

Joe Walker Kampala Boda-Boda Walk Report

“You had rather lose a minute in life than lose a life in a minute.” – ASP
Richard Ecega, Former Commandant, Kampala Metropolitan Police
(KMP)



Background

The Joe Walker Kampala Boda-Boda Walk, held on 5th July 2025, was a landmark event aimed at drawing attention to the urgent road safety issues affecting one of Uganda's most prominent yet vulnerable transportation sectors, the boda-boda industry. This initiative was born out of a growing need to foster dialogue, build trust, and create behavioural change among boda-boda riders, government authorities, and the public. Bodas have become a defining feature of urban mobility in Uganda, particularly in Kampala. However, they are also disproportionately represented in traffic accidents, injuries, and fatalities. Most of these incidents result from a combination of poor road infrastructure, limited rider training, risky behaviors, and insufficient enforcement of traffic regulations.

Against this backdrop, the *Joe Walker* and Friends sought to go beyond awareness by creating this walk where both leaders and citizens would walk together, listen to each other, and advocate for safer road use through direct engagement with boda-boda communities at the grassroots level.

Participation and Route

With more than 100 walkers on the road, including riders , police , cyclicts and JoeWalker and friends community members. Each key stop witnessed an estimated 100 or more riders, either joining in or engaging directly in the discussions. Notably, Wandegeya registered the largest turnout, reflecting both the vibrancy and deep concerns of riders in that area.

Route Overview:

The planned walk route included:

Sheraton Gardens – Jinja Road – Nakawa – Ntinda – Kamwokya – Wandegeya – back to Sheraton. However, due to logistical constraints and the organic nature of the event, not all sections were walked in sequence as initially intended. Nonetheless, the symbolic value and strategic engagement at each stop made the walk a significant success.

Major Stopovers:

1. Total Nakawa
2. Former Crane Bank, Ntinda
3. Police Boda Stage, Wandegeya

Each location was selected for its high concentration of boda-boda operations, as well as its unique infrastructure and community characteristics that reflect the broader transportation challenges in Kampala.

Key Dignitaries and Authorities Present

The walk was graced by several key public figures and government representatives who walked side by side with boda-boda riders and citizens:

- Mr. Benon Kigenyi, Deputy Executive Director, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), who officially flagged off the walk.
- ASP Michael Kananura, Spokesperson, Uganda Police Traffic Directorate who provided vital safety insights at each stop.
- Richard Ecega, Former Kampala Metropolitan Police Commandant who inspired the campaign's theme.

- Senior officers from the Kampala Metropolitan Police Traffic Command.

Their presence was a strong message of solidarity and accountability signalling a shift towards *dialogue over confrontation* when it comes to engaging with the boda-boda community.

Walk Highlights

Segment 1: Sheraton – Jinja Road – Nakawa

The day began at Sheraton Gardens, with walkers rallying behind the words of former KMP Commandant Richard Ecega, who reminded the public of the preciousness of every minute and the danger of trading caution for speed. As the group moved down Speke Road to Jinja Road, they quickly encountered a mix of infrastructure successes and failures. While proper pedestrian walkways were applauded, particularly near the Airtel roundabout, the route also revealed glaring gaps. Just after Uganda Management Institute (UMI), walkers were disheartened to see raw sewage flowing down from a police facility a grim reminder that even institutions meant to enforce order can sometimes contribute to chaos.

The stop at Total Nakawa served as the first formal engagement point. Riders there passionately voiced three main issues:

1. Unexplained arrests and harassment from both KCCA and Police
2. High licensing costs, often inaccessible to informal or low-income riders
3. Lack of protective gear, leaving riders and passengers vulnerable in accidents

ASP Kananura acknowledged the legitimacy of their grievances but also used the opportunity to teach urging riders to understand the meaning of road signs, observe safe speeds, wear helmets correctly, and avoid yielding to dangerous peer pressure.

Segment 2: Nakawa – Ntinda

As the team headed to Ntinda, conversations continued in full throttle this time with an increased focus on motorist-boda relations. Riders expressed frustration over the lack of respect from drivers, especially in areas with narrow or potholed roads.

They also pointed out the terrible road conditions between Ntinda and Bukoto, where boda accidents are frequent due to uneven surfaces and congestion. Many riders admitted that, under such conditions, obeying all traffic rules becomes nearly impossible making personal risk management all the more vital.

