



# NEW PATRIOTIC PARTY

## POLICY SECRETARIAT

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### STATEMENT BY THE NEW PATRIOTIC PARTY TRANSPORT SECTOR COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT'S ACQUISITION OF TWO (2) DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES AND TWENTY (20) FREIGHT WAGONS

The Minority Transport Policy Committee welcomes the announcement by the Government of Ghana regarding the acquisition of two (2) locomotives and twenty (20) freight wagons intended to support freight operations within Ghana's railway sector.

Any investment aimed at reviving rail transport, improving freight mobility, and reducing pressure on the nation's road network is a step in the right direction and deserves commendation. Every effort to restore operational capacity should be encouraged.

However, while the government has understandably highlighted the arrival of the rolling stock, it has failed to provide Ghanaians with important details necessary for an objective assessment of the acquisition.

#### **Nature and Age of the Locomotives**

Credible information available to the Minority Caucus indicates that the new locomotives are nothing but toys fit for the museum. Information indicates that the locomotives are refurbished British Rail Class 56 diesel-electric locomotives originally manufactured in the United Kingdom between 1976 and 1983 and last operated by Colas Rail. These class of locomotives manufactured were 135 in total, but as we speak, less than 15 continue to remain in service with considerably less capacity and efficiency.

While refurbished locomotives can still provide useful service life when properly maintained, Ghanaians deserve full transparency regarding the age, operational history, refurbishment scope, expected remaining service life, and total lifecycle costs associated with these assets.

The British Rail Class 56 was designed primarily for heavy freight haulage and earned a reputation as a powerful and robust locomotive capable of moving substantial loads. However, these locomotives were built more than four decades ago, and despite refurbishment, they remain products of an earlier generation of railway technology. Their mechanical systems are considerably older than those found in modern freight locomotives, they generally require more intensive maintenance interventions, and their operating costs are typically higher when compared to contemporary locomotive designs that benefit from advances in efficiency, diagnostics, and reliability.

The critical question is therefore not simply whether locomotives have arrived, but whether they represent the most sustainable and cost-effective solution for Ghana's railway sector over the long term.

## **Maintenance and Spare Parts Concerns**

The acquisition also raises legitimate concerns regarding maintenance sustainability.

The British Rail Class 56 fleet has largely been withdrawn from mainstream service in many parts of the world. Consequently, sourcing replacement components may become increasingly difficult and costly as manufacturers discontinue production and inventories diminish.

Government must therefore explain:

- What long-term spare parts arrangements have been secured;
- Whether a strategic stock of critical components has been acquired;
- What technical support agreements exist with the refurbishment contractor or specialist maintenance providers;
- What training programme has been established to develop local maintenance capacity; and
- Whether lifecycle maintenance costs were fully evaluated before the acquisition was undertaken.

Ghana's railway sector currently has limited experience maintaining this particular class of locomotive. Without adequate technology transfer, specialist training, and guaranteed access to spare parts, the country risks acquiring equipment that may become increasingly difficult and expensive to keep operational.

## **Lessons from Previous Rolling Stock Procurement**

This situation inevitably invites comparison with the acquisition of the modern Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs) procured under the previous NPP administration from PESA of Poland.

Those trains were supplied as newly manufactured rolling stock and, importantly, were accompanied by a structured maintenance and technical support arrangement, including a five (5) year maintenance framework designed to ensure reliability during the early years of operation while facilitating skills transfer to Ghanaian personnel.

The key lesson is that successful railway investment extends beyond the purchase price of equipment. Long-term operational sustainability, maintenance support, training, and technology transfer are equally important considerations.

We call on the government to disclose the maintenance and technical support framework attached to the newly acquired locomotives for the public to assess whether similar safeguards have been secured.

## **Preparedness of the Tema–Mpakadan Railway for Freight Operations**

Beyond the rolling stock itself, serious questions remain regarding the readiness of the Tema–Mpakadan railway corridor for sustained freight operations.

The success of the intended freight operations depends not only on locomotives and wagons but also on the supporting logistics infrastructure required to efficiently transfer cargo between rail and water transport on the Volta Lake.

The Mpakadan railhead is intended to function as a critical intermodal transfer point. Yet there are concerns regarding the availability of essential cargo-handling equipment, including:

- Mobile harbour cranes;
- Reach stackers;
- Container handling systems;
- Bulk cargo loading facilities; and
- Other intermodal logistics infrastructure.

Without these facilities, the operational efficiency and commercial viability of freight movements between Tema, Mpakadan, and destinations along the Volta Lake would be severely constrained.

Government must therefore clarify whether the necessary handling equipment has been procured, commissioned, and tested for full-scale commercial operations.

### **Cargo Availability and Commercial Viability**

Equally important is the question of demand.

Railways cannot succeed merely because tracks and locomotives exist. Their sustainability depends on predictable cargo volumes and long-term commercial commitments from customers.

The public therefore deserves answers to the following questions:

- Has a comprehensive freight demand and market feasibility study been undertaken?
- What annual cargo volumes are projected for the corridor?
- Have off-take agreements or haulage contracts been signed with major shippers?
- Which industries and companies have committed to utilizing the railway?
- What revenue projections justify the investment?
- And finally, having closed down the Ghana Railway Company Limited, which vehicle are they using to operationalize the commissioning of the locomotives?

Without secured freight demand, there is a risk that valuable public assets would remain significantly underutilized, generating insufficient revenue to sustain operations and maintenance.

### **Government's Broader Rail Sector Commitments**

Finally, this announcement must be viewed within the context of the NDC's broader commitments to the railway sector.

During the 2024 election campaign, the NDC made strong commitments to accelerate railway development, including major investments aimed at completing the Western Railway Line to facilitate the transportation of manganese, bauxite, and other bulk commodities.

Such investments were presented as essential measures to:

- Reduce heavy truck traffic on Ghana's roads;
- Lower road maintenance costs;
- Improve export competitiveness; and
- Unlock the economic potential of the Western and Middle Belt corridors.

It is therefore difficult to reconcile these ambitious commitments with the allocation of approximately **GHS 70 million** to the railway sector in the 2026 national budget.

The allocation confirmed the governments seriousness in the scale of railway expansion promised to Ghanaians, particularly the completion of strategic corridors such as the Western

Railway Line.

Ghanaians want to know:

- How it intends to finance the completion of the Western Railway corridor;
- Whether detailed implementation timelines exist;
- What funding sources have been secured; and
- How the current budget allocation aligns with its manifesto commitments.
- When will government pay the railway workers?

### Conclusion

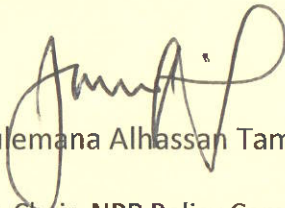
The Minority Caucus supports all genuine efforts to strengthen Ghana's railway sector and welcomes the addition of rolling stock that can contribute to freight transport.

Nevertheless, transparency, sustainability, and commercial viability must remain central considerations.

The acquisition of refurbished Margaret Thatcher era locomotives should not be presented merely as a symbolic achievement. Ghanaians deserve full disclosure regarding the age, cost and condition of the equipment, maintenance arrangements, spare parts availability, operational readiness of the Tema–Mpakadan corridor, freight demand projections, and the government's broader strategy for fulfilling its railway development promises.

Ultimately, the success of railway revitalization will not be measured by the arrival of locomotives toy engines and wagons, but by the creation of a reliable, commercially viable, and sustainable rail transport system that supports national economic development.

SIGNED



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