

Travails on the Nigerian Roads: The Case of the Luxury Bus Transport Services

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Abstract

Part of irony of Nigerian situation is that most of the infrastructure inherited from the British colonial administration were either not developed or had been left to dilapidate. The condition of Nigerian roads have not ceased to amaze discerning observers and in effect, the roads have been ranked among the worst in the world. A significant portion of post independence studies on transport systems have been devoted to examination of successive Nigerian government`s budgetary allocations and development in the transport sector in general. While there are comprehensive studies on the railway transport sub-sector as a vital colonial legacy in Nigerian economic history in terms of opening up the country for the British commercial enterprise and imperial control, little has been done in looking at the aspect of the hazards on Nigerian road network. This paper marks a significant shift by

examining the risks the Nigerian roads have constituted over time on the motor road transport services. This paper, therefore examines the emergence of Luxury bus service as a new modern road transport mode for long distance travels in the country as well as elucidates on the daily experiences encountered by the operators and commuters. It also looks at the unique resilience of the Luxury bus in transforming the road transport sub-sector in terms of minimally surmounting the myriad risks on Nigerian roads. This paper contends that the advent of the Luxury bus has not only revolutionalized the road transport sub-sector, but invariably dominated the road transport services despite the constraints posed by the Nigerian roads. This paper uses valuable information from the lived experiences of the Luxury bus entrepreneurs, drivers, conductors and commuters especially those that ply the North-South and East-West routes in Nigeria.

Introduction

Road network development in Nigeria dates back to 1906. By 1914 the total kilometre of motorable roads across Nigeria were 3,200km. However in 1992, the total kilometre of motorable federal and state roads rose to 51,428km. The roads are classified into three categories thus: Trunk A are tarred road that link the various regions and are managed by the Federal Government. Trunk B are controlled by States Government and connect various cities in the country. Trunk C are rural roads, usually untarred and controlled by the local authorities. In the early days of road network development in Nigeria, vehicular traffic was sparingly distributed across the available road network. The components that make a functional road traffic environment such as road signs, marking, paintings, cycle paths, pedestrian walkways, and zebra-crossing were not only adequately provided; but were also maintained regularly by the authorities especially in urban centres.¹

However, priority given to road network maintenance gradually dropped immediately after the political independence in 1960. Although more roads were constructed, but without the components that make traffic environment safe as mentioned above and whenever these components were provided they were rarely maintained.

Most of the Nigerian roads were constructed during the oil boom era of the 1970s and 1980s when they were good and fascinating. From the Northern to the Southern parts of the country,

the roads were dazzling and beautiful. During the period, there were massive road construction, rehabilitation and maintenance which made road travel to pleasant and eventful. There were no fears of night marauders, no organised armed robbery attacks, be it in the day or in the night. It was paradise on wheels. The drivers were disciplined, cautious and they strictly adhered to the speed limits which minimised road accidents. While it lasted, commuters had smooth travels. The roads stimulated and enhanced economic activities because traders could travel from one part of the country to another. Trading items and agricultural produce were transported with ease.²

However, as from the 1990s, deterioration sets in, making the once celebrated transport network to rot away. According to transport analysts, the decay of the national road network in the country is as a result of combination of factors of poor maintenance, shoddy jobs by the contractors, increased traffic and population. The consequence, is that a journey of a few hours could lead to endless hours, sometimes commuters have to sleep overnight which has brought untold pains, loss of lives and property to transport operators and passengers.

Nigeria has the largest road network in West Africa and the second largest south of the Sahara with a national network currently estimated to about 194,200 kilometre of which 34,120 kilometre (17.6%) are federal roads; 30,500 kilometre (15.7%), state roads; and 129,580 kilometre (16.7%) local and rural roads. The federal roads network carries about 70% of freight in the country.³

The condition of Nigerian roads is horrible. Nigerian roads rank among the worst in the world. This is evident in the harrowing experiences and agonising tales associated with road travels across the country. Nigerian roads whether Federal or State, have dwelled more on their dilapidated state, characterized by gullies and craters. It was reported that only 15 per cent of the Nigerian`s road network are in good condition. Data from the Federal Road Safety

Corps (FRSC) stated that as at 1998, there were over seven million registered vehicles operating on the Nigerian roads daily and road transport accounts for over 75 per cent of mobility in the country.⁴

The major road transport infrastructure in Nigeria consists of 32,000 km of Federal highways including seven major bridges across rivers Niger and Benue, the Lagos ring road, the third Mainland axial bridge; 30,500 kilometres of state roads; and 130,000 kilometres of local roads. As at June 1996, only 50% of the Federal roads and 20% of the state roads were in reasonably good condition. Only an estimated 5 per cent of the local rural roads were freely motorable.⁵ Meanwhile overuse and lack of maintenance are further eroding the quality of the rest of the Federal highway network.

