Zambia TRACER Project: What It Funds on the Dar es Salaam Corridor

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Key Takeaways

The Zambia TRACER project is a US$270 million World Bank IDA grant (P180801), approved in February 2024 and due to close in February 2030, that upgrades the Dar es Salaam Corridor between Zambia and Tanzania. It pays for the Serenje-Mpika road, the Nakonde one-stop border post, a SMART corridor system and US$15 million of capacity building for the Road Development Agency, the National Road Fund Agency, the Ministry of Transport and Logistics and the Road Transport and Safety Agency.

- Corridor, not just a road - the project measures success in travel time, border clearance time and road deaths, not only kilometres rehabilitated.
- Border time is the headline target - truck clearance at Nakonde is to fall from 39 to 18 hours, and small-trader crossings from 20 hours to 2.
- Funding and overloading matter as much as construction - the road fund collects about 20 percent of annual maintenance needs, and weigh-in-motion scales will support axle-load control.
- Environmental and social risk is High - displacement, labour influx, SEA/SH and safety on site will shape contractor and PIU workloads.
- Component 3 is the capacity window - US$15 million covers corridor management, a railway strategy, studies, agency capacity building, PPP enabling work and project management.

Introduction

Anyone searching for the Zambia TRACER project usually wants three answers: what it pays for, who implements it, and what it means for their own agency or firm. This article sets out what the project's appraisal document says, explains the problems it was designed to solve and suggests how the agencies involved, and the contractors and consultants who will work for them, can prepare.

TRACER stands for Transport Corridors for Economic Resilience. The Zambian operation is the first in a series of projects, and its development objective is to improve year-round transport and trade connectivity between Zambia and Tanzania and expand economic activity along the Dar es Salaam Corridor. The appraisal describes this corridor as Zambia's busiest by traffic volume and its most important transport link, connecting Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the port of Dar es Salaam.

The project is financed entirely by an IDA grant. The National Road Fund Agency (NRFA) is the implementing agency, working through a project implementation unit (PIU) that brings together representatives of the ministries and agencies involved and is led by a Project Coordinator. Within that arrangement, the Road Development Agency (RDA) handles environmental, social and procurement activities and NRFA handles financial management.

What the Zambia TRACER Project Finances

The project has four components. Most of the money goes to physical works on the corridor, but a significant share supports systems, studies and institutions. The table summarises the allocations stated in the Project Appraisal Document.

The project's results framework shows what success looks like. Truck travel time between Dar es Salaam and Lusaka is to fall from 74 to 51.5 hours. Truck border clearance time at Nakonde is to fall from 39 to 18 hours, and the crossing time for small traders from 20 hours to 2. The framework also targets a 30 percent cut in fatalities on Serenje-Mpika, 35 percent women among beneficiaries with higher revenues, and 80 government staff trained.

The Corridors TRACER Covers

The Dar es Salaam Corridor is the core of the project. The Serenje-Mpika section forms part of Route T2, the route that carries Zambian and Congolese freight north-east to Tanzania. The appraisal describes the section's condition as ranging from fair to poor, and notes that it has one of the worst accident records in the region.

TRACER also looks beyond this corridor. Under sub-component 1.4 it funds feasibility studies, detailed designs and environmental and social impact assessments for targeted sections of the Nacala corridor, which links Zambia through Malawi to the port of Nacala in Mozambique, and the Trans-Caprivi corridor towards Namibia. The appraisal notes, for example, that the 147 km section between Kazungula and Katima Mulilo is in poor condition. These studies could form the pipeline for later phases of the series.

Regional coordination is built in. Sub-component 3.1 provides US$2 million to support regional corridor management, and the appraisal sets out a platform for coordination with Tanzanian counterparts, since results at Nakonde depend on how both sides of the border operate.

Border Delays at Nakonde and the One-Stop Border Post

Nakonde, opposite Tunduma in Tanzania, processes about 20 percent of all Zambia's customs consignments. The appraisal found that trucks could wait as long as four days to cross. It also noted that the Tunduma side had already been developed but could not operate as a one-stop border post (OSBP) until the Nakonde side was ready.

