As far as I could discover, ‘roads to prosperity’ was introduced as a concept by J. Vanke in a journal article published in 1988 (Vanke 1988) and also published as a kind of policy brief by a London-based transport think tank. It had a question mark in the title. It had nothing metaphorical; it was just about roads and prosperity. Vanke’s thesis was this: investments in roads and other forms of physical infrastructure do not create massive economic benefits, as transport costs are only a minor part of production costs. In addition, he stated that there are many negative effects on local production and trade during and after road building: local depots have to close, local businesses are outcompeted, and the positive employment effects are often exaggerated. Despite this, the UK Government called its road building programme in 1989 ‘Roads for Prosperity’. Wikipedia-En had this to say:

Roads for Prosperity (often incorrectly called Road to Prosperity) was a controversial white paper published by the Conservative UK Government in 1989 detailing the 'largest road building program for the UK since the Romans', produced in response to rapid increases in car ownership and use over the previous decade. It embraced what Margaret Thatcher had described as ‘the great car economy’ although implementation led to widespread road protests and many of the schemes contained within it were abandoned in 1996.¹

As a counterpoint to the rather negative position of Vanke and the British protesters against road building in the 1990s, an American author (Fernald 1999) published a very influential article in the American Economic Review at the end of the 1990s, also called ‘Roads to Prosperity’. According to Fernald, road construction (as an aggregate measure) had a very clear impact on the productivity of an area (as an aggregate measure) and hence on prosperity. But he could not really establish the causality, and also, after some years, the effects were not that clear any more. All his cases came from the US, however, during a period (the 1950s and 1960s) in which there was massive public-funded road building activity.

In the 2000s, the concept ‘roads to prosperity’ also appeared in studies about Africa. The Tanzanian economist and current director of the Central Bank of Tanzania, one of the architects of economic reform in his country, Benno Ndulu, used the concept in a paper dealing with the importance of infrastructure development and regional integration, in an attempt to increase economic growth and counter what he called the disadvantages of geography and sovereignty fragmentation (Ndulu 2006). At the same time also, Seetanah Boopen, working in Mauritius, tried to convince scholars and planners about the importance of infrastructure development for economic growth, using many examples from Africa (Boopen 2006). This was followed by like-minded publications by Ayogu in 2007 and by Fleshman in 2009, reaching out to policymakers. So again, all these publications use the phrase ‘roads to prosperity’ in a rather straightforward, or even economic, sense. And all of them make a plea for more investments in road building as a requirement for Africa’s economic take-off.

In the *African Dynamics* book of 2014, Lia van Weesenbeeck maps the evidence for Africa in 2005, and she concludes:

> The availability of high-quality roads is a major problem in Sub-Saharan Africa. ...there are only a limited number of primary roads and these are mainly concentrated in West Africa and South Africa, leaving the interior of the continent largely inaccessible.

*Van Weesenbeeck 2014: 41–43*

And in a footnote, she adds: ‘The number of railroads and inland waterways in Sub-Saharan Africa is very limited, although efforts to restore and upgrade old railways have recently been made.’

However, there had already been earlier attempts to reconstruct the impact of road building on local economies in Africa. A student at the University of Amsterdam, Marjo Gallé (1989), wrote her master’s thesis on a major road building project in northwest Kenya, connecting the city of Kitale (and hence the rest of the Kenyan economic heartland) with the remote areas in the northwest of the country (West Pokot and Turkana) and further to south Sudan and northeast Uganda. She reconstructed the impact of the road-building activities on the local economy and the immediate impact after the road had been built on the settlements near the new road. She looked for comparative studies about the impact of road building in developing countries and could find hardly any. With one major exception: a very oft-cited study by three arch-fathers of American modern economic development geography—Edward Taaffe, Richard Morrill, and Peter Gould—published in 1963. They looked at (current) Ghana...