
PROPOSED 'SERENGETI' HIGHWAY

BACKGROUND

For a second time in recent years, serious concerns are being raised about a proposal to construct a road in northern Tanzania that would cut through the Serengeti, one of the most famous national parks on Earth. By cutting through the northern part of the Park, the proposed road would sever a critical corridor for the annual migration of hundreds of thousands of wildebeests and zebra, which has been rightly called one of the 'greatest spectacles on Earth.' AWF does not support this proposal and believes there are viable and perhaps more beneficial alternatives. AWF would like to respectfully offer the following points and alternative plan as our contribution to a possible solution to this dilemma.

AWF PERSPECTIVE – KEY POINTS

1. AWF does not support the proposal of a road linking Loliondo to Mugumu across the Serengeti (see Appendix A). This proposal is inconsistent with the Serengeti's status as a National Park and a World Heritage Site. It carries with it the likelihood of unacceptable environmental impacts on the wildlife and environment of the Serengeti ecosystem.
2. AWF fully appreciates and supports the need to balance economic development with good conservation planning. We support the right of every district in Tanzania to be effectively linked to the national road network, preferably with a tarmac road. AWF supports the construction of a tar road linking Wasso in Loliondo Division, Ngorongoro District, with Mto was Mbu, given proper analysis as per Tanzania law.
3. AWF also supports the need to link Mugumu, the capital of Serengeti District, to the national road network. Mugumu should be linked to the national and regional road network *westwards* towards Musoma and Lake Victoria, not eastwards across the Serengeti. By linking Mugumu westwards to the existing highway around Lake Victoria, citizens and business people would have access to Musoma, their regional capital, to Mwanza, the largest city in Western Tanzania, to the whole Lake Victoria zone including Western Kenya and Uganda, and ultimately, via a longer route, to Dar es Salaam and the rest of the country. This proposal is more in keeping with the development of the Lake zone and the principles of East African integration, and involves primarily the upgrading of existing roads. It also strengthens the governance and security of Mara Region.
4. AWF understands that ultimately there is a need to link the entire Lake Zone with Arusha and Moshi. We believe that this is best accomplished by improving the existing road that passes to the south of the entire Serengeti/Ngorongoro conservation complex. Although somewhat longer, this alignment of the road will have a positive impact on development of many districts and the lives of many more Tanzanians. An illustrative graphic showing what we believe to be the existing proposal and proposed alternatives is attached to this document (see Appendix B). Alternatives would require proper analysis and survey to determine the environmental, social and economic impact.

ADDITIONAL POINTS

5. Tanzania National Parks has ample experience with the negative impacts of putting a commercial highway through a National Park. Mikumi National Park was bisected by a tar highway linking Dar es Salaam with Lusaka, Zambia. The highway has had a very negative impact on conservation, security, driver safety and park revenues. Speeding vehicles often hit wild animals, resulting in injury and death to both people and animals and economic loss. Additionally, some tourists and unscrupulous tour operators deprive the park of revenue by driving through on the public road and not paying park fees.
6. An argument has been made that by creating the new road across northern Serengeti, impact on Ngorongoro and Serengeti are reduced because the road will only pass through the Park for a short distance (approximately 71 kilometers) as opposed to the much longer route now through Seronera. AWF rejects the logic of this argument. In fact, the narrowness of the northern Serengeti makes it a more sensitive 'choke point' or bottle neck through which the migration must pass in full muster. This likely has more impact than cars passing through the short grass plains where the migration is more diffuse.
7. The proposed road will degrade and *cheapen* one of Tanzania's greatest and most valuable national assets. Visitors come to the northern Serengeti for a pristine wilderness experience. This is meant to be a place where the rule of nature predominates and the footprint of human activities is hardly visible. A highway through northern Serengeti threatens to completely destroy the visitor experience, which is one of Tanzania's greatest competitive advantages over other countries. The impact of this road on the psychology of visitors and the perceptions of the value of Serengeti as a destination would be significant.
8. An argument has been made that some people in Mugumu 'prefer' the route east to Loliondo across the Serengeti instead of the route west. While we respect that this preference may exist, there are several mitigating points:
 - a. Having arguably the most famous National Park in the world comes with both benefits and responsibilities. Some inconvenience for a relatively small group of people is a reasonable price to pay.
 - b. We know of no evidence of any significant direct trade between Mugumu and Loliondo.
 - c. AWF believes that private vehicles should be allowed to pass through the park as a short cut, as long as they are traveling on murrum roads, pay park fees, and obey park rules and the speed limit. All commercial traffic, including lorries and buses, should be required to use one of the alternative routes around the Park.
9. Tanzania has been working closely with the other nations of East Africa to create a strong East African community with ties of friendship, commerce and easy travel between the member states. In looking at the alternatives available to the districts surrounding the Serengeti, it should be noted that many of them can and will benefit from the new East African Roads Network project that is being funded by the Governments of East African countries together with international donor agencies. Viewed in the context of East Africa districts, there are routes available both to the

north and the south of Serengeti ecosystem which aid the economic linkages of these areas without degrading the Serengeti.

10. Recent reports in the press have indicated that Tanzania National Parks, the agency responsible for the Serengeti, has now agreed to the road after many years of opposing it. TANAPA has been an outstanding custodian of Tanzania's national parks, and there is a strong, documented track record of TANAPA opposing paved roads in any of the national parks. Serengeti is the flagship of Tanzania's park system, and one of the most famous parks in the world. TANAPA support for this road would not be consistent with the character of this fine institution over many decades. AWF notes that the post of Director General of TANAPA is currently vacant.
11. AWF encourages any international funding agencies that might assist in building these roads to provide sufficient resources so that the option with the most beneficial social and economic impact, and the least negative impact on the environment and the values of Tanzania's critical tourism industry can be embraced. Using rough estimates, the proposal for the road through the Park and on to Musoma would require paving 571 kilometers of road. AWF supports paving a 425 kilometer subset of that route to Loliondo and Mugumu as a first phase of construction. Then, two alternative options south of the Park would involve paving 555 (phase IIa) and 301 (phase IIb) kilometers of road. These longer alignments would put the road closer to people and economic activities instead of being closer to wildlife.

SUMMARY

Recent press reports claim that a decision has been made by the Government of Tanzania to proceed with a road dissecting the northern Serengeti. While acknowledging the authority and sovereignty of Tanzania, AWF respectfully encourages the Government to reconsider this decision. In most countries, poor planning and lack of vision and foresight have meant that significant wildlife populations have been lost to the forces of modernization. AWF firmly believes that with good planning and a will to conserve Tanzania's natural heritage, alternatives can be found that will meet human needs and aspirations while saving some of the most precious wild areas on the continent. Tanzania, perhaps more than any other country in Africa, still has the opportunity to get it right. An alternative road plan can help achieve a modern economy without compromising the most significant wildlife migration remaining on Earth.

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