



Passengers waiting to board the Rift Valley railways train

BY OWEN WAGABAZA

In 2018, Uganda Railways Corporation (URC) took possession of the concession assets from Rift Valley Railways (RVR) and started operating the metre-gauge.

URC cited RVR's failure to perform as stipulated in the concession agreement to terminate the concession.

Stephen Wakasenza, the chief commercial/ concession officer, says at the time of the takeover, railway transport in Uganda was in a mess. "We are now on track and the future is bright," he says.

He says at the take-over, RVR was only transporting goods on the northern Corridor, because it was not in its interest to move in the southern Corridor.

"It did not make business sense because it was not a profitable route. But as URC, we are looking at the bigger picture. We need to have an alternative access to the sea. It is, therefore, in our best interest to have the Central Corridor and the Northern Corridor Operating," Wakasenza explains.

In June 2018, URC started movement on the central corridor, and is now moving an average of 6,500 tonnes per month.

URC has started moving local cargo from Tororo to Kampala. Currently, URC is averaging 18,000-20,000 tonnes per month.

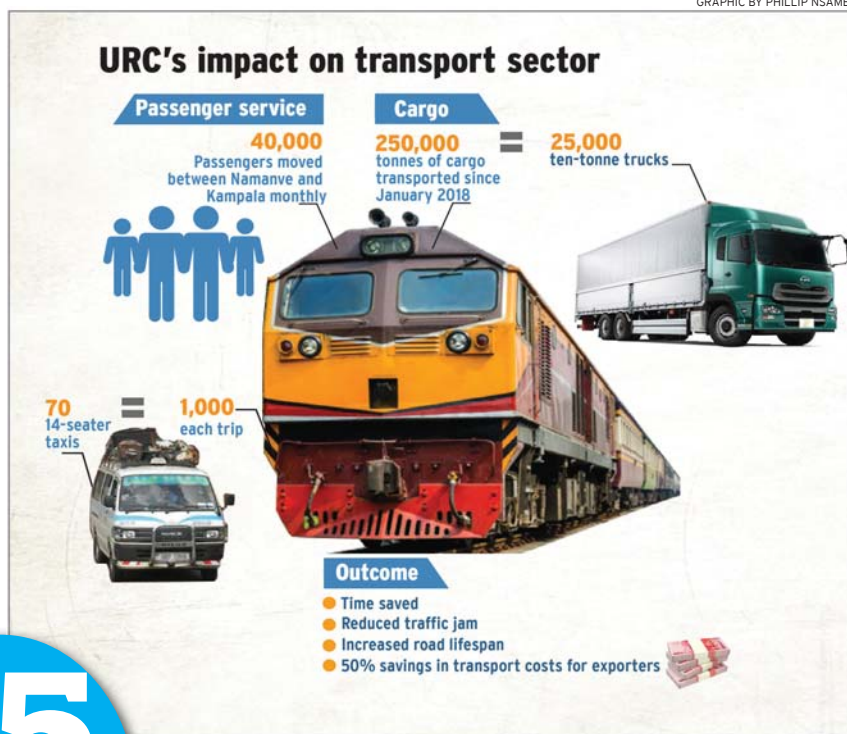
"Our biggest clients are Grain Bulk Houliers Ltd, Roofings Ltd, World Food Programme and Seroma Ltd. But at the time we took over, there was neither a Central Corridor nor local cargo," he says.

To open the Southern Corridor, URC repaired the line from Portbell to Kampala, and upgraded and insured the machinery.

They also repaired Port Bell and Goodshed warehouse, which had been abandoned. URC has since erected a fence and installed CCTV cameras, all aimed at securing the cargo. They have

Railways crucial for transport sector

GRAPHIC BY PHILLIP NSAMBA



45 minutes

The time used to travel from Namanve to Kampala by train

also repaired warehouses in Mombasa.

Moving passengers

Soon, passengers from Mukono, Kyengeru, Luzira and Port Bell and as far as Bujuuko will access passenger train services.

To make passenger train services attractive, URC will have halts on the lines so that

the users enjoy amenities such as restaurants, rest rooms, park and ride facilities.

The feasibility study for the Kampala Metropolitan passenger train services was one of the highlights of the 2018/19 financial year, the first full financial year since URC took over.

"Since February 2018, URC has been moving an average of 40,000 passengers from Namanve to Kampala every month, which is around 2,000 people daily. The plan is to move 15,000-20,000

persons per day. Fortunately, the right of way is already there," he adds.

Repairs

Because of the long periods of inactivity, there was deterioration of physical assets. Leading among these was the track, with some sections severely depleted of fixtures such as slippers, clips and bolts. As a result, some sections had been abandoned. URC's first year, therefore, revolved around emergency rehabilitation and

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Stanley Ssendegeya, the chief finance officer, says since January 2018, URC has moved over 250,000 metric tonnes of cargo. "Assuming this cargo was being transported by a 10-tonne truck via road, we would have needed 25,000 trucks. When you put those trucks off the road, the road gets a longer lifespan," he says.

"When you come to passenger service that runs between Namanve and Kampala, we move 2,000 people every day, a total of 600,000 passengers since we started operations. Every trip of 1,000 passengers relieves the road of 70 taxis at a go. This reduces traffic congestion and it is time saving as it takes only 45 minutes for one to reach Kampala from Namanve," Ssendegeya adds.

"It is also cost-friendly. Users of the train such as WFP, Bolloré and Spedag testify that it is far better as they carry bulk and save money. For exporters, for example, they save more than 50% on transport. Safety is also assured. We have, therefore, contributed to the reduction of the cost of doing business in the country," says Ssendegeya.

Using the train instead of buses or commuter taxes also reduces pollution.

repair of assets.

URC started repairs with Goodshed and fenced it off. URC then proceeded to railway stations that were in bad shape, before restoring the Kampala-Port Bell line.

URC also renovated the warehouse at Port Bell, reconstructed the parking yard and three spots along the Kampala-Malaba line, where they improved drainage by working on the catchments and culverts.

Renovations are on-going they have ordered for more materials. These include rail slippers, clips, fishplates, bolts and spikes among others.

2.000 The passengers transported daily

20.000 The target number of passengers per day

70 One train trip is equivalent to 70 14-seater passenger taxi