A survey conducted by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on the state of highways in the country in December 2002 revealed that the road network was estimated at 194,000 kilometres. It was also shown that most of the roads were in bad condition, especially those in the South East and South-South parts of the country. Some of the roads that were constructed over 30 years ago, had not been rehabilitated even once, resulting in major cracks, broken down bridges and numerous potholes. The bad nature of Nigerian roads shortens the life span of the new and fairly used vehicles with cost of maintaining vehicles higher than the cost of purchase. The survey also showed that the Nigerian roads had remained poor for a number of reasons such as faulty designs, lack of good drainage system, use of thin coatings that are easily washed away; excessive use of the road network due to underdeveloped nature of waterways and railways which could have served as alternative means of transport; absence of an articulated road transport policy, and inadequate funds for road maintenance.⁶

The worst aspect of Nigerian road is the intra-city roads. The roads in Abuja, the federal capital territory which used to be noted for tarmac-like roads where one could drive with ease

within the city have caught the bug of pot-hole infestation on its roads. In virtually all the major cities in Nigeria one will be perplexed on the insensitivity of Nigerian governments to road rehabilitation and tempted to ask whether the various State governors or even the President do not drive on these roads daily? In Lagos, the nation`s economic hub, one could see the worst of intra-city roads. Victoria Island for instance, a highbrow area has been turned into a ghetto, a perfect reflection of the state of the roads in Lagos.

The Risks on Nigerian Roads

Crashes are common features of road transportation in Nigeria. Carnage arising from road accidents have become the country`s bane of socio-economic development. Oyeleke (1987) Hardly any day passes without news of loss of lives and property on the highways as a result of road crashes in Nigeria. Various scholars such as Osuagwu (1990), Wakawa (2000), Balogun (2001) and Oyeyemi (2002) have categorise the major causes of road crashes in Nigeria into three: Human, Mechanical and Environmental factors.⁷

A basic assumption is that the human factor occupies a very high rate in the causative index of road crashes in Nigeria. The following are the human causes of road crashes:

- i. Dangerous driving / over speeding
- ii. Stress, fatigue, sleep, Road Accident Immunity Delusion Syndrome (RAIDS).
- iii. Drunk driving / drug abuse
- iv. Poor eyesight / poor driving skill
- v. Illiteracy
- vi. Over- confidence, carelessness, recklessness
- vii. Affluence / under-aged drivers.⁸

Road crashes are known to consume more human and material resources in developing countries including Nigeria. This truism is supported by the preponderance of human wrecks that populate our hospitals, as well as horrifying road crash data from the Nigeria Police and the Federal Road Safety Corps as well as other tales that inundate our newspapers daily. This is seen in the tables below:

Table 1: Summary of Road Crashes in Nigeria from 1990-1999 and 2000-2001

Table 1: 1990-1999

Year	Total Cases Reported	Persons Killed	Persons Injured
1990	21721	8154	23687
1991	22498	9525	22686
1992	22909	9620	24508
1993	21412	9454	25759
1994	18218	7420	24146
1995	17000	6647	17938
1996	16793	6364	14554
1997	9034	3616	15290
1998	16046	6538	10786
1999	12424	5429	17341
Total	178,055	72,767	196,695

Table 2: 2000-2001

Year	Total Cases Reported	Persons Killed	Persons Injured

2000	12705	6521	20677
2001	13801	8012	23249
Total	26,506	14,533	43,926

Source: Federal Road Safety Corps Sector Command Headquarters, Abuja, 2001

The above table 1 shows that between 1990 and 1999, a total number of 178,005 cases of road crashes were reported. Out of this number, 72,767 persons were killed while 196,695 persons were injured. In Table 2, between 2000 and 2001, 26,506 cases were reported, out of which 14,533 were killed and 43,926 were injured. It is discernable from the data that there was a reduction in the number of persons killed. Between 1990 and 1999, it was 178,055 and between 2000 and 2001, it dropped significantly to 26,506 persons.

The activities of armed bandits is one of the greatest menace to road transport in Nigeria. The robbers carried out their nefarious activities and dastardly act raping, maiming, killing, snatching money and property from the road users. The robbers are designated as the ‘King of the Roads’ in Nigeria. This made the passengers to be in perpetual fear of being dispossessed of their money, personal belongings, harmed or killed. Inter-state travels had been hazardous and risky. For example, armed robbery attacks had been a frequent spectacle on the Port-Harcourt-Onitsha-Kano highways and Lagos-Ibadan-Kaduna-Kano highways. One of the devastating incidents was the armed robbers attack on F.G. Onyenwe Transport service, one of the luxury buses on the 17th of September, 1999 along Auchi-Lokoja road. Many passengers lost their lives at gun point and others were seriously wounded. Another incident of armed robbery attack was on Ekene dili Chukwu luxury bus along Asaba-Benin road en-route Lagos. The passengers were robbed twice on the way before reaching Lagos.⁹ Another scary armed robbery incident which took place in Ogun State in 2009 in which a driver of a Scanian truck with registration number XN808 Ben unknowingly ran over

commuters ordered to lie face down by the robbers. The accident involved a luxury bus in the fleet of Young Shall Grow Transport Company where 19 passengers were killed, while only two were rescued unhurt. The employment of police escorts by the transport companies has failed to reduce incidence of the men of the underworld who are rarely apprehended.¹⁰

The result is that the Nigerian roads had been left to degenerate over years. Examples of such roads abound but the one that readily comes to mind in recent times is the Benin-Ore Expressway which has become a nightmare to the drivers and commuters. It is the only road that connects the western with the eastern parts of the country. Dieziani Allison-Madueke, the former Minister of Works, who visited the Benin-Ore Expressway in 2009 was shocked by the extent of devastation and promised to rehabilitate it. This has not been done because after Mrs Allison-Madueke`s visit, passengers still recount their harrowing experiences. Accidents happened frequently on the road and passengers ended up spending longer hours on the road, as a result of traffic jam caused by the bad portions of the road.¹¹

