

Urban Transportation Challenges In Calabar: Causes, Implications And Solutions

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Abstract: Transport systems are meant to support cities with complex spatial structures and a high concentration of socio-economic activities. Calabar is acclaimed to be one of the leading tourist destinations of Nigeria and its development is highly dependent on the efficiency of its transport system. This paper seeks to find out the causes, implications and solutions to the recent traffic congestions in Calabar, particularly, following the ban of commercial motorcycles (Okada). Structured questionnaires were used as research instrument and the analysis was done by simple tables of percentage frequency distribution of the responses. The findings reveal that the recent traffic challenges are largely due to inexperienced, inconsiderate and undisciplined taxi drivers, who have just shifted to driving without requisite knowledge of road driving rules/regulations as well as the influx of more cars into Calabar. It was also observed that the transport problems have implications on the environment, loss of productive man hours, increase stress, and reduced productivity. Other implications include increased fatalities increased accidents rates. Possible solutions proffered by respondents include: educating taxi drivers, proper driving license certification process, proper traffic signal synchronization, encouraging non-motorized transportation, encouraging carpooling, and provision of parking lots at designated points near economic activities like market, offices, etc. The paper demonstrates that, some urban transportation challenges can be avoided by proper planning, simple value re-orientation and positive attitudinal changes.

Index Terms: Transport, challenges, congestion, implications, solution, attitude, productivity,.

1 INTRODUCTION

Rodrigue et al (2009) posited that "transport systems support cities with complex spatial structures, having a high level of accumulation and concentration of socio-economic activities. Urban productivity is highly dependent on the efficiency of its transport system to move labor, consumers and freight between multiple origins and destinations. Traffic Congestion is one of the most prevalent transport problems in large urban agglomerations, usually above a threshold of about 1 million inhabitants. It is particularly linked with motorization and the diffusion of the automobile, which has increased the demand for transport infrastructures. The most important transport problems are often related to urban areas and take place when transport systems, for a variety of reasons, cannot satisfy the numerous requirements of urban mobility"[1]. However, some few cases may differ, where and when such transport problems are "road user" induced. This research seeks to take a critical look at the challenges of transportation in Calabar, the causes, implications for national development and the possible solutions.

1.1 Study Location

Calabar is the headquarters of Cross River State South east Nigeria; the population of Calabar is about 1.2 million, with 2.5% yearly growth rate. Calabar Municipality lies between latitude 04° 15' and 5° N and longitude 8° 25' E. the landmass is about 331.551 square kilometres. The climate is a tropical rain forest of the guinea-congolian region. The dry season happens between November to March while the rainy season happens between April to October with peak rain fall in August and September.

Calabar is acclaimed as one of the leading tourism destinations in Nigeria because of its numerous tourism hotspot within and outside the town. The city boasts of an International Museum, a Botanical Garden, a Free Trade Zone/Port, an International Airport and Seaport, an integrated sports stadium complex, a cultural centre, one of the most prominent universities in the country (the University of Calabar), a slave history park and several historical and cultural landmarks. The Tinapa Resort, a development by the Cross River State government, lies to the north of the city beside the Calabar Free Trade Zone. The Cross River State Annual Christmas Festival held every year attracts thousands within and beyond Nigeria. The Festival which includes music performance from both local and international artists, the annual Calabar Carnival, Boat regatta, Fashion shows, Christmas Village, traditional dances and the annual Ekpe Festival is a yearly event that brings in thousands of tourists at the time of the year.[5]

1.2 Statement of Problem

For a tourism destination like Calabar, the transport system is expected to optimally function in order to enhance urban socio-economic activities. However, this is not absolutely the case. Following the ban of commercial motorcycle (OKADA) in Calabar, the city has witnessed terrific traffic congestion in recent times. This calls for concerned research and analysis to establish the likely causes, determine the implications for environment and integrated national development and, proffer solution to the problem.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research paper is to find a sustainable solution to the challenges of urban transportation congestion in Calabar. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are necessary:

1. Carry out a survey on the causes of urban transport challenges in Calabar
2. Determined the implication of urban transport challenges on the environment and integrated national development
3. Proffer sustainable solutions to the challenges of urban transportation congestion in Calaba.

