Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, executive officers, honorable Secretaries and Minister Kawambwa – thank you all for coming. The US Embassy would like to warmly welcome you to Tanzania, and express our strong support for the efforts of the US Department of Transportation and the EAC Secretariat in organizing this important meeting. We look forward to a productive two days but hope the relationships forged here will continue long into the future. It is our desire that the ties between the United States and the members of the East African Community will continue to expand on every level, to the mutual benefit of our citizens.

I would like to begin my remarks on a slightly somber note, pointing out that yearly 1.3 million people die in road crashes around the world.  In addition, 20-50 million people are injured, causing poverty and devastation to families and adding to the health burden of national economies, particularly in developing countries.  In fact, road crashes are slated to become the third leading cause of death by 2010 according to the World Health Organization, a condition exacerbated as countries like India and China race to economic development and increase the number of motorized vehicles on their roads.  Road crashes are also the leading cause of death to healthy Americans living, traveling, studying and doing business overseas. This statistic came close to home when a young American traveling in Tanzania was among the many other victims who tragically died last month in a bus crash near Tanga. As I’m sure you can all attest, such horrific accidents happen all too frequently here in Tanzania and throughout east Africa.

Much is being discussed currently here in Tanzania about new initiatives and regulations to ensure such tragedies are reduced in the future. The U.S. has a good story to tell on road safety, having reduced our annual incidence to less than 43,000 road accidents. We also applaud Tanzania for having a new National Road Safety policy agreed upon and passed by the Cabinet several months ago. Of course, passing policies is only the first step, and we call upon the Government of Tanzania to quickly and effectively implement the policy now that it has been adopted. Our hope is that this conference might stimulate the sharing of ideas and solutions to improve road safety in East Africa – the results really do have the potential to be lifesaving.

The adoption of such a National Road Safety policy was one of several conditions included in the $698 million Millennium Challenge Compact that was signed in 2008. This was and remains the larged MCC Compact signed anywhere in the world, and over half of the Compact’s resources ($373 million) are targeted at improving Tanzania’s road infrastructure, with a focus on underserved areas as outlined by Tanzania’s Transport Sector Investment Program priorities.

The Project includes rehabilitation of several key trunk roads on the mainland. First, Tanga to Horohoro, a 68 km stretch of highway in northeast Tanzania connecting the seaport of Tanga with Horohoro at the Kenyan border. The rehabilitation and improvement of this highway will ease transport of goods between Dar es Salaam and Kenya, facilitating regional trade. Second, Tunduma – Sumbawanga, a 224 km stretch of highway in western Tanzania that serves an important agricultural area, and represents the main link between Dar es Salaam and Zambia. And third, a 139 km stretch of highway on both sides of Songea in southwestern Tanzania, which is part of the larger Mtwara Corridor that runs from the Indian Ocean port of Mtwara to Lake Nyasa, connecting Tanzania with landlocked Malawi.

I am happy to report that these projects are now well into in the procurement process, with both construction supervision and works contracts being competed, negotiated or with bid packages that will soon go on the street. Planning for resettlement and compensation of those who will be directly affected is going on simultaneously, with separate teams of experts working along each road segment. We expect that the first compensation payments to approximately 1000 people along the Tanga – Horohoro corridor will be going out in the next several weeks.

A significant policy reform towards mainland road sustainability was demonstrated by the GoT in July 2007, when it nearly doubled funding of road maintenance, an increase adequate to meet the maintenance costs of the mainland’s entire road network. However since adequate funding for maintenance of roads does not by itself ensure sustainability of the investments in roads, MCC funds also target the enhancement of Tanzania’s *capacity* to maintain its road network. Honorable Minister of Infrastructure Development, Dr. Shukuru Kawambwa shared with us at the recent iPAD regional infrastructure conference in Dar that there is no word in Kiswahili for “maintenance”. So we are happy to note that MCC will support improvements in institutional capacity for strategic maintenance planning and contract management for the Tanzania National Roads Agency (TANROADS) on the mainland and the Ministry of Communications and Transport on Zanzibar island.

The MCC Program’s investment in the transport sector is critical to Tanzania’s development. However we also laud the contribution of fellow donors to regional connectivity, notably the upgraded road from Arusha to the Kenyan border at Namanga being funded by the Japanese government. Most importantly, we applaud the impressive surge in infrastructure development being taken on by the Tanzanian government using hard earned domestic taxpayer revenues for the benefit of the nation.

Poor transport infrastructure is a constraint to Tanzanian economic growth. In Tanzania, roads are essential for commerce in agriculture, which employs up to 80% of the population, and for increased trade between Tanzania and its neighboring countries. The rehabilitation of the roads, therefore, will help connect road users and communities along the rehabilitated roads with markets, schools and health clinics, and expand opportunities by reducing transport costs and thus increasing the economic viability of various local products, including cash crops. Better roads enhance the abilities of citizens of the East African Community to capitalize on their individual competitive advantages by trading with neighbors.

In addition to roads, the US Embassy in Tanzania is happy to facilitate the visit of our US Department of Transportation guests to the site of the Dar Rapid Transit Agency project at the conclusion of this conference. They will be hosted by the visionary Executive Director, Cosmas Takule, who will share his plans to reduce both traffic congestion and carbon emissions in the city of Dar Es Salaam by building extra highway lanes for large commuter buses to transport workers in and out of the city. In addition, Mr. Takule will change fuel specifications for the buses involved from the current standard 5000 parts per million sulphur to only 500 parts per million. We are proud to report that Mr. Takule is an alumnus of a US Department of State Visitor Program, where he was able to learn from public transport sector counterparts in Miami, Florida. We like to think we can take credit for a little bit of his brilliance!

The US Embassy also notes with great hope and expectation the proposal to upgrade and extend the Dar to Isaka railway line into Rwanda and Burundi. This idea, currently in the final study stages, represents a real breakthrough in reducing regional transport costs and opening up greater economic opportunities for landlocked countries. There is a pressing need for increased and cheaper transport options to move commercial goods and exports in and out for trading. For a Dar – Kigali trip which currently presents importers with huge costs in the form of two to three week truck journeys fraught with continual bribe-demanding checkpoints, the upgraded rail would allow for the same trip in less than 36 hours, at a third of the cost.

To conclude, the importance of this conference in bringing together the key players in the regional transport sector can not be underestimated. It is our hope that productive solutions and partnerships will emerge from this meeting, to result in a safe, quality regional transportation network that facilitates economic opportunity for the citizens of East Africa. Karibuni sana!