

POLITICS AND MASS TRANSIT SCHEME IN NIGERIA'S TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

The history of transport and public transport concept are as old as the history of man, creation, civilization and the attendant human transformation of cities and settlements from time immemorial. This is because, nothing moves without the “grace” and “process” of transport (which is mobility). Therefore, to achieve meaningful interaction (which is the essence of movement) within a particular area, various modes of transport were evolved. Nevertheless; irrespective of the transport need of man, certain specific, physical, economic and demographic determinants or attributes must be present or available for the development of a viable public transport system meeting that need. It is against this background and the continuous search for transport efficiency, functionality, operability and responsiveness to socioeconomic needs of man, that public transport system (Rail transport mode) was developed to cope with the unfolding challenges in a heterogeneous structure of our transportation industry as a developing nation. It is pertinent to note here that, transport plays a vital role in all aspects of human endeavour. It is the engine that propels progress and sustainable growth and development of every sector of an economy and nation's state. The introduction of public transport system in Nigeria (in form of rail transport system) was in 1896 in Lagos which is over a century and fourteen years after. Incidentally, over these years, it is very obvious that the management, coordination and organization of this cardinal and critical component of our national infrastructure have proved to be unnecessarily hard and difficult. This is because of the intricate nature and structure of our public transport services and its attendant operations, with huge capital outlays and labour-intensiveness (Ndikom, 2006). Ever since our independence in Oct, 1960, the management and control of our public transport system and the attendant operational services in Nigeria were left in the hands of managers who does not seem to understand the functional and rudimentary aspects of the transport industry which is adjudged the key to national economic growth and development (Ndikom, 2006). It is common knowledge to note that, the current business environment in Nigeria requires more radical and systematic administrative strategies to cope with the unfolding challenges of a volatile, corrugated structure of Public transport system (Adesanya, 2002). The obvious management of a public transport organization in this time and age of our depressed and stressed-like economy is complex, because of the negative effect of some government policies in place. The essence and obvious process of managing a well-articulated public transport outfit in a deregulated economy, requires the need to consider human capital investment, which is the most critical infrastructure and component for the survival strategy of any transport Organization (Ndikom, 2008).

Public Transport System Management

Over the years, the world economy and the state of industrialization have been run on the pedal a progression wheel of transport system. This is because, transport has played a vital role and enduring effects on the socio-economic affairs of nations, be it developing and developed societies. Interestingly, transport has also played an important role in the growth, development and sustainability of any nation's economy. It is an agent of growth, change, and development in every sector of the economy, of which the emergence of public transport outfits in most states of the South West, South-East and South-South were not, insulated from the enduring growth pole and backwash effects in transportation system. As an agent of change, it has brought about a significant transformation in every-sphere of human existence, be it social, economic, political, recreational, religions, cultural, geo-political and even distribution of information to all economies of scale of any nation.



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It also helps in the mobilization of all factors of production, trade, commerce and all commercial transformation and geo-political activities of nations. (Ndikom, 2008). For proper advancement and effective management of any government and commercial institution on the surface of the earth, transport is very crucial in bringing a significant change. Obviously, no growth and development effort could be made possible by any responsive government without anchoring it on the transformational wheel and pedal of transport services. This is because, transport, on its own is a service (and derived demanded), which is not always demanded on the own sake, but for the satisfaction it will generate in quick response to the corresponding demand of the services by its users within a specific unit of time and space (Ndikom, 2008).

Public transport system is that system that is designed to manage and cater for a large number of passengers, from their place of origin to a given destination, where they are valued more or where their relative economic importance is greater. It is a system for moving passengers ranging from eighty and above (for a developed country) or 50 and above (for a developing nation like Nigeria) (Ndikom 2006). It is also considered as the system designed for the specific movement of passengers and goods for a price/charge. The service is provided by both public and private operators. Ironically, in Nigeria, an eighteen or fourteen-seater bus is often regarded as a mass transit bus. But in real transport parlance, this should be a Para-transit vehicle. It is pertinent to note that from time immemorial, man has been using public transport by living in groups. Even before the advent of mechanical means of movement, the various socioeconomic activities of man involved transport; and before the explosive growth of towns and cities, movement was mainly done by foot. As settlements grew larger, there was the need to have public transport to specifically to satisfy the basic mobility requirements of the people within the confines of the society. Consequently, all sorts of transport began to develop specifically meant to carry people and goods from one place to another (Adeniji, 1987). Modern modes of transport, as they are known today, were developed during the industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. At this period, people left the rural areas en-masse for urban areas due to rapid urbanization. This led to the expansion of settlements and the need for people to move more frequently from place to place in the attempt to fulfill specific socio-economic objectives. Incidentally, the major mode of transport during this period was the railway. Therefore, the railways was the first major form of public transport (Adeniji 1987), and it assisted in no small measure in the development of the emerging settlements in this nation called Nigeria.

