LATRA, DCEA linking up on transport sector drug traffic

"The drivers and conductors have a duty to inspect luggage thoroughly to prevent the transportation of illegal drugs unknowingly"

By Getrude Mbago

The Land Transport Regulatory Authority (LATRA) and the Drug Control and Enforcement Authority (DCEA) have joined forces to combat drug trafficking and abuse in commuter traffic and long distance journeys.

Eretas Lyimo, the DCEA commissioner general, affirmed this initiative after discussions with LATRA director general Habibu Suluo, noting that in the partnership, the two institutions will roll out a nationwide awareness campaign targeting upcountry bus operators.

Drivers and crew need to be educated on drug control law and their responsibilities under its specific provisions, he said in remarks to visitors at the DCEA for the just ended 49th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (DITF) over the weekend.
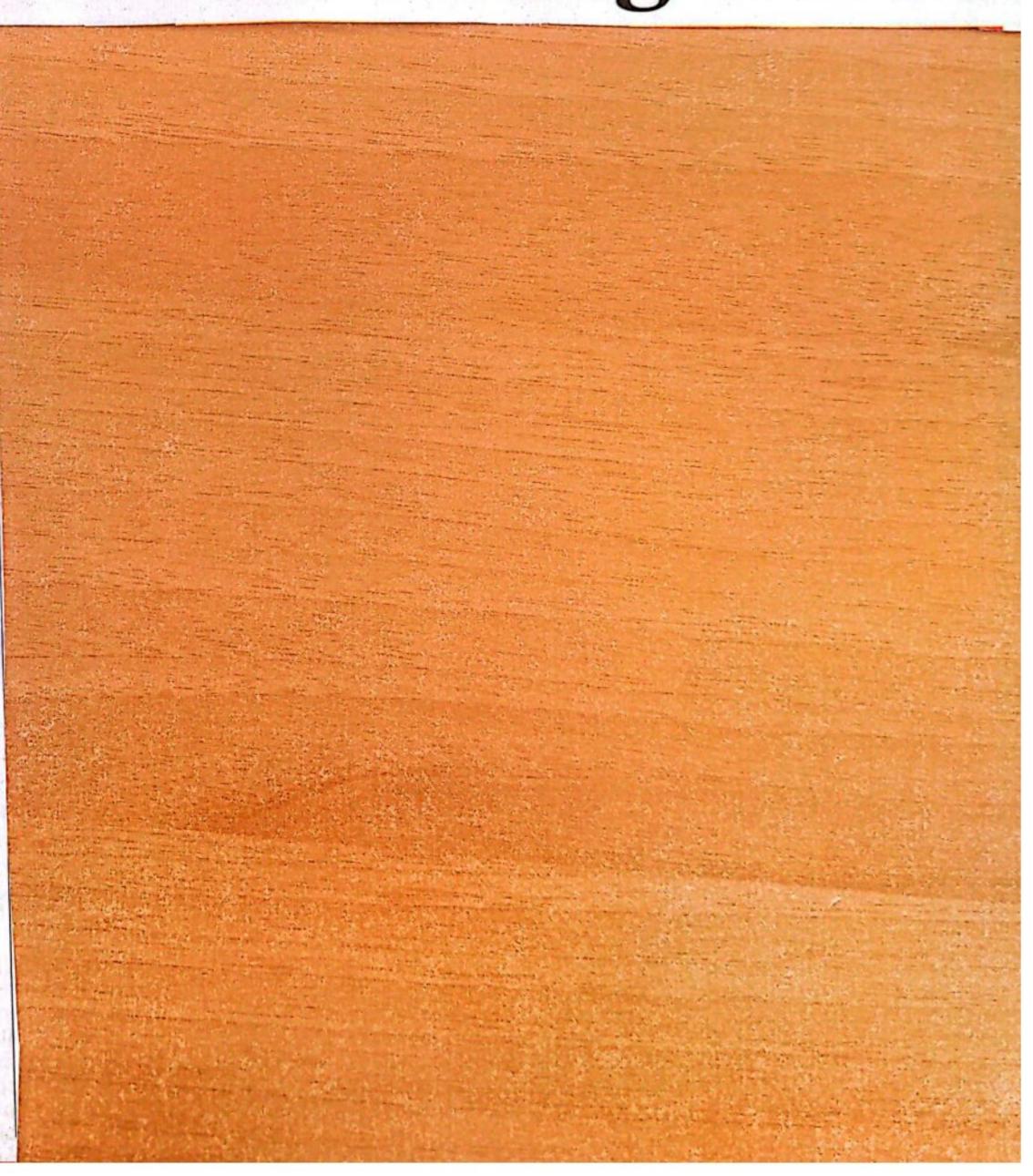
> **Understanding the law is critical to avoid vehicle confiscations and unnecessary losses**

