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Nigeria: FG Okays New Rail Design

By Daniel Idonor

Abuja — FEDERAL Executive Council (FEC) has approved a technical design for the reconstruction and revival of the Nigerian rail system beginning from Lagos ports to Kano.

Minister of Transport, Dr Abiye Sekibo, told reporters after the meeting presided over by President

Olusegun Obasanjo that the existing rail line, built 100 year ago, will be scrapped and replaced with a new 1435-millimeter gauge track.

Other specifications approved by the council include the breaking down of project into five segments with the first segment ending in Ibadan, while the second segment will end in Ilorin.

The third segment of the rail line will terminate in Minna while the fourth segment will end in Kano. The final segment is expected to run between Abuja and Kano.

The 1010-kilometer rail line will pass through Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ilorin, Minna, Abuja, Kaduna and Kano.

According to the minister, the track is being built to ensure at least 150km/h speed of trains for passenger coaches and 80km/h speed for goods coaches.

He said that in line with new rail security standards, the proposed track will run a more straight route, thereby cutting out diversions which were created in the past to avoid rocks and other natural elements.

The minister who came for the briefing with his Minister of State, Alhaji Habib Aliyu said the ministry has been directed to work out the cost implication of the three options outlined by the ministry.

The options include a single track line, another single track line with additional platforms to accommodate an additional line in future and a double track line.

According to him, the cost implications of the three options will make available data for government determination of which it would follow.

However, whatever option it adopts, the government is hoping to finance it through the Chinese soft loan of \$2.5 billion.

In his words: "Presently, only two rail lines (Lagos to Kano and Port Harcourt to Maiduguri) part of what is left of the rail line that was built 100 years ago are in operation in the country, just as it would be recalled that the Federal Ministry of Transport had in 2002 made a presentation to the FEC on a 25-year vision for the Nigeria railway that has undergone several studies, but unfortunately, not much practical work has been done until the present intervention.

"We will as much as possible follow the present right of way of the rail line. We should be able to run 36 trains per day either way from Lagos to Kano and back. 10.5 million tonnes of goods would be moved per annum on a single track and on a double track, 40 million tonnes of goods per annum. For multiplier effect, it would promote the new areas of diversification like the solid minerals mining, reduce amount of agricultural losses around the country, people would be able to know Nigeria better, there would be increased capacity-building amongst others", he added.

The funding plans for the hard trucks will be under the Public, Private Partnership (PPP) to be selected by the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE)

According to Sekibo: "We have no intention that the new railway system would be run by Government. There are new ways of managing trains. We are looking at Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the operation of the rail line."

"What the Federal Government is doing right now is a Design, Build and Maintain contract. We will get the best hands possible from anywhere in the world. Someone that has a track record in running the railway system. The new rail system would as much as possible follow the present right of way of the rail line". The minister said.

The council, also approved the contract for supply of water to the Tin Can Island ports in Lagos. The project will cost N183 million and is expected to conform with international convention on provision of water to visiting vessels.

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