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TOWARDS AN EFFICIENT MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM FOR ANAMBRA STATE: THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN BUS MODE OF MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM

BY

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TOWARDS AN EFFICIENT MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM FOR ANAMBRA STATE:
THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN BUS MODE OF MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM

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In Nigeria today, road transportation accounts for the great majority of goods
haulage activities, and remains largely the major channel for movement of people. In the
urban areas of the country, in particular where engine powered vehicles are dominantly in
use, some 90 percent of human movement activities are undertaken in private motor cars
(Ogegbo, 1977). On the contrary, facilities for movement of people by means of urban
mass transit are still inadequately developed. Most of the mass transit activities by road
have been mainly undertaken by the private sector.

The role of the public sector in this regard is virtually insignificant. Public owned
corporations and agencies that have attempted to get involved in mass transit activities
have liquidated a few years after their inception. This is because the laissez-faire way of
operation of the public sector has not been competitive with the profit-oriented mode of
private sector enterprise. This has had its serious consequences. Although the generality
of people in both the urban and rural areas of the country are in effective demand for
mass transit services, it is only the private sector that has responded, although in a very
limited way, to the demand.

The objectives of this paper are two fold. First, it is aimed at identifying the major
problems inherent in the provision of bus transit services by both the private and public
sectors in Nigeria. Second, it is hoped that the suggestions that will be put forward will be
useful to policy makers in current efforts towards providing effective and efficient public
mass transit facilities in the urban and rural areas of Anambra State in particular, and
Nigeria in general.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PASSENGER MOTOR MODE OF MASS TRANSIT IN
NIGERIA

Mass transportation history in Nigeria is replete with catalogue of temporary
successes and failures of attempts at providing both intra-city and inter-city bus transit
facilities. Although the causes of the failures of these facility provision efforts are very
much similar, it will be pertinent to discuss the two facility types separately.

Intra-City Motor Transit Facilities

Intra-city bus transit facilities have featured intermittently in each of the major
Nigerian urban centres during the last four decades. These facilities can be categorised
into publicly owned and operated services was privately owned and operated enterprises.
Notable among the publicly owned and operated services was the former Lagos
Municipal Transport Service (LAMTS) which existed as far back as the 1950’s, and the
current Lagos City Transport Service (LCTS). Among this category also was the Ibadan
City Council Bus Service which was established in 1957, and the later bus service
provided by the Ibadan City Council Joint Transport Board (ICC/JTB) in 1967 (Taiwo,
1984). Pioneer efforts in the provision of intra-urban public municipal bus facilities in the eastern states of the country included the Oriental Bus Lines, and later the Coal City Lines Bus Service which was introduced in the 1970's (Ume, 1977). In the Northern States, pioneer attempts included the Jos City Bus Service established in the early 1970's, the Kaduna City Bus Transport Service, and the Kano Bus Service which were also established in the 1970's.

The privately owned and operated intra-urban bus facilities included the following enterprises: the Benson Transport Service, and Oshinowo Transport Service which operated in Lagos in 1950's, as well as several passenger truck transit facilities such as the ‘bolikajas’ that plied the roads of Lagos metropolis. Those ‘bolikajas’ have now been replaced by ‘kia kia’ minibuses. Also included among the private sector intra-urban motor transit facilities were the Oshikakke Transport Service of Ibadan which operated in early 1950's (ibid), the Udoye Bus Service of Enugu which operated in the 1960's, the Uzodimma Bus Transport Service of Onitsha which existed in the 1950's, and a host of other such private enterprises.

Inter-City Motor Transit Facilities

Like the intra-city transit facilities, the inter-city transit operations could be categorized into public sector transit services and private sector transit enterprises. However, the public sector inter-city transit services have been virtually non-existent except for one or two that could easily be recalled to mind. One of these was the Mid-West Lines that plied the Lagos-Asaba road and a number of the other major roads in the early 1970's. Another inter-city public transit service was the Enugu Plateau Bus Service which plied the northern highways and some North-South highways, notably Jos - Enugu highway, after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. Worthy of mention also was Kaduna State Transport Authority Bus Service which is still in operation.