Several partners are involved. In the plan set out at appraisal, TradeMark Africa would finance the first lot of works, including a truck scanner, access roads and ICT, while TRACER would finance a second lot of buildings, roads, power, ICT and training, and the African Development Bank would fund a bypass. In March 2026 President Hakainde Hichilema inaugurated the first phase of upgrades, funded by the UK Government at a cost of US$12 million and implemented with TradeMark Africa. It added expanded access roads, a truck parking yard, offices and warehouses, a drive-through cargo scanner and smart gates for a crossing that handles about 800 trucks a day, and is expected to cut cargo clearance times by more than half.

A Zambian government update on the start of the works gave truck dwell time at the post as 64 hours, with a goal of less than 24 hours. The figures in different reports measure slightly different things, which is itself a lesson: border performance needs one agreed measurement method, owned jointly by the agencies on both sides.

Axle-Load Control and the SMART Corridor

Overloaded trucks are one of the main reasons new pavements fail early. The appraisal states that TRACER will complement existing weighbridge stations with weigh-in-motion (WIM) scales, which measure the axle loads of moving vehicles so that likely offenders can be directed to static scales. Its cost tables include four WIM units.

The SMART corridor sub-component, at US$54 million, has four pillars: corridor monitoring, traffic management, trade facilitation and road safety. The appraisal also refers to e-tolling equipment and states that toll and border fees will contribute to financial resources for the corridor. For RTSA, MTL and RDA, this means new data streams and systems that must be owned, staffed and maintained after the project closes.

Enforcement rules are also under review. In May 2026 an individual consultancy was advertised under TRACER to review the performance of Statutory Instrument No. 7 of 2018 and develop modalities for its enforcement, according to a DevelopmentAid listing that gives the borrower reference as ZM-MTOL.

Road Fund Revenue, Tolling and PPPs

The financing gap behind the corridor is stark. According to the appraisal, NRFA collects only 20 percent of the estimated annual resources required for road maintenance, paved roads receive less than US$2,000 per kilometre per year, which is under a third of the recommended level, and only 25 percent of the core road network is paved. Risalat has looked at the maintenance funding and arrears side of this problem separately; the corridor angle is different, because it concerns how a busy trade route can generate and protect its own revenue.

TRACER supports the adoption of PPP modalities in the road sector, and its feasibility work will examine whether a PPP model is viable for a widening section. Sub-component 3.3, at US$5 million, includes support for the PPP enabling environment and transaction advisory work alongside capacity building for RDA, NRFA, MTL and RTSA. For NRFA in particular, the question is how tolls, border fees and other charges can be collected efficiently and linked to a credible maintenance plan for the corridor.

Climate Resilience and Road Safety on Serenje-Mpika

The appraisal records that heavy rainfall, floods, erosion and extreme temperatures damage Zambia's rail, road and bridge infrastructure. In the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 rainy seasons, full access to the Serenje-Mpika road was disrupted for one to two weeks. The detailed design is being updated to include climate resilience measures, and the results framework counts the population benefiting from the section's improved resilience.

Safety is the other priority. Zambia recorded 2,240 road deaths in 2022, a rate of 11 per 100,000 people. The project includes road safety audits and safety measures on the rehabilitated section, with a target to reduce fatalities on Serenje-Mpika by 30 percent. RTSA's role in data, enforcement and public awareness will be central to meeting that target.

Environmental and Social Risk: Why It Is Rated High

The appraisal classifies TRACER's environmental and social risk as High. On the environmental side, the rating reflects the scale of works and the need to strengthen environmental and social capacity at RDA. Occupational health and safety risks on site include noise, vibration and falls from height, and the assessment draws on the World Bank's standards on labour and working conditions, resource efficiency and pollution, community health and safety, biodiversity and

cultural heritage.

The social risk is also rated High. The appraisal expects physical displacement along the alignment, which requires careful resettlement planning and livelihood restoration, and warns that labour influx could heighten the risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment for women and girls. It calls for qualified environmental and social specialists. For contractors, this means site-specific plans, worker codes of conduct, grievance mechanisms and close supervision; for the PIU, it means regular monitoring that the World Bank will review.

Component 3: Capacity Building for RDA, NRFA, MTL and RTSA

Component 3, Sectoral capacity development and project management, is worth US$15 million. It has four parts: US$2 million to support regional corridor management; US$5 million to develop a railway strategy for Zambia; US$5 million for studies and sectoral capacity building, including building the capacity of RDA, NRFA, MTL and RTSA to plan and implement their mandates and supporting the PPP enabling environment; and US$3 million for project management, monitoring and evaluation.