Due to the fact that, the cost of providing railway services was very prohibitive as at the time, there was the urgent need to evolve alternative modes of public transport for the conveyance of people and goods. The use of Bus services was originated from a barber, who had a carriage designed for his business in Omnes. (Adeniji, 1987); later, a bus was designed to carry people from place to place. Shortly after this, he introduced fares and subsequently expanded his business all over Paris. With time, this bus was replicated all over Europe and, by early 20th century, general motors in America started the mass production of buses (Adeniji, 1987). Hopefully, any mode of transport from carrying people that does not, simultaneously, convey more than 50 passage crisis regarded as a para-transit transport mode, not a mass transit. Indeed, the para-transit mode is defined not much by the number of passengers carried but by their mode of operation, which should reflect the following.

- There is no specific schedule service
- The routes may not be fixed
- Their operations are very flexible in nature
- They offer door to door services to satisfy travelling needs.

A well-organized public transport system is of immense benefits to both developed and developing societies. As earlier stated, the system is a more efficient means of transporting large members of people between and within settlements than car and other private vehicles (Adeniji, 1987). For the purpose of efficiency and convenience, public transport systems are classified into the following.

1. Conventional public transport systems e.g urban rail services, motorbuses, trains, trolling buses and rail rapid systems; ferry services etc.
2. Para-transit intermediate systems of public transport, it must be noted therefore that several schemes have been used in the classification of urban public transport system. For instance, Hutchinson (1974), used the “demand” and “functional” schemes to classify public transport systems.



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Needs to move

Movement is life, and the essence of movement is the satisfaction of needs; to secure some practical basic things that are lacking in a particular place. Without movement, the world would be stagnant. Movement, mobility or transport takes people or goods from their place of origin or manufacture (that is where they are not essentially needed) to a destination (that is, where their relative importance is great). Some of the many reasons people move about are:

1. Interaction
2. Economic gains
3. Trade and commerce
4. Knowledge acquisition
5. Recreational purposes/leisure
6. Politics
7. Information
8. Information gathering/dissemination
9. To strengthen the body system.

Relevance of Public Transport System.

The importance of public transport system in the political, socio-economic transformation of any nation, economy and society cannot be over emphasized. Obviously, this could be seen in the following ways as in understated:

1. Fuel efficiency
2. Pollution effects
3. Large carriage capacity
4. Cost/time efficiency
5. Level of congestion
6. Appropriate land use and space

Attributes of public transport system

For any public urban transport to be effective and efficient within the framework of a viable public transport planning system, the attributes below must be present as could be seen:

1. Reliability
2. Efficiency
3. Safety
4. Comfort ability
5. Availability
6. Affordability
7. Accessibility
8. Convenience

Concept of public Transport Systems

Public transport in whatever form it may be plays an important role in human settlements. It is true that people travel in order to obtain access to a variety of other people, services and facilities that are not available in their homes or origin of their travel. A well-managed and organized public transport is acknowledged as an important action by governments, whether state or federal in developing internal commercial activities, states transformation changes in trade and commerce and also all allied institutional movements within the confines of the state. By its nature, most public transport systems are more efficient means of transporting large numbers of people (from 50 passengers and above) between and within settlements than are admittedly more flexible private cars. The concept of public transportation in a developing nation's state like Nigeria is rather a misconceived and misrepresented concept of what obtains in advanced economies of the world. No doubt to say that an 18 seater bus is regarded as mass transit means of moving people from place of origin where they are not needed or command less value to destinations where their relative importance are greater. Obviously, such buses carrying less than 50 passengers at a go should be regarded as "para-transit modes) not public transport. In the late 80's and early 90s, federal government made several efforts in developing a public transport system that



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culminated in the establishment FUMTA (Federal Urban Mass Transit Administration). The idea was a good and laudable project by federal government. Obviously, the project did not last, as it died a natural death due largely to apparent lack of transport policy in place, and attendant managerial inabilities and planning principles. Indeed, professional and technical expertise were also lacking as their apparent mismanagement of funds by managers of this laudable projects, who were government workers, were very obvious.

