

THE STAR

CARGO HANDLING

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SGR freight hits new monthly record since inception

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Standard Gauge

Railway(SGR) freight services hit a new record in January buoyed by Kenya Railways' improvement in cargo evacuations from the Port of Mombasa.

Last month recorded the best performance since the first SGR Madaraka freight trip in January 2018), with 241 trains run from Mombasa delivering 24,256 TEUs (Twenty-Foot equivalent Unit)—the approximate unit of measure of a container, to both Nairobi and Naivasha Inland Container Depots.

Kenya Railways Corporation managing director Philip Mainga yesterday said the “remarkable performance” was due to the revival of majority of wagons earlier under maintenance repairs and internal conversion of additional conventional cargo wagons to load containerised cargo.

KRC, in collaboration with Kenya Ports Authority, KRA and other government agencies, will sustain these efforts to ensure seamless cargo delivery to destinations,” Mainga said.

Kenya Railways Corporation managing director Philip Mainga

“We have maintained a steady daily supply of above 400 wagons to the port, moving above 800 TEUs. Two additional double deck trains, each moving 152 TEUs per train, have been introduced to sustain daily loading needs”, said Mainga.

These efforts have seen the earlier containers backlog that by the beginning of January oscillated above 6,000 units, cleared to the current state of loading containers ex hook, loading direct from discharging vessels.

“ KRC, in collaboration with Kenya Ports Authority, KRA and other government agencies, will sustain these efforts to ensure seamless cargo delivery to destinations,” Mainga said.

A good performance translates to improved revenue generation from the multi-billion investment, whose government is indebted to the Chinese with loan repayment having commenced.

Meanwhile, KRC and KRA are banking on the Boma transit shed in Nairobi to promote SME cargo consolidators needs.

The Boma Line shed launched by President Uhuru Kenyatta last November was gazetted this month, paving way for its full operation.

It is expected to serve more than 7,500 small scale traders in Nairobi and its environs , making it easier to collect their goods.

Effective February 8, imported consolidated cargo destined for Nairobi is cleared at shed located at the Kenya Railways Nairobi headquarters.

“KRC’s Boma transit shade is fully operational and small scale traders’ cargo is being delivered directly without any delays,” Mainga noted yesterday.

To further enhance cargo handling and haulage, Africa Star Railway Operation Company (Afristar), the SGR operator, has introduced new service for bulk cargo conveyance, utilizing available special high sided types of wagons covered with tarpaulins.

An inaugural train of 46 wagons with bulk cargo has already arrived in Nairobi.

“These efforts will be sustained moving forward to ensure seamless evacuations of cargo from the port”, Mainga said.

The January record comes with improving international trade and cargo business, which recorded improvement in the third quarter of last year into this year.

Data from Afristar shows recovery in the third quarter (July-September) as volumes closed at 115,760 TEUs.

This is up from 100,284 TEUs hauled on the rail, from the Port of Mombasa to the Nairobi and Naivasha Inland Container Depots, between April and June (second quarter).

The volumes were 96,294 TEUs in quarter one (January-March) when global supply chain shrunk on effects of Covid-19 , with Kenya reporting its first case within the period.

As of November 30, Afristar had transported a total of 389,412 TEUs.

This included 8,466 TEUs of dangerous goods, 13,876 TEUs of grain and 96 TEUs of essential Covid-19 prevention materials such as disinfectants, ethyl and alcohol, the company said in its recent statistics.

The total number of SGR cargo trains between January and November were 4,521.

Average daily cargo trains increased to above eight from between five and seven in the first half of the year when Covid affected the economy, with disruption in the Chinese market (Kenya's biggest import source) leading to reduced imports mainly raw material and finished goods.