Frank Nneji, the Managing Director of ABC transport, one of the prominent luxury bus transport service that ply the route on daily basis narrated the ordeal commuters went through on the Benin-Ore road in this way, "it is saddening that people leave Lagos early but never get to the East until after 36 hours. The journey that supposed to take four hours had stretched to several hours". Frank Nneji, who is also the secretary of the Association of Luxury Bus Owners of Nigeria, (ALBON) had, in a communiqué jointly signed by him and the ALBON President, Prince Ejike Okoli, called for an urgent intervention programme on the Ore-Benin Expressway to ensure that normal flow of traffic was restored. He stated that, "as a way of ameliorating the hardship faced by travellers, ALBON members often bought chippings and brick objects with which its members filled and made the bad portions of the road passable".¹²

The media is replete with gory tales of robbers raiding road travellers and disposing them of goods and cash and at times their lives. Even in Northern Nigeria where the issue of highway robbery used to be unheard of or minimal, armed robbery attacks are now rampant. The question is where are the law enforcement agents, what is the use of all those numerous checkpoints if they cannot check these robberies or at least apprehend them after operations.

The bad state of the road has had enormous adverse effect on the lifespan of the vehicles. In a bid to escape the stress on the road and avoid being trapped in traffic, some drivers often choose to navigate narrow roads through the bush and in the process some of them at times fell victims to armed robbers. According to Ezekiel Uzodinma, a staff of one of the transport companies in Lagos stated that robbers often took advantage of the bad road situation to wreck havoc on the commuters. Armed bandits benefit from the bad roads because they often operate at spots where the road was rough and did not allow for speed. Although the contract for the renovation of the Benin-Ore road was awarded to Reynolds Construction Company and Borini Prono in 2009 the road is currently undergoing construction and commuters who ply the road still experience some difficulties.¹³

Travelling from Lagos to Abuja also has its own discomfort and hardship especially within Ekiti State and Kogi State axis owing to the poor nature of the highway. It is saddening that Lokoja-Abuja road which connects the western part of the country with Abuja, the nation's capital and other northern states such as Kano and Kaduna is not dualised. The highway is still a single lane full of pot-holes and craters despite the heavy traffic that ply the road on daily basis. It is one of the most dangerous and dreadful route in Nigerian highways.

In the eastern part of the country, another road that had caused a lot of trauma to motorists is the Enugu-Onitsha highway. The road is full of potholes which had led to many accidents. Although contract for the rehabilitation of the road had been awarded to construction

companies, but not much progress has been made. Passengers and drivers still have to endure the discomfort that travelling on the road entails as well as the damage to vehicles with its attendant high maintenance costs.

The bad roads across the country which have been awarded for rehabilitation or construction but which have not translated into joy for road users were: Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway, Calabar-Ugep-Ogoja Katsina-Ala road (section I), Calabar; Ugep, Ogoja Katsina Ala road (section 11) and the 9th Mile Otukpo-Makurdi Road. Others include the Mararaba-Pambeguwa-Saminaka, Jos road, section I in Kaduna State, Mararaba Pambeguwa Saminaka, Jos road, (section II), the Gombe, Numan, Yola, (section II), the Maiduguri- Bama Gwoza Hong road, (section II) in Borno State, the Kano-Katsina, Kaura Namoda, Jiba road, (section II) in Zamfara and Katsina states. There is also Kano-Katsina-Kaura Namoda, Jiba Road, (section IV) in Zamfara State.¹⁴ The contract for the rehabilitation and construction of Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, another major busy route has been awarded to Bi-Courtney construction firm but nothing significant has been seen beyond the billboards announcing the intention to do so.

A journey on many of these roads leaves one with unpleasant memories. The magnitude of the dilapidation is a reflection of the neglect they had suffered for years. The issue of neglect, as it were, has little to do with lack of funds, but more with corruption, either through collaboration of contractors and government officials who choose to do shoddy jobs, for their own selfish gain, or embezzlement of funds meant for the projects. Conservative estimates put the cost of funds voted for road repairs, rehabilitation or construction since 1999 at over one trillion naira, with nothing much to show for it. Road infrastructure across the length and breadth of Nigeria would not have reached this dreadful and horrible state if the successive

Nigerian governments had enunciated more viable and proactive alternative transport systems such as the rail and water transport systems.

Apart from the intra and inter-city travels, the nefarious activities of the law enforcement agents on the roads constitute their own problem to road users. The law enforcement agents are like pests on the Nigerian roads. A journey from Lagos to Lokoja, for instance, one could count over twenty (20) checkpoints. There are mobile ones, stationary ones and the ones that suddenly pop out from nowhere and force motorists to a shuddering halt with all the risk of accident that accompany such unplanned sudden stops. The idea of instituting checkpoints on the roads was a direct response to the phenomenal increase in the activities of robbers on the roads. At the onset Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief when these law enforcement agents were first put on the roads, but later the law enforcement agents grossly abuse the noble idea.¹⁵

Apart from the law enforcement agents, one need to reckon with the activities of Nigerian Federal Road Safety officials. In response to the endemic carnage on the roads, the federal government decided to establish the FRSC on 18th February, 1988. The FRSC is saddled with enforcement of safety measures on the motorists such as ensuring that drivers fasten their seat belts, maintain speed limits and comply with other road safety measures.¹⁶ In carrying their duties, FRSC officials mount road blocks on the various strategic locations and bad patches on the road where drivers have to slow down. The setting up of FRSC was a beautiful idea, but some of the officials have deviated much from their responsibilities.