On the other hand, there have been several private-sector inter-urban transit enterprises. It is perhaps in this area that the private sector has made very significant contributions to mass transit activities in Nigeria. One of the most successful in this group is the Ekelie Dili Chukwu (Nig.) Ltd. Bus Service which plies virtually all the key highways of this country.

This particular inter-city bus transport service has retained a model to be emulated in bus transport operation in Nigeria. Other private sector inter-urban transit enterprises include the following: Chi Di Ebere (Nig.) Ltd. Transport Service, Izeoluwa & Sons (Nig.) Ltd. Service, P.N. Enenah & Sons (Nig.) Ltd. Transport Service, and a host of others too numerous to mention.

The Merits and Demerits of Private Sector Involvement in Mass Transit Facility Provision

Over the years, the public sector has been largely unsuccessful in provision of the bus mode of mass transit facilities. This is largely because of the inefficient manner of operation of that sector. On the contrary, the private sector has remained the major provider of the bus mode of transit facilities. This sector has made significant contributions to the national economy in this regard because of its characteristic profit-oriented goals and objectives. These contributions can be observed in a number of ways.
Firstly, the private sector has provided and has continued to provide very essential transit services in many situations where public sector services are not available. This is especially the case in such towns like Onitsha, Enugu, Warri, Makurdi, Yola and many other urban centres.

Most of the inter-city travellers in Nigeria today often use the mass transit facilities provided by private-sector enterprises. This is especially true for journeys that span appreciable distances. An origin destination (O-D) study carried out by the author at the 9th Mile Corner, Enugu in March 1988 showed that an average of about 90 percent of daily passenger bus trips from Anambra and Imo States to the Northern States of Nigeria are undertaken by means of private sector operated bus services. There was no evidence of presence of any public sector bus service. Taxi cab riders accounted for the rest of the passenger motor trips to the Northern States.

Secondly, the private-sector mass transit facilities immensely supplement the scanty services occasionally provided by the public sector. This is especially the situation in some Nigerian cities where such public facilities are available. In Lagos for example, where the Lagos City Transport Service is in operation, a large number of 'kaa ka Mini-buses are usually found plying the streets of the metropolis. Moreover, in Sardauna where the city bus is quite operational, private sector operated transit facilities have been playing a significant role. Nevertheless, taxi cab services still have appreciable effective demand. In effect, both the public-sector and the private-sector mass transit facilities can play useful complementary roles.

Thirdly, the private-sector mass transit facilities provide more cost effective services than the public sector mass transit facilities. It should not be surprising that this is the real situation. There is hardly any prudent private investor that would not aim at maximizing his profit. Equally true is the statement that no investor would want to be running his business at a loss.

Notwithstanding the positive contributions of the private sector in provision of mass transit facilities, some negative externalities are usually associated with this sector. Firstly, the private-sector mass transit operator is not often committed to cover all the areas where such services are badly needed. Certain parts of an urban area that do not have good roads are often not covered by such services. The consequence of this is that the residents of such an area eventually suffer untold hardships in getting to areas that are adequately covered by transportation facilities. Secondly, non-public sector mass transit entrepreneurs are, most of the time, insensitive to the preferences and tastes of consumers of their services. They would not pay heed to requests that concern improvement of quality of service. There are often cases of bus conductors that abuse their passengers. Thirdly, private sector mass transit enterprises are generally characterized by instability of transport fares. Although the government insists on stability of transport fares, the private sector entrepreneurs often seize any available opportunity to hike passenger fares. This usually happens whenever they observe the slightest signs of fuel scarcity. In December 1987, for example, when rumours about government withdrawal of fuel subsidy were being propagated, some private mass transit enterprises in Enugu and Onitsha raised their fares by over 33 percent. Such erratic fare increases would certainly not have occurred in a system where there is appreciable percentage of public sector involvement in mass transit services. Fourthly, some private-sector mass transit operators often fail to maintain...
their vehicles at the level commensurate with the intensity and frequency of the use to which they are put. Occasionally, some of these private-sector mass transit vehicles get stalled on the highways, and their stranded passengers are seen attempting to catch other available transport. Passengers thus are often exposed to such undesirable risks that should have been avoided.