Community members, including regular passengers, joined in the discussion emphasizing that many of them feel unsafe but have little choice due to affordability

and convenience. This broadened the conversation from rider behavior to systemic infrastructure limitations.

Segment 3: Ntinda – Kamwokya – Wandegeya

In Kamwokya, engagement was more emotionally charged. Many riders appeared weary and skeptical with several stating that they no longer trust “government people” due to years of broken promises and inconsistent enforcement.

Yet the issues remained consistent:

- Cost of licenses
- Daily harassment and extortion by enforcement officers

At Wandegeya, the crowd swelled. Tensions peaked when a rider pointed out a traffic officer present in the crowd, accusing him of “terrorizing” their stage and being the reason, they avoid stopping at traffic lights. It was a moment of reckoning yet ASP Kananura handled the situation with tact, reminding the riders that: “The law is not your enemy. It is your shield, but only if you obey it.”

He emphasized the importance of mutual respect, acknowledging that enforcement without engagement leads to resistance, while education opens the path to cooperation. Riders here also openly admitted to carrying more than one passenger often citing economic pressure and lack of regulation. While they were aware of the risks, the general sentiment was that they could “get away with it,” given weak enforcement mechanisms.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

Enforce Self-Regulation Through Structured Boda-Boda Associations

Instead of relying solely on state enforcement mechanisms, which often fail due to lack of trust or logistical limitations, management of boda-boda operations should be delegated to officially recognized and regulated rider associations or unions. These groups:

- Should be registered and accountable to local government authorities.
- Must maintain accurate registers of all active riders, bikes, and routes.
- Should be given authority to enforce conduct rules, mediate disputes, and support enforcement of traffic laws in collaboration with the police.

Identify, Train, and Empower Boda-Boda Road Safety Champions

Each association or stage should elect a Road Safety Champion—a trained rider responsible for sensitizing peers on road safety regulations, customer care, and best practices.

- These champions should be trained periodically by Uganda Police and Ministry of Works and Transport.
- Their role would include organizing weekly safety briefings, sharing emergency contacts, and keeping a record of incidents.
- They could also be supported with branded safety gear, materials, and a modest facilitation.

Mandatory Basic Riding and Road Safety Courses

A national program must be rolled out to train all riders, starting with urban centers, in the fundamentals of:

- Motorcycle handling
- Traffic regulations
- Defensive riding
- First aid
- Customer safety and conduct

Training can be done in collaboration with driving schools, police, and professional rider instructors. Certification must be tied to licensing.

Enforce the Use of Crash Helmets for Both Riders and Passengers

Helmet use must be enforced without compromise. This includes:

- Ensuring all helmets meet a certified safety standard.
- Banning the use of damaged, expired, or fake helmets.
- Penalizing riders who carry passengers without helmets or allow pillion riders to share helmets.

Incentives can also be provided: e.g., tax exemptions on quality helmets or partnerships with NGOs to subsidize them.

Introduce and Enforce Motorcycle Lanes on All Major Roads

Urban infrastructure must evolve to accommodate boda-bodas safely:

- Dedicated motorcycle lanes should be integrated into all new road projects and retrofitted into existing ones where possible.
- Clear road markings, signage, and even barriers (in high-traffic zones) should be introduced.
- Riders must be fined for using pedestrian walkways or driving against traffic flow.

Control the Number of Boda-Bodas in Urban Areas

The current number of motorcycles operating in Kampala and other urban centers is unsustainable.

- The government should cap the number of new registrations in congested zones.
- Licensing should be tied to need, location, and a valid business case.
- Redundant or unlicensed motorcycles should be removed from circulation.
- Alternative employment or compensation schemes should be introduced for those displaced.

Next Steps:

1. Roll out structured follow-up engagements at each of the visited boda stages
2. Publish and present rider grievances to KCCA and Uganda Police leadership for review
3. Advocate for inclusive urban planning that considers non-motorized transport lanes
4. Institutionalize joint road safety walks as an annual or quarterly practice, scaling up to other cities
5. Launch a community pledge campaign, encouraging riders to publicly commit to safe practices

Conclusion

The Joe Walker Kampala Boda-Boda Walk was not merely a campaign it was a movement. A movement that proved conversations can spark change, walking side by side can bridge divides, and listening can be more powerful than lecturing. As **SP**

Kananura reminded all present: *“Today was educational. Tomorrow will be enforcement.”*