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2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rodrigue et al (2009) opined that the purpose of transportation is to overcome space which is shaped by both human and physical constraints such as distance, political boundaries, time and topographies. He further established that the specific purpose of transportation is to fulfill a demand for mobility, since it can only exist if it moves something, be it people or goods[1]. Munby (1968) recorded that 'there is no escape for transport', that is, every basic thing a man does or get involved with in catering for his daily living in his society ,either directly or indirectly, is in a way or the other rooted or made possible through transportation[2]. According to Hoyle (1973) "even in the most remote and least developed of inhabited regions, transport in some form, is a fundamental part of the daily rhythm of life"[3]. Societies rely on transport systems to support a wide variety of activities. These activities include commuting, supplying energy needs, distributing goods, and acquiring personal wants. Transportation also plays a very important role in the economic growth and social development of a country. Brian Hoyle and Jose Smith (1998) in their study on the conceptual framework of transport and development, as an epitome of the complex relationships that exist between the physical environment, patterns of social and political activity, and levels of economic development. Transport systems; however, provides a key to the understanding and operation of many other systems at many different scales[4]. So important is the issue of transportation in Calabar, Cross River state that the Government created a Department of Public Transportation (DOPT), with a special assistant to the Governor on transportation appointed. In a recent press interview in Calabar, the special assistant Engr. Edem Ekon said "Calabar Metropolis is increasingly facing traffic congestion as a result of the influx of vehicles into the state as a result of the ban on commercial motorcycles"[6] When Senator Lyle Imoke replaced Donald Duke as Governor of Cross River state in 2007, the pressure to keep commercial motor cycles (okada) off the streets of Calabar continued, and on 11 November 2009, Imoke formally banned them in Calabar. To ameliorate the pains of the ban, Imoke, through the Department of Public Transportation handed out 400 cars and mini-cabs to the erstwhile okada operators. The motorcyclists were asked to organize themselves in groups of four, and each group, after submitting their registration documents as okada riders, were given a car to operate as taxi. Though they were to pay for the car, it was on loan basis, which was significantly subsidized. Following government's lead, individuals and organizations rehabilitated grounded vehicles and put them on the road as taxis. The fad caught on fast in neighbouring cities like Uyo, Ikom, Ogoja and Ikot-Ekpene, where those with cars were anxious to reap from the sudden boom in taxi business in Calabar. The result has been a deluge of cars on the roads in the city.[7] And for those without the necessary driving skills, the roads became the learning ground. According to critical observation by the researcher, 'there is hardly a taxi in this city without a dent or some form of damage. Private cars have also suffered tremendously from the recklessness of the taxi drivers.' The sharp increase in number of cars soon overwhelmed Calabar roads. The cars have increased in number while the roads remain the same and most of the taxi drivers are okada men, who through government magnanimity or bank loans became car owners overnight. They drive the same way they were riding motorcycles. That is a most likely cause of frequent

accidents and gridlocks; because they stop where they should not and make U-turn where they clearly ought not to turn..

3 METHODOLOGY

Random administration of about 500 structured questionnaires and 'on the spot' interview at 5 traffic congestion hotspot was carried out to achieve the objectives of this research. The five traffic congestion hotspots identified and used for the survey are:

1. Calabar Road by Mary Slessor,
2. Goldie by Eta-Agbor,
3. Marian Market
4. University of Calabar roundabout,
5. Watt market round about.

Structured questionnaires were used as research instrument and the analysis was done by simple tables of percentage frequency distribution of the responses. Data about the gender, mode of transport, travel time and general perception of respondents about the causes, implications and solutions to traffic problems were collected using the research instruments. The research was conducted over a period of 6 months spanning February to August 2011.

4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS/FINDINGS

Table 1: Gender distribution of questionnaire

Gender	Distribution(%)
Male	67
Females	33
Total	100

Table 1 reveals a near equality distribution, considering that more men drive than women. 67% of the respondents were male, while 33% were Female.

Table 2: Respondent mode of transportation

Mode	Distribution (%)
Personal car	43
Public Taxi	35
Public bus	12.3
Chattered Taxi	9.7
total	100

Table 2 reveals that Public mode of transportation consisting of taxi (chattered and public) & public buses constitute 57% of the road users concerned in this research. This is a high and significant value (slightly above half). While private cars made up 43% of the respondents.

Table 3: Daily commuting time

	Before 2010 (%)	Presently (%)
< 10 minutes	54.78	28
10 – 20 minutes	32	43
> 20 minutes	13.21	29
total	100	100

Table 3 reveals that the commuting time of respondents have significantly increases now compared to 2009 (when the commercial motorcycle ban was affected). Here, it is assumed that the distance travelled is constant. Before 2010, about 54% respondents could get to their daily destinations in less than 10 minutes. Presently, due to traffic congestion only 28% can get to their destination in less than 10 minutes. On the other extreme, before 2010, about 13% of the respondents could get to their daily destination after 20 minutes, but presently, the number of those requiring more than 20 minutes to their daily destination have increase from 13% to 29%.

