



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
FREETOWN MUNICIPALITY

Hon Ambassador Tamba John Lamina
Minister of Local Government and Community Affairs
Ministry of Local Government of Community Affairs
6th Floor, Youyi Building
Brookfields
Freetown, Sierra Leone

3rd June 2025

Dear Hon Ambassador Tamba Lamina

OPEN LETTER IN RESPONSE TO ANNOUNCED PLANS TO DIVIDE FREETOWN INTO TWO CITIES

I have read with grave concern social media reports that Cabinet approval has been obtained to divide the historic city of Freetown into two cities under two local councils. I am alarmed that this pronouncement has been made without any consultation whatsoever with the people for whom it will have the biggest impact, Freetonians.

As the current Mayor of Freetown, I believe that the proposed division would have negative consequences for our vibrant city, a city founded in 1792, and one that is rich in history and culture. Since 1792, Freetown has been many things: a haven for previously enslaved people; a trading hub; a World War II Naval Base; the heart of academic excellence in West Africa; and since 1961 Sierra Leone's capital city and the seat of government. Although its geographical area (82.4 sq km) is just 0.1% of the country, it is home to over 15% of the population; it is the country's main economic and administrative hub; and it is a key provider of jobs, with nascent industries like tourism offering significant opportunities for employment growth in the years to come.

Effect of Mandate Fragmentation on Delivery of Essential Services

Hon Minister Lamina, already Freetown City Council faces challenges as a result of the fragmentation of mandates for the delivery of urban management functions. The Local Government Act 2022 Section 21 (1) (c) states that the local council shall **"be responsible,**

generally for promoting the development of the locality and the welfare of the people in the locality”

A local council's primary purpose is thus to govern and manage a local area, representing the interests of its residents and providing essential services. Global best practice is for such structures to be responsible for local functions such as land use planning and building approvals, roads and public amenities as well as waste management in order to enhance the integration required to efficiently deliver services to residents. However, **across Sierra Leone’s local councils, including Freetown City Council, the mandates for key urban management functions are held by others.**

- The mandates for land use planning and building approvals are held by the Ministry of Lands.
- The mandates for road and drainage construction and road maintenance are held by the Sierra Leone Roads Authority.
- The mandate for the provision of water in Freetown is held by Guma Valley Water Company.

In the absence of decentralised, effective land use planning and building permit issuance, Freetonians are increasingly experiencing flooding caused by buildings erected in protected waterways and forests. Whilst **residents of the formal and informal non-motorable settlements which have been established without the provision of roads** (that would have happened where effective land use planning is done), deposit their waste in the water ways and empty them in the streams during the rains because they cannot be reached by waste service providers.

Other challenges that emanate from the fragmentation of mandates directly related to effective urban management include, but are not limited to, the destruction of water catchments, poor transport connectivity, potholes and burst water pipes in the middle of the city and inadequate access to basic services.

This proposed plan to sub-divide Freetown into two cities and create two local councils does not address any of the challenges emanating from the failure to devolve key urban management mandates but will instead create additional management and coordination challenges. In fact, it is my belief that what is required for Freetown to have improved service delivery is greater devolution of functions to the city council, and more consolidation and coordination in service planning rather than further disintegration. Best practice in urban management, particularly for a city as compact and densely populated as Freetown, is to strengthen and not weaken comprehensive and integrated planning for services delivery.

There is also the negative impact that this proposed action will have on the implementation of existing interventions, designed for the benefit of our residents. **Hon Minister Lamina, we are truly appreciative of the role that you played in assisting Freetown City Council to have the Freetown City Council Solid and Liquid Waste Collection ByELaws laid in Parliament in 2024.** As

you are aware, the byelaws are predicated on a citywide waste collection system that groups the 48 administrative wards of the city into 8 blocks. The new byelaws have provided the legislative framework necessary to attract private sector companies to bid for contracts to service the blocks with door-to-door waste collection. We have completed the bidding and contracting processes in accordance with NPPA rules and we are about to launch an extensive citywide campaign called **“Operation Dorti Mus Go”**. **The significant investment in introducing the legislation and building a system for citywide waste collection, and the effective implementation of that system, would be negatively impacted by splitting the city into two local councils.**

Financial Matters

Hon Minister, may I also raise with you the important issue of financing the work of local councils. **The Local Government Act 2022 Section 49 (1) states that the Local Council shall be financed from:**

- (a) its own revenue collections
- (b) central government grants for devolved functions; and
- (c) transfers of services delegated from Government Ministries

