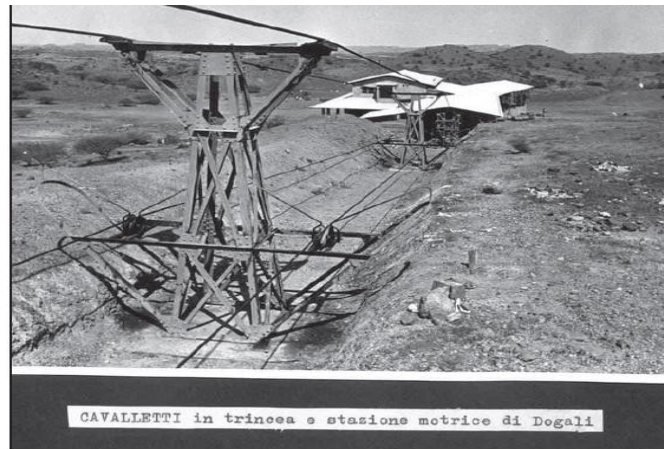


Cableway in Eritrea: its History and Prospects for its Revival



By: Kidanemariam Feday

The Asmara – Massawa Cableway, also known by its Italian name, Teleferica, was regarded as one of the most extraordinary engineering achievements in Africa. Constructed during the Italian colonial period, it was the longest aerial cableway of its kind in the world. Stretching nearly 71.8 kilometers across rugged mountains and valleys from Asmara to the port of Massawa, it served not only as a vital transport link but also as a symbol of modern ambition and technical ingenuity.

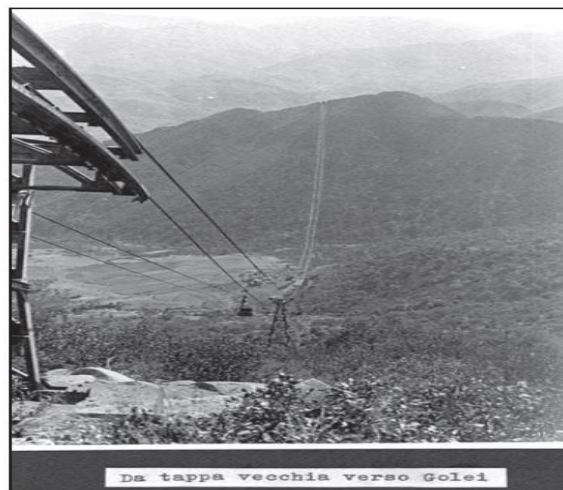
After World War II, the British dismantled the Cableway when Eritrea was under the British Military Administration, leaving behind only memories. The looting and destruction of the Cableway, railway assets, Naval Base structures, oil storage tanks and by the British was enormous and remains a well-known chapter in Eritrea's history. Every Eritrean grows up hearing stories of the cableway's destruction, and the removal of key infrastructure and assets. Today, the Cableway lives on in the collective memory both as a lost treasure of Eritrea's past and a vision of what might be revived for the future.

The Asmara – Massawa Cableway was a three-cable aerial system, unique in its scale and purpose. It was inaugurated in 1937 and had a loading capacity of 30 tons of material every hour in each direction. Divided into nearly 13 sections, the cableway was powered by diesel engines and carried freight in 1540 small

transport gondolas. It was designed to handle the significant elevation difference (from sea level to 2,326 meters) and was built to withstand Eritrea's environment conditions, including heat and wind.

For the Cableway project to move from memory to reality, Eritrea needs a structured and well-supported feasibility study. This should be spearheaded by a dedicated team under the Ministry of Transport and Communication.

The feasibility study must assess multiple factors and ensure that the study captures technical, economic and social dimensions. Importantly, the Cableway should be viewed not merely as a transport project, but as a heritage asset of significance not only for Eritrea but for Africa and the wider world.