The Merits and Demerits of the Public Sector Involvement in Mass Transit Facility Provision

Generally, where publicly owned and operated mass transit facilities do exist, they indicate some clear advantages over the private-sector transit facilities. One of the advantages is observable in greater coverage of areas that need transit services. The facilities are usually spread out over reasonably representative areas. This aspect of public transit facilities is particularly relevant to the needs of people located in areas where private transit facilities would not get to, either because of bad roads or because of non-profitability.

Moreover, users of public-sector operated mass transit facilities feel a little more secure than they would feel with private-sector operated transit facilities. They feel freer to make comments and suggestions as they find necessary without the risk of being forced out of the vehicle. On the other hand, the public servants operating the transit facilities are expected to live up to an acceptable level of conduct.

In spite of the expectations of the public sector in mass transit facility provision, the performance of many of the agencies is often below standard. The services provided by the public sector are grossly inefficient and unsatisfactory. This is usually caused by the public service attitude that public business is nobody’s business. The level of accountability observed in the public sector is alarmingly low. Government funds which survive embezzlement are occasionally not expended in a rational manner. The consequence of this is continued loss of revenue by the government. This in itself has usually led to abandonment of otherwise very essential bus transit services. This has been a common feature of public sector bus transit services in Anambra State and other parts of the country.

A CASE FOR EFFICIENT PASSENGER BUS TRANSIT SYSTEM IN ANAMBRA STATE

In the preceding sections of this paper, an attempt was made to briefly review the historical background of the passenger motor transit system in Nigeria. The merits and demerits of both publicly operated and privately operated transit facilities were critically discussed with a view to shedding light on the problems of passenger motor transit system in the country. In the succeeding sections of this paper, the rationale for a proposal for efficient passenger bus transit system for Anambra State will be discussed.

Modal Split Patterns in Enugu

The demand for mass transit system is closely associated with modal split patterns in a locality. In order to gain insight into the modal split patterns in the urban areas of Anambra State, it may be pertinent to examine the components of the transportation modes in Enugu, the State Capital.
A study carried out in selected areas of Enugu, representing both the central city and suburban areas, yielded some interesting results. The study showed that the following means of road transportation are in use, to varying extents: private car, commercial bus, taxi, bicycle, motor cycle, and walking. Table 1 shows the distributions of these means of transportation.

The Table shows the patterns of the means of transportation in Uwani (a central city location), Awkunanaw Phase 1 Layout (a suburban location), and Abakpa Nike Housing Estate Area. The subject users of various transportation modes were households, and the sample processed for each area was 200 households. Systematic sampling technique was used in the survey.

It can easily be observed from the table that the major transportation mode for Uwani is the taxi, which accounts for 46.7 percent of survey respondents. Usage of commercial bus services comes second with 22 percent. In effect, the taxi cab services are used more than twice as much as the commercial bus services in such a centrally located area like Uwani. The implication of this is that fewer people in Uwani make use of the private-sector mass transit system. Although the exact percent of the residents of the area that will make use of future public mass transport facilities, was not determined, there were indications that the idea was very much welcomed. Another interesting observation is that only 8.5 percent of the respondents ride the private car while as many as 21.5 percent walk. Only 1.5 percent ride either bicycles or motor-cycles.

However, in the suburban Awkunanaw Phase 1 Layout, some 50 percent of the residents make use of commercial buses, whereas only 10 percent make use of taxi cabs. Some 27.5 of the respondents drive private cars. Only 2 percent walk, while 10.5 percent ride either the bicycle or the motor cycle.

