



Proposed Serengeti Highway

Tanzanian position at World Heritage Convention meeting in June 2011

The Serengeti Highway as proposed in 2010 would have cut through nearly 55 km of the Serengeti National Park World Heritage Site, causing immense ecological and economic damage.

BirdLife International was pleased that at the June 2011 meeting of the World Heritage Convention (WHC) Standing Committee the Tanzanian Government clarified its position on the planned Serengeti road, explaining that this would be built in two sections, the section through the Serengeti National Park would not be paved, the ongoing Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) would be revised and submitted to the WHC, and that serious consideration was being given to a alternative southern route for the road outside the Serengeti¹.

Situation since June 2011

Almost two years have now passed since this statement but there has been little information nor evidence on the ground about progress other than the statement in the 2012 decision that the WHC:

*'Notes the commitment of the State Party to solicit funding for a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SEA) for the northern Tanzanian road and calls on donors to provide funding for this study as well as for the construction of a southern alignment, which will avoid Serengeti National Park'*²

We feel it is vital to have a more detailed update on what has happened since June 2011 on both the planned Serengeti road and the planning of the southern alternative. After the 2011 WHC meeting there were clear indications from donors (eg the World Bank and German Government³) that they were willing to finance a study on the southern alternative route, so we find the statement in the 2012 WHC decision calling for donors somewhat puzzling. Further there have been conflicting stories in the media about the status of proposed Serengeti airport and the Lake Natron soda exploration projects⁴. While both areas are outside the Serengeti WHS, any development there could clearly also affect the Serengeti WHS.

BirdLife's position: need for sustainable transport solutions

We recognise the need for Tanzania to upgrade its transport infrastructure, including the road network and to provide increased access for local people around the Serengeti National Park. However, to maintain the integrity of the Serengeti World Heritage Site (WHS), it must be kept free of commercial roads, but this can only happen when there are good alternatives.

¹ http://africaanswerman.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/NoSerHiway_letter_6-221.pdf

² <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2012/whc12-36com-19e.pdf>

³ http://www.bmz.de/de/presse/aktuelleMeldungen/2012/april/20120427_tansania/index.html

⁴ For example: Serengeti Airport <http://allafrica.com/stories/201208130281.html>, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Serengeti-airport--Tanzanian-govt-wins-the-day/-/2558/1622540/-/eamrnxz/-/index.html> and <http://allafrica.com/stories/201212210044.html>. Lake Natron <http://allafrica.com/stories/201211260119.html>, http://www.ooskanews.com/daily-water-briefing/tanzania-moves-forward-controversial-500-million-soda-ash-factory-lake-natron_2, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Six-firms-bid-for-Lake-Natron-soda-ash-plant/-/2558/1676146/-/5fc5o1z/-/index.html>.

Transport solutions must be sustainable and environmental issues should be properly taken into account in route decisions as is required by both Tanzanian and international law. We believe a solution is possible through strategic planning. **A Land Use Planning exercise supported by Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) with full public consultation should be carried out for Northern Tanzania to examine strategic options for meeting transport needs and for integrating these with environmental objectives (including biodiversity protection) and the needs of local people.** This should look at both transit and local traffic options together with associated infrastructure i.e route options including a Southern alternative road. The Serengeti National Park is a trans boundary resource and therefore all concerned stakeholders need to be involved in any decisions and actions.

We strongly believe that such a strategic study would identify suitable transport solutions that would be environmentally sustainable. The products, an SEA and Land Use Plan, would provide the framework for sustainable development in Northern Tanzania and provide the context in which individual projects are taken forward for more detailed planning and rigorous ESIA.

Role for the World Heritage Committee members

Despite the Tanzanian Minister's welcome statement at the 35th Session of the World Heritage Committee in Paris in June 2011, the situation remains concerning.

Hence, although the Serengeti case is not on the formal agenda this year, we would still urge World Heritage Committee members to raise the matter with the Tanzanian Government representatives, asking for an update on the case including:

- Confirmation that Tanzania has abandoned plans for upgrading the dirt track road across the Serengeti National Park (by gravelling or otherwise); and
- Progress on undertaking Land Use Plan/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) processes. These processes are meant to examine a range of potential alternative routes, which could meet the objectives of the proposed Serengeti Highway including providing an international transit corridor and better transport links for local communities without serious damage to the World Heritage Site.

Serengeti National Park – a site of global importance

The Serengeti National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Important Bird Area, supports one of the greatest migrations in the world involving 1.8 million wildebeest and other antelopes. The area is home to over 450 bird species including two unique to Tanzania ('endemic') and the globally threatened Karamoja Apalis. It is thought one third of Africa's population of Rueppell's Vulture uses the Serengeti ecosystem.

Serengeti: jewel in Tanzania's tourism crown

300,000 tourists visit the Serengeti every year and tourism is a major foreign exchange earner for Tanzania raising over US\$ 1 billion in 2009. Long-term, the domestic and international tourism industry is the fastest growing sector globally and Tanzania is well placed to capitalise upon this growth, with Serengeti as the jewel in its crown. It would be an economic as well as an environmental mistake to endanger the Serengeti.

Devastating impact

BirdLife International is concerned that a road across the Serengeti would negatively affect its biodiversity in a number of ways, but especially through increased road kills of large mammals and attendant

scavengers, including vultures, which are facing extreme pressure outside Protected Areas. It will also potentially increase the risk associated with poaching. The road would significantly affect the mammals that inhabit the park and is likely to disrupt the renowned wildebeest migration between Serengeti and Maasai Mara in Kenya leading to a collapse of the current population and most likely the end of the great migration. Furthermore, the proposed road will pass close to Lake Natron and could adversely affect the breeding of Lesser Flamingos. Lake Natron is by far their most important breeding site in the world.

The road can be predicted to alter the character and landscape of the entire Serengeti, with significant deterioration of its biodiversity. The local communities' livelihoods base could also be greatly and negatively impacted. The Serengeti would lose its world-class tourism potential and its status as the world's most famous national park. Globally, public perceptions would be very negative, eclipsing the current goodwill and admiration for the many conservation achievements of Tanzania.

Who is BirdLife International – experience from across the globe




BirdLife International is a global Partnership of conservation NGOs (121 NGOs in 119 countries – 24 in Africa), with around 13 million members and supporters worldwide. BirdLife’s work is built on a strong scientific foundation: we provide authoritative information on the status and conservation of bird species, and are the IUCN Red List Authority for birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is the UK partner in BirdLife International and has over one million members. RSPB has provided assistance to conservation in East Africa for the past 20 years.

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The Serengeti Roads

-  Existing non-public tourist access and through-road, central
-  Planned public through-road, north
-  Approximate alignment of alternative road

The wilderness areas are a critical habitat for endangered species like rhinos and wild dogs – the Serengeti Management Plan allows no commercial roads at all in these areas.

