

Interview with Emmanuel Asaba Katarbarwa, City Engineer, City of Kigali

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Please briefly introduce yourself and your city

I am Eng. ASABA KATABARWA Emmanuel, the City Engineer of the City of Kigali.

The City of Kigali is the capital of Rwanda, situated in the centre of Rwanda. Rwanda is landlocked and bordered by Uganda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Tanzania. It has a pleasant climate, with an average day time temperature of around 27°C, despite being situated in the tropics. The City is well-known for its oval-shaped hills, which progressively converge and are separated from each other by large valleys.

Rwanda is 26,338 Km² in area and its population is approximately 12 million. The City of Kigali is 730 Km² in area and its population is approximately 1.65 million (Kigali Bus Project, 2020).

As far as mobility is concerned, the number of trips per inhabitant per day in Kigali is 1.8. Non-motorised transportation (NMT) represents 52% of total daily passenger trips while motorised transportation represents 48%. Public transport (buses) represents 17% of daily passenger trips, moto-taxis 16%, and personal cars 15%.

What are the main mobility challenges in your city?

The City of Kigali has invested in developing a good quality public transport system mainly on the infrastructure side. It has improved public transport infrastructure including formal, properly designed and located terminals, designated and well-located bus stops, and depot and workshop facilities as well as walking and cycling links to bus stops and stations. However, there is still room for improvement especially in NMT infrastructure.

Despite the efforts made to have a better public transport in the City of Kigali, there are still mobility challenges which include increase of traffic congestion that resulted into increased travel time. The traffic congestion has affected efficiency of public transport and resulted into long queues at bus stops and terminals as well as long in-vehicle travel times. In addition, vehicle emissions are still a threat to the health of Kigali residents as



well as climate change. Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of floods in the City of Kigali that damage transport infrastructure.

What mobility changes would you like to see in your city within the next 5 years?

The City of Kigali considers an efficient mobility as a key pre-requisite for sustainable development of a city. The City of Kigali aims at providing a transport system that will allow residents and visitors of the City of Kigali to meet their travel needs in an economical, safe, and energy-efficient manner without compromising both environmental and inclusive principles.

What do you think are the greatest obstacles in achieving the changes?

The main obstacles expected to achieve a sustainable transport in the City of Kigali, include:

- Budget constraints: transport infrastructure is costly, and budget constraints have been a major obstacle. It is there less likely that this challenge will have been fully addressed in the next five years.
 - Travel behaviour change: it's a difficult process to change the behaviour of commuters from travelling with conventional transport modes (fossil fuel private vehicles) to sustainable transport modes (electric vehicles, buses and NMT).
 - Reluctance of private actors to invest in transport: the number of private investors involved in transport sector, especially infrastructure development is still low and it's most likely that this trend will not change much in the next five year.
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What kind of electric mobility solutions do you consider to be most suitable for your city?

There is a broad range of electric vehicles that we want to see growing and expanding in Kigali. Electric buses have not been introduced so far, but we are working hard on identifying the technical and financial feasibility of electrifying public transport. This will be essential to further improve the quality of public transport services in Kigali, which has been a core target of our mobility policy over the last 10 years.

There are also other modes that should be electrified, and where the transition has already started: we have for instance a couple of companies providing electric motorcycles taxis. The Government of Rwanda has approved a number of incentives to accelerate e-mobility uptake. A pilot of shared electric cars is also running. But this does not stop here: we hope to see further innovative electric mobility solutions emerging and succeeding, for instance electric bicycles. They could be owned by people or available through a public shared system. They would keep people active and help them face the

many hills of Kigali. This is also well aligned with our policy to support NMT infrastructure, for instance cycle lanes.

What do you expect from the SOLUTIONS plus project?

As said, we see some pilots running, but with only a limited number of vehicles so far. For buses, we are still assessing how to address the technical and financial barriers to electrify them. So, there are significant parts where the SOLUTIONS plus project can support us: by procuring a number of electric buses, by raising awareness on them, but also, very importantly, by helping scale up the solutions. This can for instance be done by helping start-ups enter into contact with financiers, by obtaining further support from development partners. The project can also support in the identification of appropriate policies at national and city levels.

How do you ensure coordination between stakeholders to roll-out electric mobility?

This is actually one of the fundamentals that we are currently setting, as we are launching soon a technical coordination committee. This committee will handle the coordination of the many stakeholders and initiatives on electric mobility available in the city. This will be really important to structure dialogues between public institutions, agencies and regulators, and with private stakeholders.

Kigali's mobility policy has a strong focus on non-motorised transport. Can you tell us more how the City will further support cycling and improve urban spaces?

We have given strong signals to support active mobility in planning documents, as we intend to design a green city. For instance, we will develop a city-wide NMT network. We have started implementing cycle lanes in different parts of the city, and we will install racks where people can park their bicycles. If you walk around the City Hall, you will see the important work we are doing to improve the quality of the Imbuga City Walk that is the Car Free Zone: we are installing benches, kids' playground, kiosks and food courts, etc.

How has the Covid-pandemic impacted transport projects and policies?

The pandemic has been very challenging on many levels, including the transport sector. Bus companies have been experiencing economic losses because of the mandatory reduction in carrying capacity. We acknowledged this and decided to support them with a subsidy of Rwf29.3 billion (*nb. about 24 million EUR*), to ensure service quality and continuity.

We are hoping that the Government of Rwanda mass vaccination that is going on will soon help to normalise the situation and even help to restart car-free days, which have been so important to residents and visitors of Kigali.

Current works on the Imbuga/Car Free Zone, cycle lanes, high-quality public transport, cycling, walking and moto-taxi in Kigali

