

Transport Infrastructural Development In Kenya Towards Enhanced Regional Integration: A Case Of Eastern Africa Region.

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Date: 2013-11

ABSTRACT

The structural gap in transport infrastructure is not only a serious handicap to growth and poverty reduction in Kenya but to the entire Eastern Africa region at large. Transport connectivity has a direct link to any country's competitiveness since it weighs on the cost of doing business and living. Kenya's former President Mwai Kibaki invested heavily in the development of infrastructure in order to encourage economic growth. President Uhuru Kenyatta's manifesto during the 2013 general elections campaign pledged to sustain the development of infrastructure to improve the country's competitiveness in the external environment.

Kenya has continuously played a leading role in the region due to its strategic location on the East African coast. For a long time it has been one of the most important outposts for the transcontinental trade between Europe, the Indian sub-continent, the Arab world and the Far East. It has also been the gateway for many countries in the hinterland and landlocked, with a relatively well developed transport infrastructure. Kenya is the transport hub of East Africa with its capital Nairobi as the base for an extensive regional trucking business, international airlines, and airfreight services, among other ventures. Greater regional integration will further strengthen its position as a hub, but with the rising regional trade volumes, inadequacy in infrastructure is a major impediment to greater integration.

The purpose of this study is to examine Kenya's transport infrastructural development through the assessment of strengths, opportunities, challenges and the proposed projects to either enhance the existing system or mitigate the infrastructural gap towards more connectivity, mobility and reduced costs. Upon realization of optimum levels of economic and social

connectivity as a result of an upgraded transport system in Kenya, greater Eastern Africa regional integration will be a reality.

In order to cut the region's over-reliance on Kenya's existing port of Mombasa, the recently commissioned Lamu Port-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) project, among other initiatives aims at intensifying trade and opening up northern Kenya and surroundings, a vast area whose enormous economic potential has not been fully tapped because of infrastructural challenges.