

## Commentary

### Uganda's Road Construction Journey—the true story!

Uganda's road network has improved significantly arising from the increased funding and the road sector reforms of the 1990s compared to the pre-1986 situation when majority of the roads were impassable.

Before independence, when the country was still under the British Colonial rule, a total of **692km** of roads were upgraded to bituminous standards with the last roads to be constructed just before independence (completed in 1961) being the Tororo - Mbale-Soroti, Iganga - Kaliro and Jinja-Kamuli Roads. For the post-independence period between 1962 and 1986, a total of 1,175km of new roads were constructed averaging 49km of roads constructed per year.

Since 1986, however, a total of 4,793km of new paved/tarmac roads have been constructed and a total of 1,924km of existing dilapidated paved roads reconstructed (this is because paved roads last on average for 15years). So, in total the current Government has tarmacked a total of 8,588km of roads which translates to an average of 252km of paved roads per year. The table below shows the history of paved road construction in Uganda.

Period	Pre-independence (1962)	1962-1986	1986-To date	Totals (km)
<b>Kms of Paved Roads (new)</b>	696	1,175	4,793	<b>6,664</b>
<b>Kms of Roads Rehabilitated/Reconstructed</b>	0	0	1,924	<b>1,924</b>
<b>Total Kms (New + Reconstructed)</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>1,175</b>	<b>6,717</b>	<b>8,588</b>

If one looks at the recent trend of the increase in the stock of new paved/ tarmacked national roads (i.e under UNRA jurisdiction only), it is clear that the average increase in new paved roads over the last 5years has been approximately 300km per year. In particular, the last two financial years have seen an average of over 400km per year of new paved/ tarmacked national roads added to the network. This increase in paved/tarmacked roads is in line with the National Development Plan and Vision 2040 targets.

The table below shows the annual increase in the stock of paved national roads over the last 5 financial years.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
<b>Paved Roads (km)</b>	3,919	4,157	4,257	4551	5,015	5,398
<b>Annual Increase (km)</b>	-	238	100	294	464	383
<b>5yr Annual Average increase in paved roads</b>						<b>296</b>
<b>2yr Annual Average increase in paved roads (last 2yrs)</b>						<b>423</b>

*Source: UNRA Road Asset Management System*

From the above table, it is clear that the Government of Uganda through UNRA is doing very well in tarmacking roads and any person that travels across the country can bear witness to this fact. There have also been similar efforts to tarmack urban roads through the USMID programme under Ministry of Lands/ Local Governments and the UNRA town roads programme that is further increasing the stock of paved roads. With the current progress of roads upgrading, the country is on course to achieve its target of tarmacking 80% of its 21,000km national road network by 2040 in line with the Vision 2040.

Uganda has chosen a more prudent option of progressive investment and/or upgrading of its road network by using both borrowed money and own funds raised through taxes. This has ensured that the country's debt remains sustainable and Government attends to other priorities. Citing Kenya for example, our colleagues opted to upgrade over 8,000km of roads at once through the annuity roads programme (i.e using private financing or borrowed money which the Kenyans would have to pay back with interest).

The Government should therefore be commended for sustaining the current road upgrading programme that has enabled almost every district in the country and border points with the neighbouring countries to be connected with a paved/ tarmacked road.

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