



Towards effective urban transportation system in Lagos, Nigeria: Commuters' opinions and experiences

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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 11 September 2012

Keywords:

Lagos
Nigeria
Commuters' survey
Traffic congestion
Urban transportation

ABSTRACT

The economic and financial sustainability of cities is inextricably linked with the viability of the city's transportation system. The viability of the system can be enhanced through an understanding of commuters' opinions and experiences. Using Lagos, Nigeria, as a case study, the purpose of this study therefore is to investigate commuters' opinions and experiences about several elements of the city's transportation system.

The results of the survey indicate that commercial vehicles represent the dominant mode of transportation in the city while the most-frequently mentioned causes and locations of traffic congestion are "law and order" issues such as motorists who pick up and drop off passengers on the roadway, informal economic entrepreneurs who occupy bus stops, and police and traffic warden checkpoints. Most of the respondents reported experiencing "road rage" during their daily commute, and the reported reasons are mostly "law and order" issues.

Most of the respondents indicate that they at least "sometimes" stay late at work in order to avoid evening time traffic congestion, and virtually all the respondents support the provision of information about traffic situation either as electronic messaging or on radio stations. The study offers suggestions that can be used to reduce traffic congestion, and improve the quality of commuters' transportation experiences.

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1. Introduction

The economic and financial sustainability of cities in both developed and developing countries are inextricably linked with the viability of the city's transportation system. Unfortunately elements of urban transportation systems in industrialized countries differ considerably from those of developing countries. Consequently, strategies developed in industrialized countries to enhance the viability of the transportation systems cannot be unilaterally transferred to developing countries including those in sub-Saharan Africa (Agina, 2007). The need therefore arises to obtain information that can be used to develop effective and efficient urban transportation policies that are relevant to sub-Saharan Africa (Osula, 2002). Specifically, Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) emphasized the need to provide policies geared towards effective, safe and reliable transportation services for Lagos, Nigeria (LASTMA, 2005).

Using Lagos, as a case study, the purpose of this study therefore is to investigate commuters' viewpoints and experiences about several elements of the city's transportation system

including modes of transportation used by commuters, causes and locations of traffic congestion, and the extent and causes of "road rage" (informal term used to describe drivers' expression of violent behaviors such as yelling insults and obscenities). As Goodwin and Lyons (2010) argued, citizens as commuters represent an invaluable source of information, and that a good understanding of public perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the transport system is necessary for both democratic accountability and for developing effective public policy. In addition, public involvement through surveys, focus groups and open discussions is necessary in order to meet commuters' expectations for safe and reliable transportation services. Furthermore, seeking out citizens' perspectives is consistent with the literature on urban planning and development that has consistently argued for open and accessible approach (Murtagh, 1999). The contention being that planning theory must recognize the need for communication and discourse between urban transportation planners and community residents.

2. Study area: Lagos

Lagos includes Lagos Island and several small and older urban settlements such as Isolo, Ebute Metta, Ajegunle, Bariga, Mushin,

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Maryland, and Agege. More recently the urban settlements that form Lagos metropolitan area include Abule Egba, Satellite Town, Egbe, Ikotun, Ijanikin, and Oto Awori, among others. Many of these settlements such as Isolo, Egbe, Oto Awori and Ikotun were earlier recognized as separate and distinct entities. With an estimated population of 13.5 million, Lagos metropolitan area is the most populated city in Nigeria, and it accounts for more than one-third of the country's urban population (Itua, 2007). Also, by crossing the 10 million population mark in 2002, Lagos became one of the world's megacities (Okunlola, 2005).

Lagos is Nigeria's earliest Central Business District (CBD), the seat of the colonial government, and capital city of Nigeria until 1991 when the capital was moved to Abuja. Notwithstanding the designation of Abuja as the "new" capital, Lagos remains as the country's economic, commercial and industrial powerhouse (Okunlola, 2005). The city accounts for about 70% of Nigeria's industries and commercial activities, and more than half of the country's non-oil economic activities or transactions (Itua, 2007). With about 2,600 km of roads, and more than 1 million vehicles plying the city's roads daily, Lagos has the highest national vehicular density of 222 vehicles per kilometer compared with the national average of 11 vehicles per kilometer (Okunlola, 2005). As Itua (2007) noted, in addition to having the highest level of car ownership, Lagos accounts for as much as 40% of all new vehicle registration in Nigeria. Road-based transportation accounts for about 90% of the transportation demand and traffic in Lagos metropolitan area (LASTMA, 2005). Ferry transportation to and from Lagos Island is available but grossly underdeveloped while the passenger rail transport system is underdeveloped and is currently obsolete in the metropolitan area.

