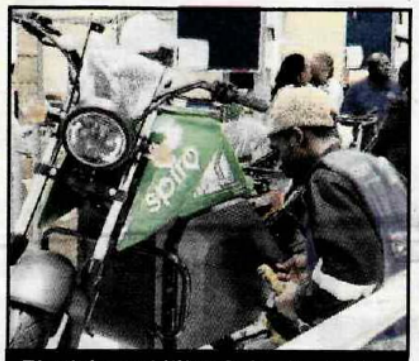


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TRADE, SECURITY RECEIVE BOOST AS DR CONGO ROADS TAKE SHAPE

TRANSPORT

Cross-border highways still under construction are already reshaping the heartbeat of commerce and travel between Uganda and DR Congo. The Mpondwe/Kasindi-Beni, Beni-Butembo and Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma roads are delivering significant gains, writes **Charles Etukuri**


An areal view of the ongoing road construction in DR Congo by Dott Services Ltd

Even before completion, key roads being constructed jointly by Uganda and DR Congo are delivering great benefits to both countries, the Minister of Works and Transport, Gen. Katumba Wamala, has said.

Addressing journalists with his Congolese counterpart, infrastructure and public works minister John Banza Lunda at Speke Resort Munyonyo in Kampala last week, Katumba said both governments were committed to ensuring the successful completion of the vital infrastructure project, Mpondwe/Kasindi-Beni (80km), Beni-Butembo (54km) and Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma (89km) roads.

"But even before completion, we are enjoying great benefits which include increased trade from $578.9m in 2019 to over $1.2b in 2025; reduced travel time between Kasindi and Beni from four hours to about one hour and 30 minutes, greatly improving the movement of goods and people.

"Others are improved security along the corridor and lower transport costs, better access to markets and increased employment opportunities to local communities," Katumba said.

He said the project was conceived during the state visit of President Félix Tshisekedi of DR Congo to Uganda in November 2019. During the visit, Tshisekedi and President Yoweri Museveni agreed to upgrade 1,182km of strategic roads connecting the two countries.

"The objectives of this project include strengthening bilateral relations between Uganda and DR Congo, increasing the volume of trade between our countries, easing cross-border business and movement of people, improving security and fast-tracking regional integration," Katumba said.

He added that the two governments demonstrated a strong commitment to this project with the following key milestones being achieved: The Inter-Governmental Agreement and Project Development Agreement (PDA)


Minister Katumba Wamala

were signed on May 27, 2021, at State House, Entebbe. The breaking of the ground ceremony was held on June 16, 2021, at the border towns of Kasindi and Mpondwe, presided over by Museveni and Tshisekedi.

To the milestones, the works minister added the ratification of the Inter-Governmental Agreement by the Cabinet of Uganda in October 2021, which reaffirmed Uganda's determination to implement this strategic initiative and the site handover on December 3, 2021.

Others are the Cabinet of Uganda's approval of the final design and stage construction implementation modality in October 2024 and the allocation of funds to the project by the two governments to the contractor, Dott Services.

"As of now, significant works are ongoing on the Kasindi-Beni (80km), which is at 61%, the section between Beni-Butembo (54km) is at about 8%, but mainly

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AGREEMENTS

After a series of deliberations on Thursday, works minister Gen. Wamala Katumba and Congolese minister John Banza Lunda issued a communiqué in which they, among others, committed to enforcing the Project Development Agreement (PDA). They reaffirmed their commitment to fully comply with the provisions of the PDA, which governs the construction and upgrading of the Mpondwe/Kasindi-Beni, Beni-Butembo and Bunagana-Rutshuru-Goma roads.

"In particular, we emphasise the enforcement of the provision that exempts the project from the payment of any taxes, duties, fees or other levies for all goods, materials and services related to the project.

"To this end, we commit to: The immediate resolution of any pending tax exemption approvals by the DR Congo's ministries of finance and planning to ensure the timely clearance of project goods, materials, vehicles and equipment," the circular noted.

Both Uganda and the DR Congo agreed on the provision of right of way, camp sites, borrow pits, quarry sites and relocation of utilities to the contractor, Dott Services Ltd.

The parties committed to providing all necessary support to CICOAGRI Sarl, the resettlement action plan implementation consultant, by ensuring continued direct engagement with the contractor.

They also agreed to strengthen security measures.

"Acknowledging the challenges posed by security risks in certain sections of the project, particularly in the Bunagana-Goma area, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the safe execution of the project by continuing to collaborate with the relevant security agencies to ensure that all works are carried out in a secure environment," the communique read.

Both countries also agreed on the registration of equipment, vehicles and issuance of work permits to expatriate staff.