

Politics – A Catalyst or Menace

Whether you like politics or not, you cannot help but feel its impact on our motherland. In Africa, politics plays a vital role in what we dress, where we school, what we eat, where you live, you name it. Our transport sector often under the public sector, is no exemption.

The big question is, are politicians considered as a resource to help catalyze the development of our transport routes or are they a major hindrance? Let's discuss.

Let's take a case study of Kenya, a country that has "enjoyed" five different presidents with different regimes. How has those regimes influenced the country's transport system since her independence in 1963? With the steady rise in urbanization in the recent years, the government has come up with several projects to try and ease some of the transport challenges in the country.

Some of the mega projects include; construction of the Thika super highway in 2012 (Ksh. 46.5 billion), construction of the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway, 2017 (Ksh. 4.6 billion), rehabilitation of the Mombasa port and recently, the Nairobi Express way, 2022 (Ksh 72 billion).

The Thika superhighway has in particular gained the interest of many lately as the current government now proposes to introduce toll stations on the road. Lest we forget, the previous regime tried to introduce a bus rapid transit on the road but the project has stalled to date. Who is to blame? Is it that the forest has changed but the monkeys still the same? Old projects stalling, new projects being launched. All in the name of making the Nation "better."

All these projects were under a public private partnership (PPP). Was the money allocated effectively used? The Jomo Kenyatta International Airport is now facing serious hiccups over conflicting interests between the government and the workers & the people of Kenya. Is the new proposal by the government to introduce PPP with Adani group the best move? Is the government truly interested in upgrading the airport? I highly doubt.

Politicians often use these transport projects to sell their manifestos, but do they really mean what they say? Lots of questions but no answers.

African politicians often side with what works for them at the moment rather than what the people truly desire. In this view, they stall projects and open new ones that will also likely be stalled when they either leave power or if the money allocated "disappears."

It's high time that we fix our leadership platform. Politicians should learn to listen and allow competent African professionals to help guide sound transport developments across the continent. We need visionary politicians who see Africa as the epitome of good (smart, safe, convenient, fast) transportation.

We need not to segregate politics from transportation planning, but to integrate both in a more holistic approach with one goal in mind, connecting the continent with highly modernized, safe and fast transport routes.

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