

FOR THE HATE  
OF TRAFFIC



Nairobi CBD, 1960

## Case Study of Nairobi City, Kenya

**In memory of our once upon a time less populous and less polluted urban areas.....**

Take me back to the colonial era, to the times when people would plan to reach their destinations without having to calculate the time they'll spend in traffic, to the times when things moved slow yet fast.

All factors held constant, commuting in a bus today during peak hours, you'll spend almost the same time as your great grand father used to spend riding a bicycle to work, over the same distance.

According to NaMATA ( Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority), the population of Nairobi City stands at 7.5 million (day population) and 4.3 million (night population) with an estimated growth rate of 5% per annum.

This heavy weekly commuter trips are to a small geographical area of approximately 703 km<sup>2</sup> and the population density increases as you get closer to the City's Central Business District.

As the population is expected to grow, it comes with significant negative effects on the city's traffic. Let's break it down to pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The Nairobi CBD, especially downtown, is the epitome of traffic chaos. From no-go frontage zones full of hawkers, to walkways turned bus stations & parking, to roadways turned pedestrian walkways, you can't walk more than two steps before you collide with a stranger. You get all kinds of human activities. Couples walking slow holding hands, hawkers chasing after vehicles, business people walking fast to meetings, street boys staring on, school kids running late, and the most dominant feature during peak hours, long queues of Nairobians waiting for public transport.



Ronald Ngala Street, Nairobi, 2024

1800hrs



Amidst all these, you find yourself rubbing shoulders and changing routes all the time, all in an attempt to reach your destination.

**Vehicular traffic** is even worse. After a long day that is often not very fruitful because either you are underpaid, or your business is not booming, or your classes are getting tougher, you struggle to get to your unroadworthy public transit only to get stuck in traffic almost immediately. You end up taking a third of your time trying to get out of the CBD, then you get stuck again in the highway because of a traffic police officer who's attempting to "ease traffic" but in real sense, making it worse. The best-case scenario is when you are the boss, so you close work and drive your expensive SUV ride home. If only there were roads for private vehicles only, because you get bullied by every public vehicle close to you to give the "right of way".

You are left with no option but to let the vehicle pass, after all, the last thing you want is to get your SUV scratched by an old bus that has nothing to lose. You end up spending more time in traffic than the people in public vehicles.

When you live like this on repeat, you find yourself getting used to it, but should you?

### **What if I told you that we can have utopian urban areas where there are no traffic jams?**

You know, if we all just decide to stay at home, then there will be no traffic, problem solved, but that is not how it works.

There have been attempts to try and solve this traffic problem. Some key examples are; construction of the BRT along Thika Super Highway, construction of the Nairobi Express Way and construction of the green park terminals at Upper Hill. All these efforts have not helped because some have either stalled or were just for monetary gain of a few individuals.



Kenneth Matiba Road, Nairobi, 2023 1630hrs



Thika Super Highway, Nairobi, 2023, 0730hrs

It's high time we value the role of our transport planning professionals, do in depth research such as mobility simulations, and come up with solutions that can ease these traffic nightmares.

### **Quick Solutions**

Prioritizing and upgrading our public transport systems to be safe, convenient and comfortable and incorporating active transport for our last mile connectivity. We could also incorporate other modes of transport such as the light rail systems, or the tramways to operate within the CBD, but these are just suggestions, the real power lies with those in the government of the day and clearly, they don't seem to have any ideas at the moment.

**Author,**

**Sam Rholex.**