Table 4: Cause of traffic congestion and delay

Cause	Distribution (%)
Increased Distance	1
Increases number of vehicles	20
Bad roads	4
Parking issues	10
Improper traffic signal synchronization	8
Taxi driver's attitude (actions and inactions)	48
Poor road network	9
Total	100

Table 4 shows that Taxi drivers attitude (actions and inactions) constitute 48% of reasons for transport problem in Calabar, followed by increases number of vehicles (20%). Parking issues (10%) and improper signal synchronization (8%) comes 2nd and 3rd respectively while bad roads and increased travel distance comes last with 4% and 1% respectively. Traffic synchronization as observed in some points is very poor. The traffic light gives a 'go' green light for only 5 seconds and then displaying 'red' stop light for about 115 seconds. Sometimes the amber light shows for all commuters from different directions. This does not help traffic flow.

Table 5: Implication of traffic congestion

Implication	Distribution (%)
Environmental Pollution (Air and Noise)	30
Loss of productive man hours	46
Increase stress	15.3
Reduced productivity	7
Increased accident rates	19
Total	100

The problem of traffic congestion as seen in table 5 has the highest implication for loss of productive man hours (46%) followed by environmental pollution (37%). Increase accident rate, increased stress and reduced productivity comes 3rd, 4th and 5th respectively.

5 MITIGATING MEASURES AND PROFFERED SOLUTIONS TO TRAFFIC CONGESTION

The Cross River state government has no doubt been trying to alleviate the situation by: Creating a Department for Public Transport (DoPT); Recruiting and training of DoPT staff; and

deploying them to regulate traffic flow. Also, some streets in Calabar have been converted to 'one-way' in order to ease traffic flow. However, these measures would not suffice for the magnitude and direction of the problem. This is because the tetrahedral problem of transport congestion in Calabar is largely due to social issues, administration and control rather than technical/engineering. Even presently, there are insinuations that, The DoPT staff, if not quickly indoctrinated with values of integrity, are fast becoming compromised by corruption. It was observed that touts have capitalized on the conversion of some streets to one way as an avenue to extort money from motorists who are ignorant of changes due to improper road signs.

Table 6: Proffered solutions to traffic congestion in Calabar.

Proffered solution	Distribution (%)
Sensitization for Taxi drivers in batches	51
Re-programing of traffic lights	9.2
Build Fly overs	10
Encourage carpooling	7
Provide affordable parking lots	13.8
* Others:	9
Total	100

Table 6 shows some 51% respondents in agreement with the sensitization for taxi and bus drivers as a main solution to the problem of traffic congestion in Calabar. This can be done in batches to avoid a service vacuum. The next main solution is to provide parking lots (13.8%) near places of high socio-economic activities like market, offices, etc. Some even agreed with the construction of fly over (10%) to improve the existing road networks and provide more driving space for the influx of vehicles to ease congestion at major road junctions. Synchronizing traffic lights (9.2%) is also a possible solution.

*Others (9%) refer to a combination of suggested drastic measures such as:

1. Re-certification of driving license for all commercial taxi and public bus drivers, through appropriate driving test exercise as opposed to the present ease of obtaining driving license by proxy.
2. Demarcating separate taxi route from private cars
3. Removal of touts along the roads and replace them with trained / certified road traffic control agencies like the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), DoPT, Vehicle inspection officers (VIO), and Traffic Police.
4. Carpooling, a situation whereby vehicle occupancy is increased in order to decrease number of vehicles on the road is also encouraged. Families with many cars can decide to use just one car and park the rest to reduce the number of vehicles on the road. Mass transit is another aspect of carpooling. Government and the organized private sector should therefore make public transport attractive to the public.

6 CONCLUSION

This research paper demonstrates by analyzed of the research instrument that, traffic congestion in Calabar is caused by social factors mainly, the attitude of taxi drivers and the unplanned influx of more cars into the city. The traffic problem

in Calabar has implications for environment and integrated national development. Some solutions were proffered to solve the problem. The paper has demonstrates that, some urban transportation challenges can be avoided by proper planning, simple value re-orientation and positive attitudinal changes.

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