A recent encounter by this writer on a trip from Kano in Northern Nigeria to Asaba, Delta State capital in Southern Nigeria lend credence to their menace. A journey that supposed to last between eight and nine hours stretched to eighteen hours. This was not caused by accidents or falling vehicle on the highway that may have blocked the road, but by a hold-up at Lokoja in which motorists were made to slow down and moved at a snail speed. Abuja-

Lokoja highway is the only route that links Abuja, the nation`s capital with both eastern and western Nigeria on one hand and northern Nigeria on the other hand. The hold-up was exacerbated by the rush of the commuters from southern Nigeria amidst sporadic eruption of post-election crises in northern Nigeria in which many southerners were fleeing from the northern cities and villages for their homelands in the South-west, South-east and South-south parts of the country.¹⁷ Had it been the Abuja-Lokoja road is dualised, this sad experience would not have been happened or even minimised. The amount of man hour wasted in traffic hold-up could easily be avoided if not the dereliction of duties by the Federal Road Safety officials.

Reckless driving is a major human causative factor for road crashes in Nigeria. Nigerian drivers hardly learn how to drive. A few established driving schools in Nigeria are neglected and only patronized with absolute disdain. For example, one can buy a car without having a driver`s license. Likewise, one can buy a driving license without ever driven before. Traffic regulations are in our statute books, but most Policemen and Traffic Wardens do not know the rules that should apply on the roads. How can the motorists and other road users be expected to obey the rules when the traffic rules when the officials responsible for their implementation are ignorant of the rules and regulations. This writer had observed severally that Nigerian Police and Road safety officials at various check points across the country rarely only check the driving license of motorist, they only do so when some of them proved recalcitrant in giving them money.

Most Nigerian drivers seems to be angry and impatient while driving. For any little provocation, they will abandon the steering wheels of their vehicles to exchange fisticuffs, while holding up other road users for hours without qualms until their anger was appeased. Molue (long buses that ply the roads in Lagos) drivers in Lagos could jump road

embankments and speed down the opposite lanes without minding the implication of such sudden act could have on the on coming traffic.

There is poor culture of the use of seat belts in Nigeria. Most drivers do not adhere to the safety measures of ensuring that they put on their seat belts despite the efforts of the FRSC to enforce its implementation. Nigerian motorists are yet to realize that seat belts are necessary for their own safety. The same applies to the cyclists popularly known as “*Okada*” in our local parlance. The use of crash helmet was introduced across the country in 2009, but that is a joke for most cyclists. Most Nigerian cyclists in their ignorance-laden beliefs of religious sheepishness, feel that “it is not their portion to die by *Okada* accidents”, while at the same time constituting threats that diminish their chances of survival in the event of an accident. Most of the accidents caused by the cyclists are daily spectre at the National Orthopaedic Hospitals in Kano and Enugu and various morgues across the country. At the National Orthopaedic hospital, Dala in Kano for instance, there is a ward designated as “*Okada* Ward”, where patients who had accident from motor cycle were admitted and treated.¹⁸

The cyclists float driving rules with impunity and drive with reckless abandon which has lead to lost of lives. Cyclists ply their dare-devilry and this gives one the impression that most of them are simply suicidal forks. They are the greatest temptation on the Nigerian roads. In Kano, cyclists had blatantly refused to use the crash helmet despite its enforcement by the Federal Road Safety Corps in 2009.¹⁹ However, most of the states especially in the southern part of the country had complied.

Indiscriminate parking of vehicles on the highways is another major travail on the Nigerian roads. Damaged and disabled vehicles are left in the middle of the roads without warning signs to other road users. The worst culprits are the haulage lorries, trailers, petroleum trucks and other big vehicles that are in good condition. This is worst at night, especially when

visibility is bad, and when there is lack of traffic light. This has contributed in causing road crashes in various highways in Nigeria.²⁰

The social decadence in our society has also finds its way into our behaviour on Nigerian roads. The wealthy and political class feel that it is their right to run every body off the road with their retinue of thugs and aides. They break the traffic codes with impunity and at times allow their thugs to bounce on anybody who fails to go off the road. A typical example is the ugly event that took place on November 3, 2008 when Uzoma Okere, a young lady was beaten for failure to clear her car off the road when Mr. Arogunade, a Naval officer was passing.²¹ The Nigerian Police use the blaring sirens to stampede other road users of their lanes. Some of the State governors, ministers and other top government officials and their coterie of entourages are the worst culprits in this regard because they always ignore the traffic codes on our roads and stampede other road users.