The commissioner explained that the joint initiative seeks to educate bus operators on the provisions of the DCEA Act, highlighting their responsibilities under the law. They need to fully understand that they are liable if their vehicles are used to transport illegal drugs, he specified.

Any vehicle caught carrying illegal substances will be confiscated, with the driver and crew facing legal action since they are accountable for the vehicle and its cargo, he stated. Passengers found carrying illicit drugs will also be held directly responsible, he further noted.
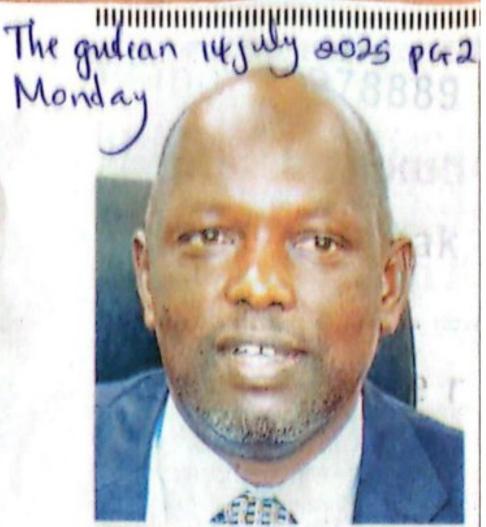
"The drivers and conductors have a duty to inspect luggage thoroughly to prevent the transportation of illegal drugs unknowingly,"

LATRA director general Habibu Suluo

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he remarked, stressing the need for vigilance and proactive conduct.

He cautioned bus operators and crew that drug trafficking offenses attract severe sentences, including life imprisonment or a minimum of 30 years, depending on the drug type and quantity involved.

"Additionally, vehicles used in drug trafficking cases are subject to seizure and forfeiture to the government as evidence," he said, urged bus owners to employ trustworthy and ethical drivers and crew.

Understanding the law is critical to avoid vehicle confiscations and unnecessary losses, he said, insisting that instead of complaining when vehicles are seized, 'owners should be cautious and ensure only reliable personnel operate their buses,"

He pointed at the country\s significant progress in the fight against illicit drugs over the past four years, saying the success arises from robust government interventions guided by directives from President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

"Previously, Tanzania was known as a major corridor for international drug trafficking, with many Tanzanians arrested abroad for related offenses. However, improved enforcement and technological upgrades have led to a marked decline in these trends," he explained.

The new collaborative educational campaign between LATRA and DCEA is expected to strengthen the prevention of drug trafficking through the country's transport system, enhancing national security and public safety, he added.

In line with this, LATRA is exploring public-private partnerships designed to extend digital adoption tools and support services to a broader range of operators, including those serving rural and low-income routes

Digital ticketing drive: Will LATRA's new system fix public transport woes?

By Judith James

O**n** July 14, 2025, the Tanzania's Land Transport Regulatory Authority (LATRA) will begin enforcing a nationwide digital ticketing mandate for public transport. All licensed bus operators must adopt LATRA-approved e-ticketing platforms integrated into the government's unified system, Safari Tiketi.

Announced at the 49th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (DITF), this directive marks a major milestone in Tanzania's digital governance strategy–aiming to boost efficiency, accountability, and passenger convenience.

