

AN OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION

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This and the next four papers describe the transportation situation in Uganda in June, 1979, immediately after the liberation war that ended eight years of military rule. Events that dominated the transport sector during those eight years are sketched, and damage caused by the 1979 fighting, including looting and destruction of property by retreating troops of the military regime and by civilians, is noted. The reconstruction of the transportation sector that might be undertaken over the next several years is discussed, with special attention being given to those projects that would contribute most significantly to this reconstruction. An attempt is made to relate these projects and reconstruction in general to the longer run development of the Uganda transportation sector.

2. In addition to the reports¹ made available to us by government and parastatal officials who were assigned to work with us, we have based our analysis on discussions with many other individuals in the transportation sector. In Kampala, and in up-country trips to the south-west and the east, we have observed road and traffic conditions as widely afield as time and security conditions permitted.

3. Our general conclusion, which is elaborated in succeeding parts of this report, is that the transportation sector of the Uganda economy has been so undermined by eight years of neglect capped by war damage in April and May, that it is incapable, without massive infusions of maintenance equipment, spare parts, workshop facilities, vehicles and railway rolling stock, of underpinning the national economic reconstruction that is to be undertaken. The vehicle fleet of buses and lorries has badly deteriorated as a result of lack of spare parts and poor road maintenance. The private sector has been better able to keep its fleet moving because of the availability of magendo or black-market parts, access to which is officially denied the publicly owned corporations; but even the private fleet has aged rapidly over the period and was seriously depleted by war damage.

4. The breakup of most components of the East African Community during the mid-1970s affected railway activities in Uganda especially severely. Uganda Railways Corporation (URC), which was created in July 1977, has suffered a rapid erosion of traffic, and most particularly has not been able to accommodate the major share of import, export and transit traffic which rail customarily carried in Uganda, even though the total amount of this traffic itself diminished over the period. As a result of the lowered capacity of the railway, an increased transportation burden was placed on the lorry fleet. Because of the deterioration of this fleet, Kenyan lorries, hired at heavy foreign-exchange costs, had to be used to carry goods traditionally moved by rail, a situation that continues.

5. Passenger transportation services have been equally affected by the years of neglect. At the moment, on all up-country roads over which we travelled, people are being carried in the backs of unlicensed, open, 10-ton lorries, at rates up to 20 and 30 times the officially posted fees schedule for licensed passenger-carrying vehicles. People wait days for transportation, even to and from major centres. To some extent, the crisis in passenger transportation is the result of war damage, but it has arisen more fundamentally from the growing inability, over the years, of the licensed bus fleet to handle even a stable level of demand. Several up-country bus depots we visited still had available their schedule of routes served in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Where 20 or 30 buses had been available then at each depot to serve 20 or more licensed routes, there would have been in late 1978 only one bus serving only one of these routes; and typically that bus would have been stolen or damaged during the 1979 war. To make the situation even worse, few bicycles or motorcycles were imported during the military regime, so that one sees on the Uganda roads only a fraction of the customary number of these machines.

6. The reconstruction period projects given highest priority in our report help define a development strategy with several distinct features. Rail, according to this strategy, should recapture the long-distance traffic lost during the 1970s to road

¹These reports are filed with the other reports received by the Commonwealth Team.

transport - an especially important objective to achieve in the face of rising oil prices; the development of an enlarged capacity to service vehicles and to maintain and repair roads is emphasised; special attention is paid to the reduction of transportation constraints in the export sector; and the relative importance of buses and bicycles for transporting people is to be returned to earlier levels.

7. Although our focus is on the physical reconstruction of the transportation sector, we regard the financial reconstruction, especially of publicly owned corporations, as critical and complementary to the physical rehabilitation of the sector. These corporations - the bus companies, transport companies and URC - have not been able to generate sufficient revenue to meet normal operating expenses. As a result, current revenue (supplemented often by loans or asset sales) has been used to service only the wages bill and to pay for essential items such as fuel. Maintenance and repair has suffered, equipment expansion has not taken place, and often very large short-term liabilities have been allowed to accumulate. These conditions are common to public corporations beyond the transportation sector, and call for the high priority development of a credit programme during the reconstruction period, a need which is elaborated in the sector report on banking and currency.

8. In the papers that follow, we discuss transportation problems in greater detail, beginning with URC, followed by the road network, road transport and civil aviation. Each of these papers ends with a summary table or statement of high priority reconstruction.