Insecurity due to riots, civil protests and ethno-religious disturbances have constituted a great threat to the passengers. Eruption of series of sectarian crises had led to enormous loss of lives and property. The crises had rendered thousands of people homeless as well as forced other survivors to relocate to other cities that are relatively peaceful. In Kano for example, between 1980 and 2004, there were more than six ethno-religious disturbances. There was the *Maitatsine* uprising in 1980, followed by a religious riot on 30th October, 1982. There was a religious riot from 14th to 16th October in 1991 followed closely by the 1994 and 1995 civil disturbances, which claimed many lives and property. In 1999, there was an ethnic clash in Kano between the Yoruba and Hausa, coupled with the general state of insecurity endangered by the launching of *Sharia* legal system with the enthronement of democratic governance President Olusegun Obasanjo in the same year. There was the sectarian crisis in Kano in 2004 which was a reprisal of the Jos sectarian crisis.²²

In the recent post-presidential election crises that engulfed the northern parts of Nigeria on 16th June, 2011 carried out by the youth mob in which innocent people from Southern Nigerian were brutally killed and their property looted and burnt. Luxury buses was one of the major targets of the rioters. They set ablaze a luxury bus that was coming from Onitsha to Jos at Bauchi-Jos road after killing and maiming the commuters. In Zaria, a luxury bus from Onitsha to Kano was also burnt by the rioters. During the period, various transport operators decided to suspend travelling from Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Bauchi, Maiduguri, Yola, Katsina , Sokoto and other northern cities to the southern parts of the country. Transport operators had for the umpteenth time been victims of the problems of insecurity perpetrated by the unemployed folks such as the *Yandaba* in Kano and other northern cities.²³

The economic losses the transporters suffered at such periods of religious extremism and ethnic inspired violence as well as civil unrest were huge. It is important to note that during these incessant uprisings, the offices of the transport firms were attacked These crises had compelled some transporters to withdraw their transport services and relocate to cities where political and religious situations hold prospects for security for lives and property.²⁴

The Emergence of Luxury Bus Transport Services

Private sector participation has been very significant in the road transport industry in Nigeria. Motor transport was established in Nigeria through the sheer enterprise of Africans notably William Akinola Dawodu in Lagos.²⁵ Today, the vast majority of road transport operations belong to the private sector. It accounts for more than 90% of urban and non-urban road transport services. In matters concerning other sectors of the transport industry, (the railways, airways, national shipping and the ports) the Federal Government exercises some measure of control in the provision of services, pricing and investment policies.

The Igbo were believed to be one of the pioneers of modern transportation business in Nigeria. Luxury bus transport business commenced in the early 1970s after the Nigerian Civil War. The improved transportation system facilitated the massive migration of the Igbo in the preceding years. After the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, some Igbos who fled from Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano and other parts of the country returned and resettled in their former place of abode.²⁶

Prior to the emergence of luxury buses as new mode of long distance travels, motor transport service was relatively more developed in Igboland. Modern motor transport business in Igboland was pioneered by individuals like Egwuatu, D.D Onyemelukwe, J.C Ulas, Louis Philip Ojukwu and Chief Augustine Ilodibe. Motor transport service further witnessed considerable expansion as a result of the advancement and improvement in the economy coupled with the enormous demand for transport. The early Igbo transporters owned most of the commercial vehicles and effectively dominated the road transport sub-sector in the 1960s. The vehicles used were Austin, Morris, Steam-Roller and Ford.²⁷ Igbo migration to other parts of the country in the 1970s coincided with the period of increase demand for motor transport. The roads were relatively better than the previous period and many Igbos owned vehicles which enhanced their movement. Hence, modern transport facilities enhanced their movement and regular settlement in various parts of the country.

The emergence of luxury bus transport service began in the 1970s. Its advent was a landmark which added a new dimension to the motor transport sub-sector. Luxury bus is well air-conditioned with complete television sets and a good music to enhance full relaxation which makes passengers` journey pleasurable. Speed is its greatest asset as compared to the previous transport modes and it makes journeys a matter of hours and not days or weeks. Being a new trend in motor transport industry and the luxury buses came in different models: Brazilian Volvo, Mercedes Benz, Concord, Marco polo, Buscca and Scanis models.²⁸

There was a whole policy of importation of vehicles in Nigeria in 1975. The luxury buses were imported from Greyhound Motor company in the United States of America by Leventis Motors, which was granted license to import vehicles into the country. The luxury bus entrepreneurs import their vehicles from Brazil. The Brazilian's Volvo and Mercedes Benz products are strong and therefore good for Nigerian roads. Other models like 0364 and 0368 mini-buses and 1414 are locally manufactured by Anambra Motor Manufacturing Company (ANAMCO) in Enugu.²⁹

In Onitsha, Luxury bus transportation service was pioneered by P.N. Emerah Motor Transport Services and late Chief Augustine Ilodibe, the owner of Ekene Dili Chukwu Transport Company.³⁰ They represent the "first generation" of transporters in the luxury bus business. The success and competence of early transporters inspired new entrants to the motor road transport services. The new-comers in the luxurious bus transport business were motivated by the need to explore the abundant economic potentials that exist in Onitsha, Lagos, Kaduna Jos, Kano and elsewhere. The new entrants constitute the "second generation" of luxurious bus transport service. Some of them include Emenike Motors, Micmerah International Agency, G.U.O Okeke transport service, F.G Onyenwe, Dan Dollars, The Young Shall Grow Motors and ABC Transport Services amongst others.

