

By Samuel Baker Byansi;

Kigali currently employs three public companies that offer Transport services to citizens on a daily basis but city passengers claim lack of development in their activities as they still delay on the taxi-stage or queues waiting for the buses especially during the rush-hours.

To be much attentive and assess the issue, we approached various passengers in Kigali where the companies have headquarters and they said they are not given adequate services in public transport.

Not only the long queues, they say that the free internet connection they were promised since 2015 as part of the broad Smart Kigali Initiative has failed.

Jean de Dieu Hakizimana, a passenger who adequately travels from Kimironko to Kigali Town for his daily activities said that he uses the internet but he has not yet seen this facility in the buses.

“I use the internet quite often when I am in the bus, I have not yet found it since they introduced the initiative. Only one transport company ‘Ritco’ tries to offer this free internet service, which is also slow. There is a need for improvement because passengers need to interact with their friends and families or business partners while in the buses.” He said.

Investigation revealed that passengers using public transport buses within the capital Kigali have been fleeced billions of francs worth of internet they pay for but cannot connect to and doesn’t exist in these buses.

Emima Uwineza, 22, is also a citizen of Remera sector in Gasabo district. She said she doesn’t care about this free internet because she has not yet seen it in the bus.

“I can’t spend a single moment thinking of this free internet because I did not see it since it was said to be introduced in the public buses five years ago, I buy and use my internet bundles.” Uwineza noted.

Commuters said they did not access the internet for five years in over 400 buses owned by three transport companies yet a mandatory Rwf10 for internet is deducted from every passenger whether they use it or not.

In 2015, under the new innovation with Tap&Go cards, all three bus agencies were

required to be fitted with WiFi that passengers would connect to with their smartphones and laptops or any other gadgets that require the internet as they enjoy their ride.

However, this project flopped after the government stopped the then service provider after series of complaints from people who experienced years of poor service.

AC Group statistics indicate they started with a deal of connecting 450 buses by fitting them with routers that would ensure the sharing of the internet within the buses.

In 2018, the cost of internet on each bus was between Rwf150,000 and Rwf200,000 but operators were not happy by the cost.

Passengers kept crying foul over cases of inconsistency, and illegal high costs of internet in the buses since the initiative was launched.

Besides, they claim the loss of money they used to pay as every transport fare included Rwf10 deducted from total journey fare for internet.

This price was set by both Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) and AC Group company that operates the Tap&Go cards.

Statistics show that among 300,000 daily connections, the AC Group fetches Rwf3 million daily from passengers in about 450 buses, making Rwf90 million monthly and Rwf1.08 billion per year.

This means that bus commuters in Kigali city lose over Rwf1billion annually over internet which is not provided.

In August 2018, Patrick Buchana the CEO AC Group told a local press that the internet was working at 85%.

Long queues slow down development

Commenting on the long queues in main public transport bus stations, passenger Hakizimana said that citizen's development is backward as they sometimes delay to reach their work places or return home to plan for further activities that contribute to the national development as well.

“The queues are a problem, you know the curfew hours also raise other problems and when you find many people on the lines in bus stops you risk to lose many other benefits as you are losing time; and ‘Time is Money’.” Hakizimana added.

Claudette Uwera, 26, is a young lady from Kimoronko Sector, Gasabo district. She told this medium that long queues have become a routine and worse when going to town and returning.

“I am a trader in Kigali Town and I use public buses every morning and evening. I always find the queue in the morning and evening, this is a routine and we complain a lot but nothing has changed.”

Call for more buses

Maurice Kaberuka, 37, is a citizen from Gitega sector in Nyarugenge district. He said that the government should allow more investors to bring more transport companies to compete with current ones in order to tackle the queues that delay commuters.

“The buses are not enough while passengers are many and keep increasing. The government needs to look into this scenario and allow more investors to bring the buses on roads in order to complement current transport companies.” He said.

For a couple of years, city commuters used to wait in long queues during peak hours and public transporters struggled to live up to their contractual obligation of providing efficient and timely services.

In October 2019, the Rwanda Utility and Regulation Authority (RURA) invited new bids from interested operators in order to address the concerns of the members of the public.

This move came after the expiry of the contracts signed by three public transport companies that first won the tender back in 2013.

In the same year, the city public transport needed about 200 more buses to cater for the surging urban population and still the problem remains unsolved as no other bus operators are in the sector.

There are nearly 500 public transport buses in the city owned by Rwanda Federation of Transport Cooperatives (RFTC), Kigali Bus Services and Royal Express.

Both lack of Internet among the Kigali public transport buses and long queues at the bus stations involve negative impacts to their socio-economic development.

Some of commuters ask themselves if anyone is responsible for helping them to recover these billions of francs they lost over the ghost internet.

“We do not know where this money has gone and who is controlling it, it would have been used for other development activities which are known.” Said James Murindabigwi, a citizen from Gatenga sector, Kicukiro district.

Statistics show that the city has an estimated 200,000 commuters daily. These ones still need to spend between 30 minutes and an hour waiting for the bus.