

## EAST AFRICAN RAILWAY DEVELOPMENTS: 1962-1963

The years 1962 and 1963 witnessed substantial changes in the railway system of East Africa. This note aims only to record these. In Uganda, the branch line from Tororo to Soroti was extended northwards, reaching Lira in July 1962 and Gulu in February, 1963. Construction was greatly assisted by the ease of the country traversed, much of the line being laid along a low watershed, and also by the availability of track from the Tanga Line which has been relaid with heavier material. These two factors contributed to the low cost of £1.4 million for the 137-mile line. The extension was built to replace the Lake Kyoga and Nile steamer service, which was the only means by which E.A.R. & H. served Lango and Acholi in the past. The lake boats were nearing the end of their useful life, and water transport was proving increasingly unsatisfactory for the movement of goods to and from northern Uganda. The Lake Kyoga service was to have been withdrawn in 1963, but in fact flooding of the ports brought it to a premature end the year before.

Flooding also put the Lake Albert service out of action, and since this, like that on Lake Kyoga, had long been running at a loss, it was decided that it too could be replaced by rail transport. The railway has therefore been extended from Gulu to the east bank of the Albert Nile opposite Pakwach, and this section was opened early in 1964. Pakwach East now forms the railhead for West Nile and it is hoped that it will serve part of Congo. The steamer service on the Albert Nile has also been withdrawn, and has been replaced by a road service from Pakwach to Arua and Rhino Camp.

The Uganda Government is anxious to have a bridge constructed at Pakwach and the railway extended further into West Nile, though more for political than for economic reasons as the traffic prospects for such an extension are poor. The building of the bridge depends on whether funds can be obtained from any external source. There is no doubt that the railway to the north, whether or not it is taken beyond Pakwach, will provide a more convenient transport route for northern Uganda than the former E.A.R. & H. services. This applies especially to West Nile, for which the former route required four trans-shipments before the main line was joined. It is important to note, however, that charges via the new route will in general be no lower than via the old, and in view of the experience on the Western Uganda Extension it would be unwise to expect the line to have any startling effects upon the area it serves.

In Tanganyika also there was both closure and new construction during this period, but in this case they took place in different areas. The Southern Province Railway, built in 1949 in connection with the ill-fated Groundnut Scheme, was closed in June, 1962. It was often claimed that this scheme had at least left Tanganyika with certain assets, one of which was a railway which would assist economic development in one of the poorest regions of the country. Unfortunately, the line proved to be a severe liability rather than an asset, for the anticipated development did not take place, while road transport offered strong competition for

the existing traffic. In 1961 the total revenue amounted to only £290,113, and with no prospect of any improvement in sight the line had to be closed down.

At the same time construction was in progress on a railway linking Mayusi on the Tanga Line with Ruvo on the Tanganyika Central Line, and this was opened in August, 1963. It was built primarily to provide a through connection between all parts of the East African railway system, one particular benefit being the possibility of moving rolling stock between sections which have peaks of traffic at different times of year. Work was also in progress in 1963 on an extension of the Kilosa - Mikumi branch a further 24 miles to Kidatu. This will bring the railway closer to the Kilombero Valley, where developments are taking place which are described elsewhere in the Review. More significance is generally attached to this line, however, as a further step in the extension of rail facilities towards the Southern Highlands and possibly beyond. Some years ago a detailed survey for a rail link from Tanganyika to Northern Rhodesia was undertaken, and although the economic case for such a long and costly new railway does not seem strong, the granting of independence to Northern Rhodesia and the uncertain political relationships between that country and those to the south, have stimulated renewed interest in the scheme.

In Kenya no comparable changes have been taking place, and the proposals for new branch lines to Kisii, Embu and Meru have all been shelved because of inadequate traffic prospects. The only future plan that is definite concerns all three countries, for although all are now linked by the new line in Tanganyika, E.A.R. & H. propose to tie them even more closely together by the establishment of a train ferry service on Lake Victoria. Two vessels have been ordered, and should be operating between Kisumu, Jinja, Mwanza and Musoma by 1965. It is clear therefore that the Railway Administration is playing its full part in providing the material foundations for federation in East Africa.

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