The dominance of the Igbo luxury bus entrepreneurs in the motor road transport industry in various parts of the country. The post civil war social and economic realities made the Igbo displayed exceptional resourcefulness and enterprising vigour to re-established themselves in the mainstream of Nigerian economy in the post war years and have contributed immensely to the development of motor transport enterprises in Nigeria.

Resilience of the Luxury Buses on Nigerian Roads

This writer interviewed a cross section of staff from different transport companies on the reason behind passengers' preference of luxury to other motor transport models like the mini-buses, taxis, lorries and Station wagon, Peugeot cars. According to Obiebo,

*There are many reasons, often the frequent operation programme is the deciding factor because this is how we recognize and reward numerous customers who patronize us. What it boils down to in the end is that customers perceive luxury bus as safe, reliable, faster and they are convinced that we offer services that give them pleasure.*³¹

It is glaring that passengers feel relaxed with luxury buses as compared to other means of motor transport, the display of excellent personal contact that ensured between the transport operators and passengers is the medium of giving passengers efficient services. Explaining further, Obiebo remarks:

*It is not just what you serve, it is how you serve it. That typically Igbo friendliness and resourcefulness that respective luxury bus staff know how to display, seems to work in this respect nationwide.*³²

Another informant concurred that customers/passengers preference for the luxury buses is because they are reliable and safe. In this respect, conductors go through the buses checking very carefully to ensure that all the passengers have adopted various safety measures such as fastening their seat belts help create a feeling of safety. A luxury bus that is clean inside and out also gives passengers a feeling of safety. He added that punctuality is another plausible reason. Lending credence to this assertion Obiebo avers that:

*All passengers do not want to be left in the lurch. They have all put their lives, and their private schedules into our hands.*³³

The use of police escorts has been identified as one of the major reasons for the commuters' preference of travelling with Luxury buses. The engagement of escort has helped to reduce the menace of the armed bandits. The escorts had in many occasions provided security to the operators and commuters. In so many instances, they had forestall the activities of the armed bandits on the Nigerian highways.

Another advantage is that the luxury buses are more gas-efficient, cleaner-burning and make lesser noise. The engines of the buses are equipped with a special, highly effective sound insulation materials. The engines are also equipped with highly innovative materials, ensuring that the entire fleet produce optimal noise reduction. These help in the long-run to reduce the maintenance costs by the transporters. In this connection, one of the transport owners adds that:

Our industry is still developing and undergoing constant improvement.

*It is assumed that in a few years a new class of buses twice as silent will be invented. Emissions from their engines will be lower.*³⁴

The above observations shows that passengers/customers preference to the luxury buses is informed by a product of salient factors of safety, comfortability, reliability, speed and most importantly, punctuality.

The dominance of the Igbos in the luxury bus transport enterprises is attributed to the earlier knowledge and familiarity of the business. There is however, a widely accepted belief by other ethnic groups in Nigeria such as Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Edo, Tiv, Idoma and so on that he luxury bus transport business and other auxiliary businesses-spare-parts, mechanics remain an exclusive reserve of the Igbo. But one of the transport owners debunked this view as a mere misconception and argues that:

Transport and spare-parts businesses are being dominated by Nnewi

*people and not all the Igbos, Louis Philip Ojukwu opened the gateway for Nnewi people many decades ago and today Nnewi people control the sectors as Nnewi town is a famous indigenous spare-parts fabricating and trading centre.*³⁵

With the advent of luxury buses in the 1970s, they have become a common feature in the major highways across the country. They shuttle long-distance routes from the Eastern to Western parts as well as Southern to the Northern parts of the country. They are equally by virtue of their contribution to the growth of Nigerian economy, a possible alternative to air-travel over long distances.

Luxury buses ply the major urban areas in Nigeria such as Lagos, Ibadan, Onitsha, Aba, Port-Harcourt, Enugu, Jos, Kaduna, Zaria and Kano. The major road networks are Lagos to Kano and the alternative routes from Port-Harcourt Onitsha to Kano. In the North, there is the Kaduna-Zaria-Kano. There are other major routes from Jos extending southwards towards Enugu and Port-Harcourt.³⁶ There are the Port-Harcourt-Aba-Onitsha-Benin-Lagos routes.

The Kano-Lagos and Kano-Onitsha-Aba-Port-Harcourt routes remain the busiest ones as the direction have regular traffic than any other major routes in the country. To this end, virtually all passengers often use these routes to their various destinations. This is an indication of the importance these two major routes serve as centre points of commercial highways in the country. Improvement in the Nigerian commercial activities meant the upsurge of transport activities in these routes as the bulk of finished goods and raw materials and traders are conveyed from Kano and other parts of the North down to the urban areas in the south.

In spite of the enormous contributions of the Igbo Luxury bus entrepreneurs in surmounting the myriad challenges posed by the Nigerian roads and by extension revamping the Nigerian economy, the transport sub-sector is confronted with numerous problems.

The motor transport industry has been facing other difficulties, some of these bordered on the general high cost for the procurement of spare parts for the vehicles, high cost of vehicles, bad roads and lack of adequate investment by the private and public sectors. As a result, transporters throughout the country have been battling with maintenance costs on their vehicles, faking of spare parts, which damage vehicles and inadequate funds to meet the ever-increasing demand for more vehicles.

