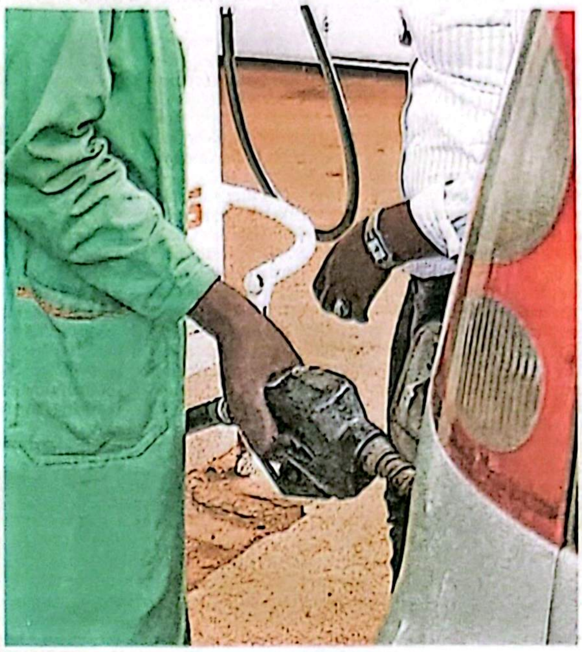
"We are struggling with daily earnings due to higher fuel prices. Raising fares has driven away customers and even explanations don't seem to help," Mr Ategeka said.

He added that the situation has also caused tension between riders and their lenders, especially money-lending companies.

"You cannot tell your boss that all your earnings went on fuel; they won't accept it. We appeal to bosses and loan companies to consider easing payments for now," Mr Ategeka added.

He urged customers to agree on transport fares before starting a journey and adjust to the rising prices, adding that the situation is temporary.

Taxi driver Birungi Asim said he can no longer cover the same distances due to rising fuel costs, yet customers resist higher fares. Another rider, Mr Deo Sebitinde, said: "Previously, I would earn more than Shs30,000 a day, but now I struggle to make even Shs10,000. I no longer save as all earnings go to family needs."



A pump attendant fuels a car. PHOTO/FILE

New rates. We are going to announce the planned fare increases on radio because petrol prices have risen by Shs1,000 per litre. We will also hold a meeting to set fair rates and ensure the public is not overcharged. In Kanungu, Petrol prices now range between Shs6,000 and Shs6,400 per litre, up from Shs5,500 before the crisis."
- Mr Saturday Byamugisha, the Kabale Central Taxi Operators chairperson

Mr Robert Tusiime, a boda boda rider, said most of his earnings now go to fuel and repairs. "A customer may offer Shs2,000 for a Shs4,000 trip, and refusing means no work at all," he explained.

Riders said customer numbers have dropped sharply, with several people choosing to walk unless it's an emergency.

Fuel prices continue to rise across the country, putting pressure on commuters and transport operators. Diesel prices range from Shs5,149 to Shs5,300 per litre, while petrol prices range from Shs5,289 to Shs5,600 per litre.

Prices surge in Busia

Fuel prices in Busia have risen sharply over the past two weeks, reflecting the impact of rising global oil costs. A litre of petrol is sold between Shs5,300 and Shs5,400 per litre, while diesel is sold between Shs5,000 and Shs5,200 per litre.

Two weeks ago, a litre of petrol was sold at an average of Shs4,950, and diesel was about Shs4,600 per litre at most filling stations.

Shell and Yassam Border Oil stations have recorded similar increases, with V-Power fuel now retailing at Shs5,650 per litre at Shell filling station.

At the Busia customs entry point, fewer fuel tankers are arriving. Busia Border is a key entry point for fuel destined for Uganda, DRC, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, the Central African Republic, and Ethiopia.

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