**Table 1**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CITY LOCATION</th>
<th>MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT RESPONDER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Uwani (including Southern Extension)</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bicycle &amp; Motor-cycle</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private car</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial bus</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awkunanaw Phase 1 Layout Area</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bicycle &amp; Motor-cycle</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private car</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial bus</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abakpa Nike Estate</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bicycle &amp; Motor-cycle</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private car</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial bus</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
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Source: Field Survey.
These findings suggest that a greater percentage of the residents of the layout make use of mass transit facilities. It is obvious, however, that apart from the 27.5 percent of the respondents that drive their private cars, the remaining 72.5 percent are likely to avail themselves of the services of a well organised public mass transit service.

The situation in Abakpa Nike Housing Estate, which is a lower and moderate middle income neighbourhood is also quite revealing. About 44 percent of the respondents ride private cars. However, some 37 percent make use of commercial bus services. Only about 2 percent make use of the taxi cab services, while some 9 percent make use of bicycles and motor cycles. Moreover, about 8 percent of the respondents are pedestrians.

Nevertheless, it is reasonably correct to assume that apart from the 44 percent of the people that ride their private cars and 37 percent that make use of commercial mass transit facilities currently, the remaining 19 percent would preferably avail themselves of the opportunities of a well organised mass transit system, if and when provided. In fact, some of the current car riders would even prefer to ride buses occasionally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The implications of the above findings, which can easily be replicated in other urban areas of Anambra State, are important for formulation of an efficient public bus transit policy for Anambra State. Such a policy will be geared towards addressing the human transportation problems of both the urban and rural areas of the State.

Some crucial issues need to be addressed in the policy document. Firstly, the state and local governments must accept their responsibility for providing mass transit facilities, or for enhancing efforts towards their provision. Secondly, where the governments cannot provide the facilities, they can subsidise private entrepreneurs who prove beyond any reasonable doubt that they can provide the services. There is evidence already that there are a few entrepreneurs who are capable of organising and managing an efficient bus transit system in the State. The organisation and management capabilities of the reputed Ekene Dili Chukwu (Nig.) Ltd. are beyond question. However, the company would need appreciable government support to be able to offer much more extensive and intensive bus services to the State. Since this company is about one of the few that are so far capable of offering a reasonably good service, the government can in fact go into partnership with it on such a limited basis that would be acceptable to both. Thirdly, extensive training programmes can be organised by the government for the staff that would be deployed in a future bus transit set-up. The training can be arranged by successful private bus transport entrepreneurs.

Already, Ekene Dili Chukwu (Nig.) Ltd. does not have a lot of problems training its staff locally. There is therefore no reason why extensive local on-the-job training programmes cannot be arranged both at the state level and at the local government level.

Fourthly, there is need to re-organise all the works departments in each local government area in order to equip them for the immense challenges of urban and rural roads maintenance. Facilities in the works departments need to be urgently expanded and updated. This will involve increases in funding, staffing and equipment.
Fifthly, in addition to the works departments in the local government establishments, there is dire need for a separate transportation department in each of such local government areas. The transportation department will be charged with the responsibility of running the bus transit system in the local government areas. In fact, transportation departments are a ‘sine qua non’ for efficient bus transit facilities that would cover the entire local government areas of the state. One of their most important challenges will be the method of working out optimal and cost-effective bus-route networks within each urban centre or local government areas. Decisions have to be taken on choosing from each of the following alternative patterns as found appropriate:

(i) the traffic zone system which involves division of the area into identifiable traffic zones.

(ii) the grid system.

CONCLUSION

Prospects of future car ownership by most Nigerians are indeed very bleak. Unless extra-ordinary miracles happen, most Nigerian car owners are probably driving their last cars. The prospects are not better for several others that have never owned any. In order to overcome this unpleasant situation and the associated hardships, serious ameliorative measures need to be taken as soon as possible.

Although seemingly difficult, public bus transit provision is not an impossible task. Since there are really no other alternatives, both decisions and actions must be taken now.