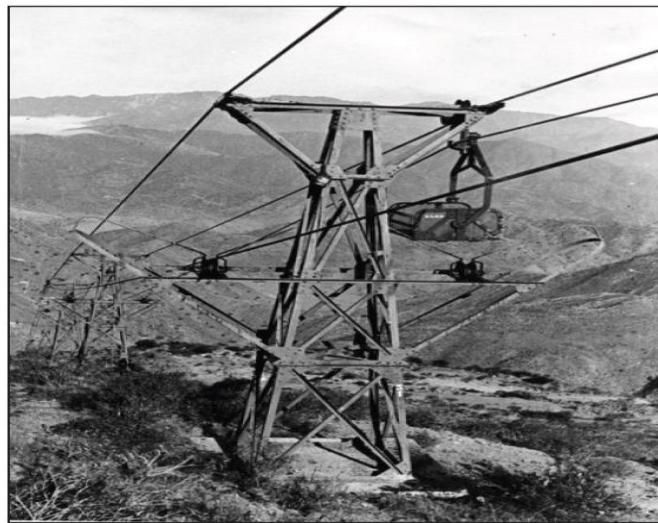


Modern tools such as drones and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) should be employed to carry out surveys in Eritrea's challenging terrain. This approach minimizes costs and ensures accuracy and efficiency in data collection.

Reviving the Cableway would be a monumental undertaking. It requires expertise in transportation, structural and mechanical engineering; financial and market analysis; market analysis, and legal/ regulatory compliance, to assess technical, financial, market, legal and operational viability, along with project management skills to coordinate the study.

In its revived form, the Cableway could serve dual purpose: supporting tourism and freight transport, incorporating the latest technologies through a hybrid system powered by solar energy and diesel.

The revival of the Cableway offers far-reaching benefits for Eritrea. Beyond restoring a piece of national heritage, the project has the potential to stimulate economic growth, boost tourism and create jobs. A functioning Cableway could become a landmark attraction, drawing visitors from across Africa and around the world while also providing a practical transport link for freight between the highlands and the Red Sea coast.



From an economic perspective, the project could generate employment across multiple sectors: Construction, Engineering, Tourism and Maintenance. It would also foster opportunities for local businesses, including hospitality and transportation, stimulating broader economic activity.

Culturally, the Cableway is more than an infrastructure; it is a symbol of Eritrea's ingenuity and historical significance. Its revival would preserve this legacy for future generations and position Eritrea as a leader in heritage conservation and innovative transport solutions in Africa.

Technically, the project should embrace modern and sustainable technologies. Advanced survey methods, including drones and GIS, can optimize route planning and construction, particularly in challenging terrains. By integrating local knowledge with international expertise, the project can be both a safe and efficient system that respects Eritrea's unique landscapes.

The revival of the Cableway should not be viewed in isolation. It can be part of the revival of a comprehensive transport network that includes Eritrea's historic railway and numerous mountain tunnels on the way to Massawa constructed during the Italian era. Together, these infrastructures can create a seamless system for both tourism and freight, offering visitors a spectacular journey through Eritrea's highlands, valleys and coastal regions, while enabling efficient movement of goods.

Strategically, the Cableway can be a cost effective means of transporting fruits, vegetables and livestock from Asmara to Massawa for export market to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. By linking the highlands and the coastal area, the Cableway can turn Eritrea's natural and historical assets into a sustainable economic corridor, combining heritage tourism with modern commercial logistics.

In essence, the Cableway can become a central piece of a holistic development plan: preserving history, enhancing tourism, improving freight efficiency and unlocking the potential of Eritrea's agricultural exports. The potential revival of the Cable way, or more broadly, the restoration of Eritrea's historic infrastructure carries a significant political meaning. It aligns with the government's effort and commitment to national development.

Cableway Eritrea represents a unique convergence of history, engineering, and national identity. Its revival offers Eritrea the chance to honor its past, engage with international partners and develop a sustainable and economically beneficial transport corridor. By integrating modern technology, diverse expertise, and a broad vision that connects heritage, tourism, and commerce, the Cableway can spur and catalyze dynamic growth within the context of the blue economy.

Sep 9, 2025

Shabait.com