

# UIC Teleconference: The Rise of Digitalisation in Rail Transport: Panorama on Some Experiences

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## Background

- Africa 's 90,000 km of railway lines mainly inherited from colonisation.
- This network, which is too fragmented and focused on transporting raw materials to ports, still needs to be extended and interconnected:
- The disparate technical configuration of Railway network across the continent poses a challenge requiring upgrade and harmonisation through new digital technologies;
- New networks being built across Africa embeds digital solutions to a certain degree;
- Some national governments have started a measure of tech upgrade and digitisation applications.

## Beyond Peculiarity of African Railways

- Covid-19 has compelled accelerated digitisation technologies within the rail sector ;
- Post - pandemic: Rail industry as a critical recovery sector will need advanced and unified technology;
- The new normal compels an embrace of technical advancement in the area of digital technologies.

## AUDA- NEPAD initiatives

As AU Development Agency-NEPAD has taken major steps in recent past to set tone for the introduction and acceleration of rail digitisation in Africa.

- **Permit to quote the words of our CEO**, Dr Ibrahim Mayaki on the urgency of rail digitisation in Africa: " The modernisation and extension of rail networks will not be possible without new digital technologies, a key element of “intelligent” transport. These technologies will help us achieve a key pillar of our regional integration, including the African Integrated High Speed Railway Network is one of the flagship projects of the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

"We strongly support digitalisation in rail via its various projects and vision. This is the way to respond to the need for development of mobility for both passengers and freight on the African continent."

- **In pursuance of the above commitment** ,some of the steps being taken broadly include the following :
  - Forging of partnership with UIC to drive the digitisation efforts;
  - Mobilisation and sensitization of national railway and transport authorities; and
  - Engagement of regional railway groups on digitisation advocacy.

## AUDA- NEPAD initiatives

### ▪ The first African Digital Rail Summit

- AUDA-NEPAD and the International Union of Railways (IUC) from 25 to 27 February, convened the first African Digital Rail Summit, in Cape Town, South Africa with the theme “Africa: The continent of the digital future for rail”

- The initiative was part of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, of which the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network is one of the flagship projects.

-This high-level meeting Summit developed African vision of digital rail, as part of the vision of rail in Africa by 2040, defined in 2014 in Malabo by focussing the following areas namely:

- Encourage the design and development of a real African digital rail strategy’;

-Creation of a digital platform ‘dedicated to exchanges and sharing for the African Rail companies with UIC Africa Region and the Union of African Railways’;

-The implementation of new digital services based on real-time interactions with customers; and

- The need to align the deployment of optic fibre cable for a high-speed telecommunications network with ‘the realisation of the rail network’.

## Post-Summit Action Plans

- The summit having forged a common platform between UIC and Africa through AUDA-NEPAD, implementation of the communique was a top priority among other steps designed to advance the digitisation agenda.

Going forward ,the following significant developments impacts on all stakeholders:

- The COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted most post summit action plan slowing down the making of action plans;
- AUDA-NEPAD had organised two webinars in which the issue of commitment to digitisation was reaffirmed ;  
and
- As noted in the beginning, the fallout of the pandemic compels acceleration of actions towards digitisation.

## Conclusions

AIUDA-NEPAD is committed to working with UIC to drive the digitisation agenda for African railways;

- AUDA-NEPAD is committed to working with African regional blocs to speed up rail tech application and integration;

-AUDA- NEPAD is committed to mobilising national ministries of transport in Africa on the urgency and importance of rail digitisation;

-AUDA- NEPAD calls for renewed engagement with UIC to draw an action plan going forward.