



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

The impact of road construction on market and street trading in Lagos

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 January 2015

Received in revised form 11 November 2015

Accepted 12 November 2015

Available online xxxxx

Keywords:

Lagos

Markets

Road construction

Urban development

ABSTRACT

In 2009, the Lagos state government in Nigeria commenced the construction of a ten-lane highway incorporating a light rail track along the existing Lagos–Badagry expressway. With the assistance of the World Bank and at a cost of about (220 billion Naira) US\$1.5 billion, when complete, the project will link Lagos with the Republic of Benin and other West African countries as part of the ECOWAS transit Corridor. While the proposed development is intended to potentially improve the business and international status of the city of Lagos, the expansion of the road has had implications for a variety of non-transport activities adjoining locations around the proposed highway. To fulfil the conditions for expanding the road, the government has had to acquire rights of way to adjoining areas of the existing expressway. Through this process, places of worship, residential buildings, motor parks, schools, markets, mechanic workshops, to mention a few activities, have been displaced in order to fulfil the project. This study explores the impact of such displacement arising from road construction activities on the livelihood of market and street traders at two markets located along the expressway; the Agboju market and New Alayabiagba market. A qualitative study with traders in the two markets in 2010 and 2012 is used to explore the often ignored implications that large-scale transport development initiatives, albeit well intentioned, can have on the livelihoods of urban residents who may attach varying meanings to a road.

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1. Road transport in Lagos — a brief overview

The paper explores the relationship between the redevelopment of a major transport corridor in Lagos, Nigeria and its impact on the activities of market traders at two markets in the city of Lagos. It draws particular attention to how roads can be embraced as providing not only a mobility function but also at the heart of supporting a range of activities like those of traders at roadside markets in Lagos. But often, such non-transport related activities that occur along and because roads, as the paper will show with the case of market traders, are typically perceived as antagonistic to the desire to improve access, connectivity and overall infrastructural capacity during road construction projects. The paper's objective is mainly to contribute to discussions that have called for transport development projects to accommodate the variety of meanings that communities attach to a road beyond those of improving access and connectivity.

Lagos, Nigeria is argued to be the sixth fastest growing city in the world and a highly populated city that has developed faster than the capacity for infrastructural facilities it can provide. The city's population growth has arisen out of a combination of high birth rates, a relatively low mortality rate in comparison to the rest of Nigeria and an unprecedented influx of migrants which has led to extreme unstructured urban expansion (Olanrewaju, 2001) and a chaotic transport system heavily dependent on a limited road network. Many of the first motorable roads in Lagos were designed and built to improve access and link emerging urban centres with major railways stations in order to reduce

strain on inland provinces. (Onakomaiya, 1978). Over the years and in the face of large scale migration, the emergence of settlements beyond the metropolitan boundaries of the city and the escalation of car ownership by the city's residents, road developments have been slow to catch up with the city's population needs.

In 2001, it was estimated that there was just over 5514 km of tarred road for a city of over 20 million persons (Atubi, 2010). Slow progress has also been witnessed in expanding other forms of non-road based transport systems across the city. Out of the 7 million or so passengers that use the Lagos transport system, only around 8000 passengers a day use the rail network for transport and it is estimated that water and rail transport account for about 1% of all movements in Lagos (Oni and Asenime, 2008). Alternatives, such as inland waterways and railways, therefore offer very limited alternatives for haulage, public and private transport activities. Planning well developed transport networks in such a city is therefore pivotal to aiding economic sustenance; especially as transport demands of the populace have constantly exceeded available transport facilities and infrastructure.

Yet there are several issues to contend with in actualising such plans. Apart from increased migration, factors such as limited and non-consistent investment in government owned transport facilities, tiered management of road networks, unorganised operation of private minibuses and constant upheavals in organised transport operators have contributed to problems of access and congestion in the city over the years (Oni, 1999). In recent years, attempts to address these issues have taken the form of various initiatives. State agencies such as

the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) have engineered planning policies focused on road reconstruction and expansion of major routes, resurfacing untarred road and generally improving access and capacity to 'trunk A' roads, expressways and other arterial ways. Other traffic management measures such as creating Bus Rapid transit routes and light rail systems across the city and the introduction of a traffic radio station in 2012 etc. have been interventions aimed at improved transport planning in the city.

However, the greatest challenges to road construction and redevelopment stem from what appears to be the unorganised nature of urban expansion in the city which has developed as a response to the city's high population that predates the development of many road networks. Much of the city's expansion has occurred within a very limited space city, where of a fifth of the city's land mass (75,555 ha out of 358,862 ha) is made up of wetlands. The resulting competition for land use in Lagos is already critical with diverse forms of housing settlements and business premises struggling with the activities of mechanics, artisans, markets, motor parks, churches, taxi ranks, salons and food vendors for whatever spaces there are. Majority of the latter activities are often established along major roads in the city and have developed into a booming informal sector along the city's major highways and road.