I am proud of the work that has been done under my leadership to improve own source revenue collection in Freetown. **The digitization of our property rates and business license system through the Moptax system – a system that I am pleased to see now being adopted in Kenema and Makeni as a best practice and which I introduced in 2020 - has enabled us to move from having 37,000 properties on the books of Freetown City Council in 2018 to over 120,000 today, increasing own source revenue potential by over sevenfold.**

However, it is important to note that revenue potential and collection in Freetown is not evenly distributed across the city. Our data shows that of the NLe22.8m property rates collected in Freetown in 2024, NLe4.6m or 20% was collected from the 24 wards in the east of Freetown (with a compliance rate of 34%) whilst NLe18.2m or 80% was collected from the 24 wards in the west of Freetown (with a compliance rate of 55%). Whilst Freetown City Council is working very hard to increase compliance rates for all residents and considerable progress has been made, the evidence clearly shows that the **east of the city, which houses two thirds of the city’s population, has a considerably lower revenue collection rate and a much lower revenue collected per capita. Residents living in the east of the city will therefore be directly disadvantaged by a city split in respect of its own source revenue collection potential and thus service delivery. Especially if central government grants and transfers continue on the current trajectory.**

The Local Government Act of 2022 Section 50 (1) is clear that “each year a Local Council shall be paid tied grants (a) for the discharge of the devolved functions; (b) for the development of its locality; and (c) towards its administrative cost”. But as of **today, Tuesday 3rd June 2025, there has been no payment made by the Government of Sierra Leone to Freetown City Council against the 2025 tied grants budget.**

Freetown City Council Revenue Sources - 2018 To Present

DESCRIPTION	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	4 months of 2025
OWN SOURCE	17,461,912.00	29,906,710.00	25,221,067.00	30,858,901.00	35,925,720.00	37,106,639.00	51,780,163.00	19,721,994.00
GOVERNMENT GRANT	22,720,174.00	23,836,654.00	15,379,094.00	9,241,842.00	7,263,829.00	16,510,500.00	20,084,931.00	-
EXTERNAL SUPPORT		4,207,043.00	4,207,043.00	3,876,857.00	363,970.00	13,591,368.00	11,381,573.92	10,222,709.97
	40,182,086.00	53,743,364.00	44,807,204.00	43,977,600.00	43,553,519.00	67,208,507.00	83,246,667.92	29,944,703.97
Grants as Percentage of FCC Total Revenue	57%	44%	34%	21%	17%	25%	24%	0%

The failure to ensure budget commitments are made in a timely manner directly impacts the operations of our schools, our primary health units and secondary hospitals especially.

It is difficult to conceive the creation of another local council within our city which would require separate funding for additional tied grants when payments of existing obligations are already a challenge. Furthermore without the benefit of developed systems for own source revenue mobilization or established networks for international collaborators and clear plans for a reform agenda such as the Transform Freetown Transforming Lives (2024- 2028) agenda shaping Freetown’s current path forward – factors that have been instrumental in our securing of unprecedented levels of external support for Freetown City Council – the financial viability of running a new council should be a serious consideration.

Legal Powers versus Data Driven Considerations

Hon Minister, whilst I recognize the powers granted to the President in Section 2 (2) of the Local Government Act to “declare any area as a locality” it is also clear that subsection (3) states that you, the Minister of Finance and the Electoral Commissioner shall, in making any recommendation to him, consider population and population density, as well as geographic contiguity, topography and the future growth or expansion of the area.

With regards geographical contiguity, topography, future growth and expansion of the area. Hon Minister, I believe that you will agree with me that for a small city bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and a mountain range, Freetown’s topography does not lend it to further growth or expansion.

On the question of population and population density, this can only be considered with reference to available credible data and not to guesswork. The most recent official government data available is **the 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Census which recorded a population size for Freetown of 609,174, reflecting a 42.3% reduction in the population size since 2015.** If, for the sake of argument, we are to take this data as accurate a decline in population is no basis for fragmenting the planning and delivery of essential services to Freetonians nor for burdening taxpayers with the additional administrative costs of establishing another local council.

In the light of all of the above, I would humbly suggest that the division of Freetown into two cities with two local councils will adversely affect the delivery of services to residents, add additional and unnecessary pressure to an already stretched government budget and

undermine the rich legacy and tourism potential of Freetown. I therefore respectfully request that Freetown be left as Freetown.

Assuring you of my highest regards



Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr OBE
Mayor of Freetown