The initiative supports President Samia Suluhu Hassan's broader agenda to enhance public service delivery and promote fiscal transparency through digital platforms. According to LATRA Director General CPA Habibu Suluo, operators failing to comply by the deadline will face administrative penalties, including license suspension.

Why the push for e-ticketing?

LATRA's Safari Tiketi provides a centralized digital platform for booking bus and train tickets in real time. Passengers can secure seats online, receive digital receipts, and pay via mobile money or banking services. For government agencies, the system enables monitoring of passenger volumes, route management, and operator performance with greater accuracy.

During the system's launch, Prof Godius Kahyarara, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport, called the transition a pivotal step in national transport reform. He said the new system will promote fair competition, increase revenue collection, and address long-standing operational inefficiencies.

The digital framework also aims to standardize fares, curb unauthorized price hikes, and improve recordkeeping. LATRA officials believe consistent, verifiable data could help operators to access credit and business support services, particularly in long-distance and intercity transport.

LATRA's timeline and enforcement

As of early July 2025, LATRA had approved three digital ticketing service providers: Otapp Agency Company Limited, Hashtech Tanzania Limited, and Iyishe Company Limited. Other providers are finalizing technical adjustments for approval. LATRA has made it clear that only platforms fully integrated with Safari Tiketi will be legally permitted after enforcement begins.

Under the LATRA Online Ticketing Regulations of 2024, all platforms must comply with Tanzania's data protection laws and cyber security standards. The goal is to ensure uniformity, security, and seamless operation across the transport sector while safeguarding passenger data.

LATRA has announced routine inspections and spot audits at major bus terminals starting mid-July, working in coordination with the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) and local governments. Passengers are urged to request digital tickets, and operators using unauthorized platforms risk immediate suspension to uphold system integrity and consumer confidence.

On the ground: Transition challenges and adaptation

According to LATRA regional updates and input from sector stakeholders, several bus operators in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro have begun transitioning to the approved platforms.

Larger passenger bus companies, particularly those managing long-distance routes and with in-house IT teams, appear to be adapting more quickly. Some transport stakeholders have observed potential benefits from early adoption, such as fewer ticketing disputes and improved passenger flow management.

As our country advances its digital ticketing agenda, attention is also being given to ensuring that operators of all sizes benefit from the transformation. A March 2025 assessment by the Ministry of Transport highlighted areas where additional technical and financial facilitation could enhance participation by small and mid-sized transport firms.

In line with this, LATRA is exploring public-private partnerships designed to extend digital adoption tools and support services to a broader range of operators, including those serving rural and low-income routes.

Passengers: Positive Trends in Cities, Digital Gaps in Rural Areas

In urban centers such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Dodoma, passengers have embraced the convenience of digital ticketing. Many now book tickets through apps or vendor websites, avoiding long queues and enjoying clearer pricing structures.

In rural areas, factors such as limited smartphone access, poor internet connectivity, and lower levels of digital literacy may influence the pace of digital ticketing adoption.

According to the 2023 ICT

> 66
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> **LATRA has pledged that all e-ticketing vendors must store passenger data on local servers with end-to-end encryption**

Access and Usage in Households Survey by the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA), smartphone ownership in rural Tanzania remains below 30%, with internet access even lower.

To enhance accessibility, LATRA has introduced USSD-based ticketing codes and licensed physical ticket agents to serve passengers without smartphones. Some civil society organizations have urged LATRA to expand public education campaigns and establish community-based digital support centers to help ensure equitable access, especially for elderly or digitally inexperienced passengers.

Controlling revenue loss, informal practices

One of LATRA's main goals is to curb revenue leakages and informal practices in the transport sector. Historically, cash-based ticketing systems have made it difficult to track passenger volumes, creating opportunities for underreporting and tax evasion.

LATRA argues that digitizing ticket transactions will strengthen oversight and increase transparency. Speaking at the DITF, Professor Kahyarara noted that Safari Tiketi enables operators to collect revenue instantly while providing real-time data on passenger volumes and vehicle operations. This, he said, will enhance fiscal audits and support VAT compliance.