It is inevitable that actualising workable interventions to improve the chaotic transport system, whether by expanding roads or constructing new ones, is likely to involve significant readjustments to already competing alternatives for land use in the city (Aderamo, 2012). The acquisition of the rights of way to expand or build new roads is likely to have an effect on residential and commercial activities. And as small informal businesses make up the bulk of roadside enterprises such redevelopment initiatives which may involve the clearance and demolition of nearby structures, threaten the existence of most vulnerable city dwellers struggling to make ends meet at the margins.

Acknowledging the competing alternatives to road development and expansion therefore involves grasping that apart from their role in transporting goods and services, roads may connote meanings beyond the purposes of trip-making and mobility. On the one hand are a variety of communities who rely on roads for livelihood opportunities but on the other hand are the funders and various political champions to contend. The latter perceive that improving road infrastructure has benefits for improving road safety, reducing traffic and generally growing the city's economy whilst ridding roads of various informal activities. It is therefore timely to explore the conflict that exists between roads serving purposes of improving transportation, mobility and access versus accommodating the varying meanings to roads by those who use them (Vorkinn and Riese, 2001). Such a focus can capture otherwise obscure but important sites of consumption and constructions of identity that may develop alongside transport systems (Law, 1999) and that sustain everyday livelihood practises that then become at risk of annihilation when transport interventions are planned.

2. Making a case for alternative road uses in large-scale transport interventions and development in African towns and cities

Much of the discussion that has emerged around transport planning in Sub-Saharan cities has focused considerably on a very narrow interest on road development as a mode of transport (Porter, 2007). Other comments have favoured highlighting the role that motor vehicles and roads play in supporting large scale migration, the flow of information and the development of new forms of cultural expression, issues of road safety and traffic congestion (Gewald et al., 2009). But as Porter (2007) notes, for any transport plan to be beneficial to the wider population there is a need to consider in detail the economic, social and political environment that such a transport intervention is being made. Rather than focusing on the direct impact that road infrastructure has on issues like reduced travel time and accessibility, there is a growing argument to begin to examine the types of secondary but equally

additional effects that transport investment can have on other forms of everyday life (MacKinnon et al., 2008).

For a long time, this important interpretation of roads from the perspective of those who use them largely remained obscure in discussions about road development initiatives in African cities. But in recent years, it is apparent that embracing an enriched narrative that takes into account the nature of social life and experiences that the development and re-development aspects of a road transport project evokes on everyday practices and livelihoods should become a matter of growing interest for various reasons (Degen et al., 2010). Exploring the relational, socio-material practices and everyday meaning of roads from the perspective of those who use the roads, is likely to present avenues that recognises the impacts (intended or not intended) that mobility can have on understanding place, identity and mundane everyday practices (Jensen, 2009). In addition, such a focus lends recognition to viewing roads as playing not just an important mobility function, but also paying attention to the various communities that regulate and create all forms of socio-technical orders off and along roads (Stasik, 2012).

A few authors have begun to explore how transport interventions may benefit from understanding of the more alternative and sometimes mundane uses of roads in African towns and cities. Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) writing on the experiences of migrant labourers on the Maputo Development Corridor draw attention to how the typical top-down management of a transport corridor linking Johannesburg and the Indian Ocean, failed to give equal attention to how the livelihoods of migrant labourers came into the picture of a state-sponsored project. The authors go on to show how state-centric powers came to have a negative view of migrant labourers as contributing to a migrant problem, fuelling trade imbalance and an informal sector; all of which they sought to eradicate through the development of this transport corridor. Though this example, Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) highlight how the profound gap that exists between state-centric commitments to formal large scale road-development projects and the actual practices of users of roads may translate to large scale projects proceeding as if the informal uses of roads are non-existent and by seeming to provide a sanitising effect to eradicate such 'informality'. Both authors support work that focuses more on what is happening on African roads as a way of opening up discussion on the ways communities experience road projects and the impact it has along the lines of ethnicity, gender, and occupational identities. They however suggest for caution and acknowledge that there is always the danger that funders, Governments and various political champions can potentially dislocate and ignore even the best intentioned people-centred development paths.

Like Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) another recent work has explored the need for road projects to embrace and account for the forms of creative entrepreneurial activities, such as hawking, that roads support. Klaeger (2013) is concerned with moving away from focusing on staged discourses like the workings of the state to undertake transport investment, reduce travel times and improve road safety and accessibility to engaging with a richer story about how communities interact and use roads. Based on his work on the Accra–Kumasi road in Southern Ghana, he favours detailing how communities interact and adapt to the long-terms changes of road through mundane practices and activities like walking, hawking or simply hanging out, may offer a more provocative approach that humanises large scale road projects. Klaeger (2013) suggests adopting more ethnographic inspired approaches that focus on the mundane, the routine and the tacit taken for granted experiences that roads afford and the more ambivalent nature of how communities actually engage and interact with roads as part of the plans for large scale development initiatives. Stasik and Klaeger (Forthcoming) in a later extension of Klaeger's work in Ghana go on to show that a lack of recognition of the kinds of ways communities use roads in favour of the intention to improve traffic flow by the planners and engineers along the Accra–Kumasi road meant that plans to accommodate hawking activities were not made and this contributed to the loss of mobile clientele and livelihood for hawkers.

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