Commuters have been the sole recipients of the transporters problems as they daily witnessed the arbitrary fare hikes and struggles for space in over-crowded buses. Worse still, they are not able to travel at the actual day they had wanted to travel particularly in cases of non-availability of transport services during Christmas and New year celebrations and other festivities.³⁸ These problems are serious and restrictive of road transport in large cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna, Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Port-Harcourt and Kano.

Recommendations on How to Revamp the Road Transport Sub-sector in Nigeria

Policy inconsistency by the successive Federal governments has been identified as one of the major problems responsible for the poor state of transport in the country. The transport industry noted for its high potentials has not performed creditably well because of the government's lack of vision and focus towards the industry.³⁷

A developing country like Nigeria needs a highly developed and well functioning transport network. For a country as greatly dependent on domestic and foreign trade as Nigeria, this is very vital. The tragedy on Nigerian roads is that the Federal Government keeps wasting millions of naira in the yearly budgetary allocations, but the rot still remain. The potholes, craters, the activities of the law enforcement officers and the hoodlums and innumerable hazards on the roads. This has made many Nigerians to engage in bouts of prayers before embarking on any journey on the roads.

The vast majority of Nigerian national transport movements are performed through the road and air transport sub-sectors, with railway and inland waterways playing important, although secondary roles. Considering the relative importance which successive Nigerian governments have attached to road transportation and huge amount of money allocated to the sector, little has been achieved. The transport industry is still characterized by acute shortage of vehicles, lack of adequate spare parts, hike in price of fuel.³⁹

In recognition of the poor state of transport in the country, the former Military President, Ibrahim Babangida decided to launch the National Transport Policy in 1988 as a pragmatic measure to address the difficulties in the transport industry. Acknowledging this perennial challenge in the transport sector, President Ibrahim Babangida asserted that:

*One of the greatest challenges of our time is to conceptualize, design and operate workable systems by which the mass of humanity inhabiting various human or urban centres can move around and attend to their various occupations and social obligations with relative ease.*⁴⁰

Similarly, Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua had challenged the stakeholders in the transport sector to find alternative sources of funding, construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of the nation's road network. He posited that the challenge had become necessary because of the prevailing economic realities in the country which constrained the federal government from performing the function of a regulator, and yet, remain responsible for the maintenance of existing road infrastructure, while developing new ones.⁴¹

The transport industry should be overhauled and excellent transport system provided to bring positive results. The establishment of an efficient National Transport Policy to provide a common framework for the transport industry is necessary. This would provide policies that would include a rational allocation of money to the industry to ensure efficiency and provide proper guidelines for future investments in the transport sector.⁴²

Nigerian government should endeavour to initiate policies in order to minimize the influx of the fairly used vehicles otherwise known as “*Tokunbo*” or “Belgium” into the country. The influx of fairly used vehicles into Nigeria has undermined the economy of the country and subsequently turned the country into a dumping ground for these vehicles. Government should enunciate policy guidelines that would standardize the influx of these vehicles into the country. The use of the fake spare-parts imported from foreign countries have damaged some vehicles and shortened their life span. This explains why most of the vehicles have had to be disposed of by some transporters, having outlived their usefulness after only a few years.⁴³

The Nigerian government should direct the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) to broaden the responsibility of the Rescue Department of the Commission by establishing a National Emergency Rescue Project. This is to give prompt and adequate attention to victims of accidents. The establishment of the Rescue Department should be extended to all the states and local governments in the country. The commission should be encouraged to establish the Road Side Accident Clinics in major towns on the major highways in towns such as Shagamu on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and Birnin-Yaro, along Kaduna-Kano Expressway. There is also need to provide well-equipped accident clinics with standby ambulance in the following areas on major highways at Asaba, Birnin-Gwari, Talata Marafa, Akwanga and Katagum.⁴⁴

The revival of good road culture in the form of modification of round-about, crash prevention guidance, painting of Zebra crossings and traffic monitoring teams would help reduce road accidents in the major highways. Other measures include the introduction of traffic rules as practised in advanced countries like the off-side rules, humps and bumps. The resuscitation of lane-markings equally would help minimize road accidents.⁴⁵ There is need for improvement in road planning. This is because roads in Nigeria have no place for pedestrians, bicycle users and even the disabled. It is a vestige of our colonial history which need to be reversed.

The transport infrastructure in the country should be improved and expanded. Priority attention should be given to extending North-South transport links so as to link the various parts of the country and promote efficient economic ties. The government should ensure prompt maintenance of the major highways and dualize the single lane ones.⁴⁶ Although, the financial implications of these proposals are tremendous, the establishment of Transport Development Bank would help to alleviate financial burden in the transport sector. The bank when established, would promote balanced development of both the public and private sectors of the transport system through the provision of loans and grants.⁴⁷

Government should be able to equip our law enforcement agents in such a way that they can effectively police our roads. A situation where a band of robbers would waylay a luxury bus in broad daylight and robbed the passengers for several hours without any law enforcement agent coming to the rescue is a sight that leaves one numb with fear. A lot of people believed that the problems with our law enforcement are poor remuneration, poor equipment, poor welfare and working conditions and utter neglect by the authorities, which demoralized them and make hem to be inefficient.

