



# Uganda Railways working towards efficient network

An efficient railway network is a pivotal asset in the freight and logistics industry. Charles Kateeba, the Managing Director of Uganda Railways Corporation explains what they are doing to promote a vibrant freight and logistics industry in Uganda.



Charles A. Kateeba, Managing Director

## About Uganda Railways Corporation

Uganda Railways Corporation is a government agency tasked with the construction, operations and maintenance of railway, marine and road services and our mandate is both inside and outside Uganda. We operate freight services between Kampala and Mombasa, Kampala and Dar-es-Salam and over the lake between Port Bell and Mwanza by use of wagon ferries.

In Mombasa, we work with Kenya Railways Corporation, and Kenya Ports Authority. As of now, we have two services, the first service is purely on the meter gauge network, where we load cargo at Mombasa or Changamwe and it comes all the way to Kampala over the Meter Gauge Railway.

The second service is in combination with the new Standard Gauge Railway, which is between Nairobi and Mombasa. Here, cargo is loaded at Kilindini or Port Reitz and it comes to

Embakasi inland container depot or the new cargo terminal which serves both meter gauge and standard gauge. We for example load containers on standard gauge wagons from Port Reitz up to Embakasi inland container terminal. At Embakasi, the containers are transferred to meter gauge wagons which move from Embakasi in Nairobi all the way to Kampala.

The customer can therefore load his cargo either on meter gauge at Mombasa or Kyangamwe or standard gauge at Port Reitz or Kilindini and it will reach safely in Uganda.

We are also operating a limited passenger service currently operating in Kampala between Kampala station and Namanve station. We have three services a day, one in the morning and two in the evening and carries 1000 passengers each way.

## Life after Rift Valley Railways

We took over from rift valley railways in January this year and I can say, we are doing really well, a lot of people were skeptical that is difficult, but so far, a lot is being achieved.

In the first three months, the volume of cargo was still low and this was because before our taking over, there had been six months of inactivity, and systems had broken down and customers had walked away, because their cargo was delaying for months.

But by June this year, cargo has started picking up, especially after we agreed with Kenya Authorities on how to share containers between the standard gauge and the meter gauge wagons.

In July for example, we carried 22,000 tonnes, and starting September, we expect to go over 35000 tonnes. We have also resumed services

to Dar-es-salam via Portbell and Mwanza and we are now carrying up to 8000 tonnes on that route, we expect to have up to 15000 tonnes starting September and going forward.

And here, we have brought back strategic customers such as World Food Programme, Bakhesa, Mukwano, Spedag, Interfreight, Bolorre, Bidco and Roofings.

The Dar-es-Salam route is proving to be the most efficient, with cargo reaching Uganda in three and half days.

## SGR and Vision 2040

The Standard Gauge Railway is meant to revolutionise freight transport in East Africa. Whereas the current system is designed for



Mukono ICD

operating speed of between 50 -55km per hour, the SGR has an average operating speed of 75km per hour. And this means that cargo can reach Kampala in less than 24 hours compared to the current system of minimum three days.

To a manufacturer, this means that they will be assured of replenishment every day, unlike today where replenishment is after every three days.

The most important however, is that the meter gauge had come of age and it required major refurbishment. Large sections of the railway line needed replacement, certain corners needed realignment, and this would have cost the Government about US\$ 1B to rehabilitate our network.

Fortunately, the Government strategically decided that rather than spend a billion on a system that will give you at most 55km per hour, we would rather upgrade the railway line by straitening it, increasing the axle load, increase on the maximum number of wagons it can carry, and the pay load that it can deliver.



Wagon roll off from MV Umoja at Portbell, Luzira

The current system is limited to 35 wagons maximum whereas the SGR can carry up to 100 wagons, the current system can carry up to 65 tons wagons and the future system can carry up to 100 tons wagons. SGR will therefore benefit the economy by providing a more productive transport system.

The SGR will also connect us to our neighbors, the current system stops at Kasese but the SGR is designed to connect to us Rwanda and South Sudan and this means we can now have better trade between these countries.

## Attracting investors

Currently, we have not opened up to private investors, though there are opportunities for investment, notably in rolling stock, maintenance, and in the future, opportunities may be available in operations as well. But in order to do that, you need to have sufficient volumes of traffic to guarantee a private investor that it is worth investing in.



Passengers aboard the train to Namboole