Beyond improving revenue collection, the system seeks to build trust between operators and passengers by promoting fair pricing and reducing fare manipulation. It also generates critical data for transport infrastructure planning, supporting sustainable sector growth.

If successfully implemented, the digital transition could help formalize the informal economy, boost domestic revenue collection, and streamline operations across Tanzania's transport network.

System readiness and technical barriers

Despite the system's promise, concerns about technical readiness remain. A 2024 report by the Ministry of Transport highlighted infrastructure gaps, including unstable mobile networks, unreliable electricity at bus terminals, and limited data infrastructure in smaller towns.

These challenges could cause ticket validation delays, transaction failures, or data transmission issues during peak travel times.

Experts recommend that LATRA promote offline-compatible systems that synchronize data when connectivity is restored to ensure service continuity. LATRA has directed vendors to provide 24/7 technical support and hotlines, though the effectiveness of this provision will be tested as the system scales up.

Additional investments in technical assistance, system stress tests, and localized support teams are likely to be necessary for smooth nationwide implementation.

Rural inclusion

Government officials acknowledge that bridging the digital divide is essential for long-term success. LATRA is collaborating with the Universal Communications Service Access Fund (UCSAF) to deploy digital kiosks and mobile ticketing stations in underserved areas, aiming to reduce reliance on paper tickets.

A 2022 study by Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) found that many rural residents remain skeptical of digital platforms, citing concerns about fraud and unfamiliarity. Low smartphone ownership, intermittent power supply, and limited internet access further complicate user experiences. LATRA emphasizes that sustained outreach, user training, and community sensitization will be key to building trust and ensuring inclusive adoption.

Regional comparisons and global lessons

Tanzania's e-ticketing drive is part of a broader regional trend. Kenya introduced e-ticketing for long-distance buses and 'matatus' in 2021, but rollout challenges and operator resistance hampered its success. In contrast, Rwanda effectively implemented a tap-and-go system in Kigali with strong government and telecom support.

Globally, India's digital overhaul of its railway ticketing system is a frequently cited success story. Experts attribute India's progress to phased implementation, public education campaigns, and user-friendly, multilingual platforms that encouraged widespread adoption.

Regional experts stress that sustainable digital reforms require user-centered design, backup systems for network failures, and robust regulatory frameworks. Early stakeholder engagement, scalable technology infrastructure, and consistent government leadership are crucial to maintaining reform momentum and public trust.

Data protection and oversight

With millions of transactions expected to pass through Safari Tiketi, data protection is a top concern. Tanzania's Personal Data Protection Act of 2022 sets guidelines for user consent, secure data storage, and personal information oversight.

LATRA has pledged that all e-ticketing vendors must store passenger data on local servers with end-to-end encryption. The agency is working with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner to monitor compliance, conduct regular audits, and prevent misuse. A national complaint resolution center is being established to handle disputes related to billing, system outages, or operator conduct–promoting transparency and accountability.

What's at Stake?

Tanzania's e-ticketing reform offers the potential for a more transparent, efficient, and accountable public transport system. Successful implementation could improve passenger rights, reduce cash-handling risks, streamline operations, and provide real-time data for infrastructure planning.

Digital records may also curb fare manipulation, promote legal compliance, enhance tax collection, and build investor confidence by offering transparent operational benchmarks. Furthermore, optimized fleet management could support environmental sustainability by reducing unnecessary trips.

However, experts caution that if implementation is uneven or enforcement is too rigid, the reforms could exacerbate digital exclusion and erode public trust.

Effective communication, stakeholder engagement, and tailored support mechanisms will be critical. The coming months will test LATRA's ability to balance regulation with empathy–and ensure that no traveler is left behind.

The author can be reached at judithjamestz@gmail.com

As LATRA enforces mandatory e-ticketing integration, Tanzania's transport sector stands at a digital crossroads. Can the system improve transparency and service without leaving anyone behind?