

Kagame meets railway expert



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Isaka-Kigali line pilot study to be signed on April 27

President Paul Kagame yesterday held talks with a delegation from the United States-based BNSF Railway Corporation, in a bid to expedite the construction of the railway connecting Rwanda to other regional countries. According to the BNSF Assistant Vice-President (Service Design and Performance), John Orrison, the discussions revolved around kick-starting the railway line that will link Kigali to Tanzania's dry port of Isaka.

"We held talks with the President (Kagame) about ways in which the government can be helpful in speeding up the processes involved in the pre-construction of the railway line," Orrison told journalists shortly after the meeting at Village Urugwiro.

Orrison is a member of a body of Americans helping Rwanda in various backbone sectors such as infrastructure, transport, water and sanitation, and also a member of the Friends for Rwanda. He noted that the team was in the country to provide expertise in the process of starting the railway project.

"I briefed the President on various ways and areas in which we can give a helping hand in terms of providing expertise and technical support, among others, in the smooth running of the venture, including preparatory stages," said the American railways expert.

Orrison added that they had also approached authorities in the Tanzania Ports Authority and Railways Corporation, bodies charged with overseeing the railways sector in the vast East African country.

Flanked by team mates Dennis Voisard and James Carter, Orrison explained that the Tanzanian government has expressed interest in the proposed Isaka-Kigali railway venture and that Rwanda needed to brace the strategies aimed at facilitating the construction of the transport line.

Citing the 1913 and 1984 railway master plans designed for the Rwandan government by Germans and Australian railway experts respectively, he said that the government had underlying opportunities to resurrect them. The master plans were later abandoned without blueprints facilitating the implementation plans.

"Plans are there to guide the developers in the upcoming railway project. It is upon the government to make sure that all these are employed

in creating a railway network linking Kigali to the rest of the region in a bid to ease transport of goods,” Orrison said.

Accompanying the delegation, the Minister for Infrastructure, Stanislaus Kamanzi, said John Orrison’s initiatives are very instrumental, supportive and timely.

He said the technical expertise extended to Rwanda in the initial stages prior to the study of the railway venture has facilitated a flawless deal of negotiations amongst partners, hence limiting hitches.

Kamanzi also disclosed that the government has selected DE, a Germany consultancy firm, to undertake the pilot work of the railway line, which is designed to stretch between Tanzania to Kigali and later on roll out to other neighbouring countries like Uganda.

“We will be signing an agreement with the German company on Friday (April 27),” the minister said. He added that details of the total funds to be invested and the time frame that will be involved in the construction of the railway line would be produced after the pilot work.

Khan-owned Meridiana Airlines are battling to take over Rwandair Express in the wake of the government’s plan to privatise the company. The two companies are sending delegates to Kigali to establish government conditions on the joint venture ahead of the bidding date.

Minister Kamanzi said the government is more interested in a company that will make a complete turn-around in the company’s services and competence, while at the same time valuing the government’s opinion in the venture.

He said it will be more advantageous if the government manages to secure the majority shares in the bid to liberalise the airline.

BY ROBERT MUKOMBOZI

PICTURED: President Kagame shakes hands with John Orrison when they met at Village Urugwiro yesterday. (Photo/PPU)