

The Uganda-DR Congo road project is estimated to cost \$334 million (about Shs1.2 trillion)

BY TONNY ABET

The Minister of Works and Transport, Gen Edward Katumba Wamala, has defended Uganda's co-funding of a road construction project in the DR Congo (DRC), despite concerns about the poor condition of many roads within Uganda.

Speaking during an interview in Kampala yesterday after a meeting to review progress on the project, the minister said the Uganda-DR Congo road initiative would boost trade and eventually generate revenue that could be used to improve domestic roads.

"So, this is a strategic investment which will bring returns on the investment to enable us do the (domestic) roads," he said.

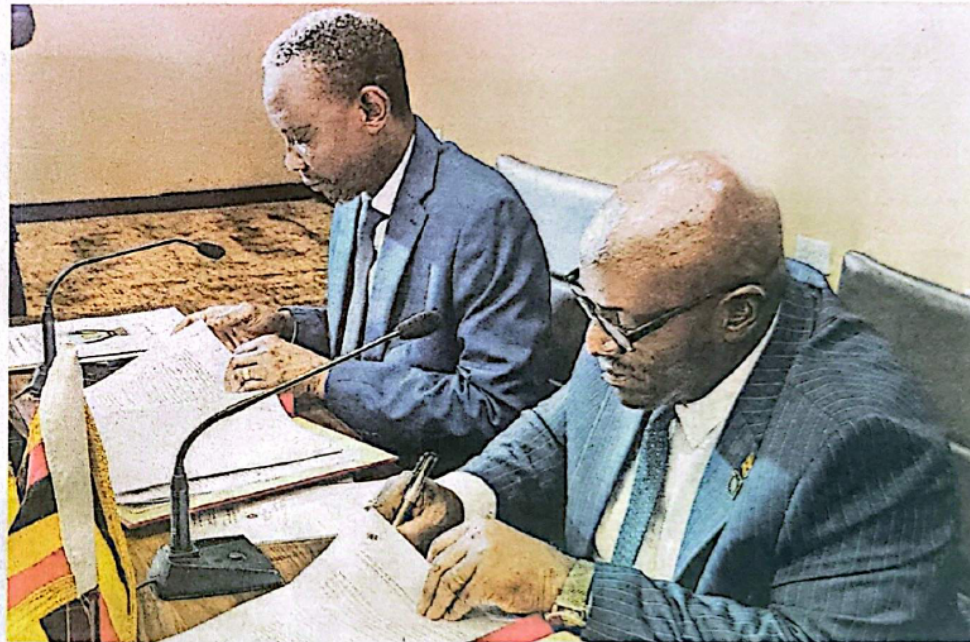
"You have already heard before the construction started, the trade volume between us was \$578 million; today, even before the road construction is finished, it's \$1.2 billion. So that was the thinking," he added.

Gen Katumba was speaking after the March 5 ministerial meeting held at Speke Resort Munyonyo, where officials from Uganda and the DR Congo reviewed progress on the road works and discussed ways to accelerate construction.

The project involves the construction and upgrading of three roads in eastern DR Congo: the Mpondwe/Kasindi-Beni

Gen Katumba defends DR Congo road project

DR Congo Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works John Banza Lunda (left) and Uganda's Works and Transport minister Gen Katumba Wamala, sign a joint communiqué in Kampala yesterday. PHOTO/TONNY ABET



Road (80km), the Beni-Butembo Road (54km), and the Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma Road (89km).

The Uganda-DR Congo road project is estimated to cost \$334 million (about Shs1.2 trillion). Uganda's decision to co-fund the construction of 223 kilometres of roads inside the neighbouring country has drawn mixed reactions, particularly from critics who argue that many

roads in Uganda remain in poor condition and that the country faces funding constraints for essential social services.

However, Gen Katumba reaffirmed the government's commitment to completing the project. He said Uganda would contribute 20 percent of the total project cost, while the DR Congo would provide another 20 percent. The remaining funding will be provided by the construction

firm Dot Services, which will recover its investment through user fees.

"The section between Kasindi and Beni is at 61 percent. The section between Beni and Butembo is at about five to eight percent. That's the progress, but mainly murram and gravel, not yet tarmacked," he said. "What they did was first start with the structures. Structures include the drainage structures and the bridges,

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In a joint communiqué signed after the meeting, the two ministers reaffirmed their commitment to completing the project. "We, the undersigned, on behalf of our respective governments, reaffirm our shared commitment to the successful completion of the Kasindi-Beni (80km), Beni-Butembo (54km) and Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma (89km) Roads Construction and Upgrading Project. We fully recognise the strategic importance of this project for regional integration..." the communiqué states.

and then doing the gravel," he added.

The minister said the project has faced several challenges, including insecurity and bureaucratic hurdles. "We have so far released \$50 million (about Shs184b) for the road and the same will be done by DR Congo," he said.

The DR Congo Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works, Mr John Banza Lunda, said both countries are working to accelerate the construction works.

"We are pushing, as we have already said, so that the works can go very quickly. The colleague minister (Gen Katumba Wamala) has proposed a strategy for gaining time," he said.

"Concentrate the equipment which was meant for the second phase to do the first phase, and they go very quickly to gain time on this. So we expect the road to be finished in the shortest time possible," he added.