Procurement linked to the project is visible in 2026, including the individual consultancy on enforcing a 2018 statutory instrument. The results framework's target of 80 government staff trained gives a measurable anchor for training plans, and agencies can use it to link learning to the corridor's performance indicators rather than to attendance alone.

What Agencies and Contractors Should Prepare For

Each organisation involved will face specific demands over the remaining years to 2030.

- RDA: large works contracts with High E&S risk, resettlement, OHS and SEA/SH supervision, procurement planning in STEP and contract management on Serenje-Mpika.
- NRFA: financial management for the whole project, disbursement tracking, and a stronger revenue case linking tolls and fees to corridor maintenance.
- MTL: corridor policy, regional coordination with Tanzania, the railway strategy and regulatory reviews.
- RTSA: road safety data, enforcement and the operation of SMART corridor tools.
- Border agencies: joint procedures, risk-based inspection and agreed clearance time measurement at Nakonde.
- Contractors and consultants: resilient design standards, E&S plans, worker codes of conduct and grievance handling from mobilisation onwards.

Readers looking for related training areas can browse Risalat's programme categories.

Critical Questions Government and Project Leaders Should Be Asking

Do we measure border and corridor performance the same way as our partners?

Different reports give different figures for Nakonde. Agreeing one method, data source and owner for clearance time and travel time, on both sides of the border, is the first step to showing progress against TRACER's targets.

Will the systems we buy still run after 2030?

SMART corridor equipment, WIM scales and e-tolling need staff, maintenance budgets and data management. Operating costs and responsibilities should be agreed now and reflected in agency budgets.

Is our E&S team large enough for a High-risk project?

Resettlement, labour influx, SEA/SH and OHS risks require specialists in the PIU and on contractors' teams, with clear reporting lines and regular site supervision.

How will corridor revenue support maintenance?

With NRFA collecting about 20 percent of maintenance needs, the corridor's tolls and fees should be linked to a maintenance plan that protects the new pavement.

Is the Component 3 budget tied to results?

Capacity building should target the gaps that most affect delivery and be measured against the project's indicators, not only the number of people trained.

Are the next corridor phases ready?

Studies for the Nacala and Trans-Caprivi corridors will shape future investment. Agencies should plan now for the procurement, design review and safeguards work these studies will need.

How Risalat Can Help

Risalat partners with road agencies, road funds, ministries and PIUs to build the skills that corridor projects depend on. Our Transport Corridor Management & Road Financing Training in Rotterdam covers corridor performance measurement, OSBPs, axle-load control, road fund revenue, asset management, PPPs, climate resilience and E&S risk. Teams that want a quick view of where their project stands can start with our free project health check.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Zambia TRACER project?

Transport Corridors for Economic Resilience (P180801) is a US$270 million World Bank IDA grant approved in February 2024 to improve transport and trade connectivity between Zambia and Tanzania along the Dar es Salaam Corridor. Its expected closing date is 27 February 2030.

Which agencies implement TRACER?

The National Road Fund Agency is the implementing agency, working through a multi-agency PIU. RDA handles environmental, social and procurement activities, and NRFA handles financial management. MTL and RTSA are among the agencies receiving capacity support.

How much does TRACER spend on capacity building?

Component 3 provides US$15 million: US$2 million for regional corridor management, US$5 million for a railway strategy, US$5 million for studies and capacity building for RDA, NRFA, MTL and RTSA and PPP work, and US$3 million for project management and M&E.

Why is TRACER's environmental and social risk rated High?

The appraisal cites expected physical displacement, labour influx and related SEA/SH risks, occupational health and safety hazards, and the need to strengthen environmental and social capacity at RDA.

Sources

- World Bank, TRACER Project Appraisal Document (P180801), January 2024
- Early Warning System: TRACER project record (P180801)
- TradeMark Africa: President Hichilema inaugurates upgraded Nakonde border post (March 2026)
- Government of Zambia (PDU): Modernisation of Nakonde border post underway
- DevelopmentAid: TRACER technical assistant to review performance of SI No. 7 of 2018 (May 2026)
- World Bank: Southern Africa taps US$380 million to facilitate regional trade (April 2021)
- World Bank: SATCP Implementation Status & Results Report, Seq. 7 (April 2025)

Related Risalat programmes

- Procurement under World Bank and ADB Rules for Project Teams in Dubai, Dubai (4 Jan 2027)
- Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation for Donor-Funded Projects in Nairobi, Nairobi (11 Jan 2027)
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