The modes of road-based transportation in Lagos include molue, danfo, 'Keke NAPEP, okada, taxi cabs, private cars, bicycles, and walking. Molue is a big bus that can carry as many 30 passengers while danfo, a minibus is designed to carry seven passengers. The two-wheeled motorcycle is referred to as "Okada" while keke NAPEP is a three-wheeled motorcycle which carries up to four passengers. Private operators dominate the commercial transportation system while public transportation known as "Oluwole" has been discontinued at the time of this study. Bicycle is a rare form of transportation in Lagos because of the lack of designated bicycle lanes and therefore the potential for accidents. Lastly, people often walk to and from bus stops to their destinations, and it often serves as a viable transportation option if traffic congestion is heavy.

3. Elements of urban transportation systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

The factors that affect urban transportation systems in sub-Saharan Africa include high population growth rate, high rate of urbanization growth and the subsequent increased vehicular activities, high rate of car ownership and inadequate public transportation system, presence of potholes and debris on the roadways, extensive violations of traffic laws including dangerous and unruly driving, inadequate network of roads, and poorly timed traffic signals. Others include the presence of vendors/hawkers and street traders on roadways, traffic check point activity which is a slow process that impedes the normal flow of traffic, and frequent accidents and vehicle breakdowns (Asiyanbola, 2004; LASTMA, 2005; Mbarara, 2002; Okunlola, 2005; Osula, 2002).

The current population growth rate (PGR) of sub-Saharan Africa (3%) is by far the highest of any region of the world. The high PGR is accompanied by rapid rate of rural-urban migration, the absorption of peripheral urban settlements and the concentration

of government economic programs in urban areas thereby resulting in high urban population growth rates, growth rates that are substantially higher than the overall PGR (Mbarara, 2002). Onibokun and Kumuyi (1999) noted that while Africa is the least urbanized region in the world, the continent has the highest rate of urbanization. Rapid and high rate of urbanization lead to increased travel activities as more people and goods are moved within a limited geographical space.

Although the level of car ownership in developing countries is relatively low, the annual rate of car ownership is high and these motorized vehicles are concentrated in urban areas. For example, about 50% of private automobiles in Kenya are in Nairobi, the capital city (World Resources, 1996–97) while Chijioke (2005) noted that private cars account for as much as 81% of vehicular traffic in Lagos. Incidentally, the growth rate of car ownership in urban sub-Saharan Africa is likely to continue for the following reasons; convenience, comfort, safety, reliability, and especially the prestige or status associated with car ownership.

Apart from being grossly inadequate, the roadways in urban sub-Saharan Africa are poorly maintained, and are often inundated with potholes, and debris which cause motorists to move cautiously and slowly thereby negatively affecting the flow of traffic (Asiyanbola, 2004; LASTMA, 2005; Okunlola, 2005). Mbarara (2002) also noted that roadway capacity and subsequent traffic flow are often substantially reduced by vendors/hawkers and street traders who occupy the spaces that are meant for vehicular traffic and pedestrians. Another element of urban transportation system in urban sub-Saharan Africa is the preponderance of private vehicles which carry few passengers relative to commercial vehicles. For example, van Vliet and Kinney (2007) noted that in Nairobi, Kenya, private vehicles account for 64% of vehicular traffic but carry only 22% of the passengers while commercial vehicles account for 36% of vehicular volume but carry 78% of the city's passengers.

Other elements of urban transportation system identified by the past research (LASTMA, 2005) specifically for the study area include conflict over jurisdictional control between the different traffic law enforcement agencies, traffic wardens and traffic police. Traffic wardens are employed by the states to manage traffic on the state roadways, while police are employed by the federal government to manage roadway traffic in addition to other responsibilities of maintaining law and order. There are often conflicts and lack of cooperation when both the police and traffic wardens work together at checkpoints. Also, there are charges of corruption among these law enforcement agencies, the contention being that they take bribes from both private and commercial drivers on the pretense of checking for vehicle registration papers, and enforcing violations of traffic laws (LASTMA, 2005). The activity at the checkpoints is often a slow process that negatively affects the flow of traffic because all vehicles are required to stop for such checks (LASTMA, 2005).

Finally, as Evren and Akad (2002) noted, a major element of urban transportation system in many developing countries including sub-Saharan Africa is the lack permanency of transportation policies and/or regulations. For example, one of the strategies established in the 1970s designed to reduce traffic congestion in Lagos, Nigeria requires that vehicles whose registration numbers start with even numbers only to ply the roadways leading directly to Lagos Island on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and vehicles whose registration numbers start with odd numbers only to ply the roadways on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The "rationale" (provided by LASTMA) for discontinuing the strategy in the mid-1980s was that wealthy citizens often bought two or more cars, and arranged to have even number on one of the cars and odd number on the other car thereby forestalling the intent of the policy. Also, the Lagos Special Constabulary unit which

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