The afore-mentioned problems could be militating factors to the proper functioning of the law enforcement agents, but the most important factor is lack of commitment to work. With commitment to work, all the other inadequacies can be managed. Men of Nigerian police force are only interested in asking for “wetin you carry” (which in our local parlance connotes seeking for bribe) and one keep wondering the number of criminals that could stroll past the Police checkpoints just because they can “offer the right thing”. Even when the Police are given patrol cars, they rarely patrol with them, rather they use them to mount checkpoints such that armed bandits can find out where the roadblocks are and they move away from them and carry out their operations elsewhere. Many security experts have

observed that the only efficient police force is a mobile one that has modern communication gadgets, not a police force that is bugged down at checkpoints. Between one checkpoint and another, a lot of crime could be carried out and what the criminals need to do is to drive safely past the next checkpoint after completing their operations.

The road marshals, traffic inspection officers, the police and soldiers, who mount illegal road blocks in order to extort money from the transporters on highways should be penalized and persecuted or even sacked from the force when detected. The police and other law enforcement agencies should be well-equipped to enhance timely response to armed robbery attacks on the various highways.⁴⁸

The Zonal Director of Federal Road Maintenance Agency (FERMA), South-West zone, Engineer Olatayo Komolafe, in an interview with *Saturday Tribune* pointed out that the primary mandate of FERMA was maintenance of the federal roads only and not to reconstruct and that FERMA was constrained by lack of funds. Most of these roads were built in the mid-70s and the early 80s and the life span of a standard highway was about 15 years, and that therefore virtually all these roads had deteriorated beyond maintenance. He further posited that the function of FERMA was to bring the deteriorating structure back to its original state. He, however, stated that in view of the collapse of these roads, what the roads need is rehabilitation or reconstruction depending on the level of deterioration.⁴⁹ Most of the drivers in Nigeria need to be re-schooled on the art of driving. Some should be made to undergo a mandatory eye and psychological test to ascertain their suitability for driving. Driving schools should be re-introduced and strictly implemented for anyone who intends to drive on Nigerian roads. Modalities for obtaining drivers` license should be made more strict and should be only given after completion of a driving course in a government

approved driving school. Any driver caught driving while drunk should be banned for life from driving because it is an act of irresponsibility that a driver should drink while driving.

The Nigerian Police should ensure full motorised patrols on Nigerian highways to stem the tide of the menace of the armed bandits as well as rescue accident victims. The motorised patrol posts all over the highways should give responses to distress calls. Plain-clothed policemen should be made to patrol the highways and give intelligence reports on the activities of the robbers. In this way, armed robbery operations would be thwarted or aborted.

The police force should mobilize some ambulances and recovery vehicles (towing vans) in order to remove “crashed vehicles that might ordinarily cause hold-ups while the ambulances will be used to convey accident victims to the hospital. The Police and Road safety officials should exhibit a high standard of behaviour and accountability. They should be empowered and challenged to be alive to their duties in ensuring that our roads are not dead traps or slaughter slabs where Nigerians killed on daily basis.

Conclusion

This paper has identified the risks on the Nigerian roads which the transport operators and passengers encounter on daily basis in the course of their socio-economic endeavours. Apart from bad roads which constitute problems to travellers, the activities of armed robbers and insecurity during sectarian and civil strife have been identified as the major threats to the road users. Most travellers are in perpetual fear of armed robbery and mob attacks. Many drivers and passengers have different sad tales to tell after their encounters with the armed bandits and rioters. Most passengers had bore the scars and the attendant agonies of the incidents for the rest of their lives.

It has been demonstrated in this paper that the introduction of the luxury bus service has helped to surmount some of the hassles commuters were subjected to during their travels. Although, more prone to armed robbery and mob attacks in eruption of ethno-religious inspired crises and civil disturbances, the salient unique features of the luxury bus over other road transport modes are speed, reliability, affordable fares charges and comfort. This has made the luxury bus transport service to dominate the long distance travels across the country because they traverse virtually all the major cities and state capitals in Nigeria.

The collapse of infrastructure and other economic indices have really taken its toll on Nigerians and one area that is devastating is the state of the Nigerian roads and the attendant problems it created for the people. Travelling on Nigerian roads has been dreadfully agonising to travellers. Bad roads are a common feature which dot the landscape of the country despite the huge amount of money being budgeted for rehabilitation, reconstruction and maintenance of the roads. The impact has remained grossly unfelt.

The categories of transport problems have been identified and this paper has clearly established that transport infrastructure have not kept pace with development in Nigeria. There is need for urgent policy measures to addressing the prevailing transport problems in Nigeria. A synopsis of the causes of the decay in Nigerian road networks are lack of political will by federal authorities for not have persecuted any corrupt officials, heavy vehicular traffic, the failure of relevant government agencies such as FERMA to maintain the roads on short or long-term basis, the shoddy jobs done by incompetent contractors, sheer embezzlement of public funds meant for road maintenance or construction by the political office-holders and their surrogates are the major causative elements why many of the roads in Nigeria have been in state of decadence. Since the advent of Nigeria's democratic in 1999, nobody has been brought to book for the decrepit state of the Nigerian roads despite the huge

funds being earmarked in the annual budgetary allocation. Tony Anenih, the erstwhile Minister for Works during Obasanjo`s administration was reported to have spent 300 billion naira on federal roads in Nigeria but the Federal government has not probe Anenih or any other minister for misappropriating the funds meant for construction of new roads and rehabilitation of existing ones.

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