



**Keynote Address by His Excellency, Dr.  
Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic  
of Sierra Leone, at the Launch of the Sierra  
Leone Integrated Resilient Urban Mobility  
Project. Miatta Conference Centre,  
Freetown, 28 November 2019**

Ministers of Government,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

## URBAN RESILIENCE & MOBILITY 2

Her Worship, The Mayor of the Municipality of Freetown

Our friends and partners especially our World Bank  
representatives

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow citizens,

Good afternoon.

Let me from the outset thank the World Bank through their  
representatives, (World Bank Executive Director-Africa Group 1  
– **Madam Anne Kabagambe**; and our World Bank Country  
Manager, **Gayle Martin**). They have been reliable partners in  
development who understand this government's commitment  
and vision. They and the World Bank are actively engaged in  
making the lives of Sierra Leoneans better. Thank you.

Prior to our accession to office, we recognised, as a party, that  
our Freetown was not the Freetown that we wanted. It was not  
the Freetown that was safe, clean, resilient, and liveable. It  
was not the Freetown we imagined would be conducive for  
visitors, friends, and citizens to travel, access services, explore  
economic opportunity, immerse themselves in the helpless

gorgeousness of chaos and beauty, and do good business that creates jobs and enhances national development.

Commuting in Freetown has remained unsafe and chaotic especially at peak hours. Traffic congestion along key arterial roads and within the central business district is grindingly slow.

Here is what one would see on a typical congested street of Freetown: used second hand cars used as taxis and trucks that are not road-worthy; kekeh riders and taxi drivers who use the roads without much regard to traffic ordinances; Okadas that bob and weave dangerously through with two or more passengers balanced precariously on a single seat; risky road-user behaviour from commuters who walk among cars without regard to their own safety; and, poor to deadly driving skills on display with drivers who refuse to yield the right of way or who just park or stop anywhere they wish to drop and pick up passengers or just to argue endlessly among themselves while holding up traffic.

That is our Freetown.

**I need not say that a congested city is not good for citizens, not good for tourism, not good for business, and not safe for our women and children.**

I need not emphasize that **traffic congestion diminishes productivity, increases the cost of commuting through increased fuel and operating costs, and has environmental and health implications.** There is a heavy direct and indirect cost to congestion. Alongside our interventions being announced today, it may be invaluable for our government and our development partners to calculate the real monetary value of the cost of Freetown's congestion. **That may help us come to terms with its multiple realities and guide strategy and policy.**

In our city, Freetown, **new road space is almost impossible to come by especially along heavy commuting corridors because of our city's topography and dense population settlements.** Besides, there is intense competition for limited government funds between financing our core human capital development programmes and money to invest in new road infrastructure.

**Hitherto, there had been no coherence of policy or thinking about urban congestion and commuting and the potential of multimodal transportation had yet to be unlocked.**

**So in our party's manifesto, we determined that we could address the current traffic congestion in Freetown** “not only by the construction of new roads” and the widening of others (supplemented with pedestrian flyovers at the busiest urban intersections), “but also by employing proven and practical traffic engineering mitigation measures such as the use of actuated traffic light signals, directional traffic flows, channelization, the use of pedestrian only roadways, commercial vehicles only-roadway, peak and off-peak traffic directional flows, and effective traffic enforcement” among others.

**Our party also determined that by reviewing the legal and regulatory mandates of multiple agencies in the sector, enforcing traffic regulations, employing multiple modes of transportation within Freetown,** providing mass-transit facilities including markets, and increasing public

bus services, we would tackle the urban blight of traffic congestion.

**To our mind, one of the pathways (among others) to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 11 – "Making cities sustainable" is to invest in public transportation** in a bid to build sustainable and resilient cities.

**To grapple with the complexity of the task at hand, we have determined that we should work with development partners and the private sector in designing an integrated, scaled, measurable, accountable, and sustainable pilot mobility plan**

As a government committed to inclusive development and to protecting women and girls from gender-based and sexual violence, **a safe commute matters through the entire span of the daily movement of women and girls.** A safe commute means that women and girls can safely participate in the full span of economic and social activities and take advantage of educational and other opportunities. A predictable

commuter schedule, identifiable, safe, and well-lit bus and other transportation stops and transit centres (market and transit transport terminals with dedicated safe spaces for women) are therefore important.

**So to my mind, if we cannot immediately build new roads but we must facilitate the movement of the same estimated 1 million plus people at peak times in various parts of Freetown, we must find innovative ways of moving those same numbers on our existing roads.**

Naturally, moving more people along the same small amount of road space is the objective. We must also make that movement safe, affordable, and it should reduce congestion. 2 Okadas and 2 kekehs occupy about the same road space but pose more road safety hazard for commuters and carry far fewer passengers than a 50 seater bus.

**We also think that we can strengthen the resilience of our commuter thoroughfares and major roads** during adverse climate conditions by improving drainage capacity and slope stability.

**We must also smoothen out policy and legal creases and overlaps among the mandates of existing agencies** within the sector that have often caused uncertainty and inaction. We must be able to facilitate multi-agency and multi-sectoral coordination in dealing with the problem of urban congestion.

**Additionally, we must improve overall governance of the sector by not only enhancing personnel capacity through staff training, the provision of equipment, but by thoughtfully laying out clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).**

**Those SOPs will guide predictability around the scheduling, movement, and timeliness of the bus services and how the buses are operated and maintained.**

**We also intend to harness the power of technology to inform commuters** in real time on traffic flow and bus schedules so they can plan and manage their commute. They can also use technology to purchase cashless passes (**and hence improve accountability and eliminate the pilfering of bus fares**). As I have said before, when one

eliminates contact between humans and cash, one dramatically reduces the likelihood of thieving.

**I also anticipate that in these days of big data analytics, real-time data will be collected and interpreted along the entirety of the Pilot Bus Improvement Corridor.** That data, I would imagine, could be used to manage scheduling, route planning, ridership, safety, information, and for periodically reviewing SOPs.

**It is also not impossible for us in Sierra Leone to build our own home-grown intelligent transportation system that will** help us manage traffic, improve road safety, mitigate congestion, and provide more access to climate-friendly modes of commuting in our cities.

**We must also ensure that our transportation strategy and policies keep step with best practices and cutting-edge research in the areas of urban transportation management.** I anticipate that the proposed twinning between the Ministry and its agencies with Fourah Bay College and the Transport Centre of Excellence in Kumasi, as

mentioned earlier on, will enhance the transfer of expertise and the augment institutional capacity.

**I also anticipate that with this pilot phase, a refined and well-honed policy on urban congestion and commuting will be replicated along other identified congested corridors in Freetown.**

**With regard to funding, the public-private partnership for funding and operating this pilot gives the private sector a vested interest in operating and managing the assets (the buses).** They (the private sector) will ensure the delivery of consistent and first class customer service and they will be assured of a predictable revenue stream. Government will provide maintenance and overall governance and thus ease congestion and thus reap the economic and social gains for inclusive national development. **This win-win relationship, I want to assume, should open up new possibilities and new ideas for procuring and financing kindred partnerships that will ease the pain of urban commuting.**

As I mentioned in opening, this scaled, measurable, accountable, and sustainable pilot mobility plan will open up

new possibilities for managing the perennial scourge of urban congestion in Freetown. **I am therefore pleased to associate with and register my unconditional commitment and support for this World Bank funded pilot.**

I thank you.