

THE PROPOSED TANZANIA — ZAMBIA RAILWAY

Amongst several recent railway developments in East Africa the proposal to link the Copperbelt of Zambia with the Central Tanzania line has aroused widespread interest and controversy. A southward spur from the central line from Kilosa reached Mikumi in 1962 and will reach Kidatu in 1965; the immediate purpose of this branch line is to facilitate the agricultural development of the fertile Kilombero Valley, where sugar cultivation has been particularly successful with Government help. This line may in due course be continued as far as Makumbako. The wider interest of the line, however, lies in the possibility of a rail link with Zambia, a proposal that has recurred at intervals since the days of Cecil Rhodes' dream of a Cape to Cairo railway, and now seems much closer to

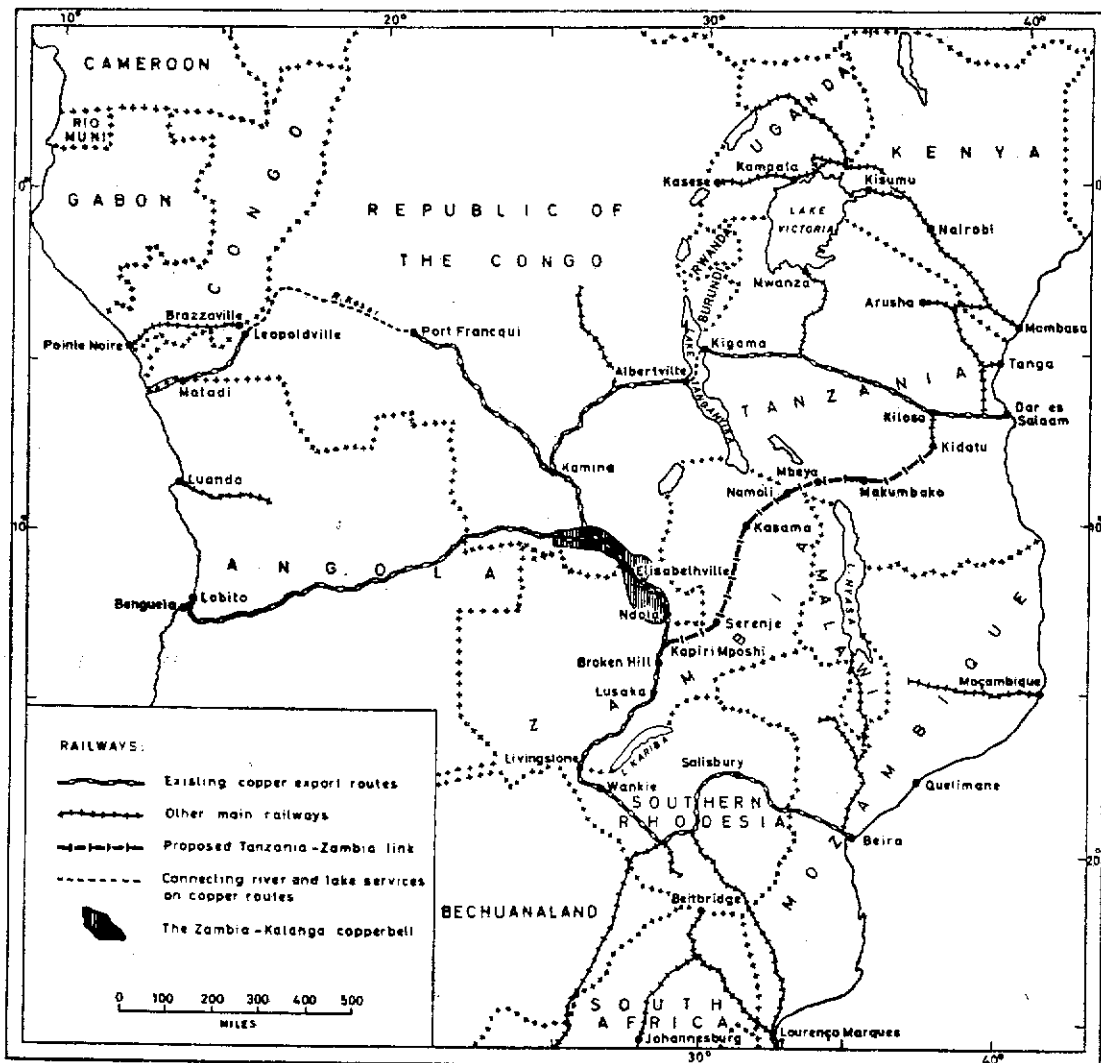


Figure 1. *The proposed Tanzania-Zambia rail link in relation to the principal railways of East and Central Africa.*

realisation than ever before. The irony of the situation is that a Tanzania-Zambia rail link would today be a means of loosening ties between eastern and southern Africa, rather than a means of welding together the countries of High Africa as was once conceived. One of the main arguments put forward in support of this railway, which could not hope to pay its way for many years, is that its completion would considerably lessen the dependence of Zambia upon rail outlets through Southern Rhodesia and Katanga to seaports in Mozambique and Angola. Against this view, it may be argued that by the time the link railway could be completed, in five or seven years' time, the political circumstances of both Southern Rhodesia and the Portuguese territories may have changed. It is contended by those in favour of the link that its presence would have a developmental effect upon the underdeveloped parts of north-eastern Zambia and southern Tanzania through which it would pass. In a limited sense this may be so, since there are potential agricultural resources in both areas which need better transport facilities. There is not likely, however, to be a ready market for the meagre mineral resources known to exist in the area (including some coal and iron in Tanzania), and, as experience has shown, both elsewhere in Tanzania and in Uganda, rail extensions do not stimulate economic development without considerable investment in other spheres. The economic case for the construction of the link rests firmly on the prospect of mineral exports from the copperbelt to Dar es Salaam, since other through traffic in either direction would not be considerable apart perhaps from petroleum imports into Zambia. In order to pay its way, the line would have to take a considerable proportion of Zambia's increasing copper exports which now go chiefly via Beira. There are however, strong political reasons for constructing a line of dubious economic value, both in terms of Zambia's internal problems of creating employment for unskilled labour and of assisting the development of backward parts of the country, and in terms of her strongly northward-looking political orientation which contrasts with her southward economic links. The line is likely to cost well over £50 millions, and such a sum could only be found with the aid of substantial external grants or loans. Whether such funds are likely to be forthcoming for a project of such doubtful economic value is a very open question, especially in view of the fact that the World Bank has recently expressed itself against the project.

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