Ideally, government business, an adage goes - is no any bodies business. This goes to say that, there is serious need for public private partnership in the management of our transportation system and attendant infrastructural facilities, for a meaningful sustainable transportation system to thrive in both state and the nation.

Obviously, the inability of the state in not adopting public transport scheme, which is due largely to political reason over the years, gave rise to the emergence of commercial motorcycling called Okada, taxis and small shuttle 18 seater buses to take centre stage in usurping the responsibilities of a well-managed public transport system in Nigeria. Worrisomely, the clear menace of Okada and its attendant social negative consequences in regard to armed robbery attacks, pollution, traffic congestion, road accidents and fatal injuries and permanent disabilities of young able population (youths) are nothing to write home about. Regrettably, the negative social and economic effects are more than its obvious benefits to the society at large. There is need to re-order and structure our public transportation systems, if we are to emerge and key into the seven point agenda of 2020 of the present government proposal of becoming one of the world's leading economy. The thriving of Okada in most of our cities mostly in Owerri, (and other known cities) must be done away with, if the "New face of Imo project" of the present administration will be achievable within this first four (4) years of its existence. We can do it, as we have the managerial and technical skills to arrive at an expected destination, if proper planning and succinct implementation of the policy must be carried out to its logical conclusion (Ndikom, 2008).

New Public Transportation Trend in Nigeria

The emergence of luxury buses in Nigeria in the last three decades ago through private efforts for long distance travel across the nooks and crannies of this nation, has indeed stimulated growth and economic revival, commercial transformation and emancipation of poverty in the land. This is because, inter-state trade and commerce and commercial transactions and transformation of these cities had witnessed growing ascendancy, as more people have gained employment through this laudable effort and participation of private sector investment in this critical and national infrastructural facilities. No doubt, no nation or state can thrive without an appreciable progress in its transportation management. This is because, as nations or her state develops, her mode of transport and its attendant operational modalities develops equally. There is need for concerted effort to be initiated to ensure that, the sector remains responsive, functional, progressive, reflective, competitive to sustainable standards and finally relevant to societal needs (Ndikom, 2008).

Against this background that the efforts of the new public transportation trend will be supported by states and all well-meaning individuals, who want a total re-ordering, re-constructions, re-habilitation and re-structuring of our public transportation system in Nigeria, mostly in Imo State and other states of the nation. Recognizing the spatial differentiation and the need to continue to sustain our national economy, various forms of transport systems or modes have been evolved or incorporated.

Notably, five states in Nigeria have currently taking the lead for an operational and functional workings of public transport system in their respective states of which Imo State is cheerfully one of them. Interestingly, other states are Lagos State, Cross River State, Bayelsa State and Abuja-the Federal Capital Territory. It is pertinent to note that, the degree of its operational functioning in all these states depend on the planning and managerial capabilities of the individual managers in place. Of interest, is the involvement of private sector initiatives in the management of these fleets of vehicles by all these states mostly Imo State, (Lagos State and Abuja etc, as this is something cheering and commendable. This shows one fact that, these state's governments want to extricate themselves from the project from the known usual governmental influence and vested interest, which are the main problems of the system over the years.



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Urban Transport Concept of Public Transport

Obviously, provision of access and mobility is very essential for the efficient organization and functioning of an urban centre of both developed and developing nations of the world. For most urban centres in developing countries, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the existing transport infrastructure and services to cope with the growing transport demand. Part of the problems that have affected urban transport in a developing country like Nigeria, is lack of adequate transport policy and a good, and functioning enabling environment. Worst still is that, the sub-sector of the transport industry has suffered from multiple stress of funding for appropriate sustainability of operational performance and policy inconsistency over the years. These identified problems have stunted the growth and development of the sector, which is currently witnessing an abrasive policy effects. The current age limit placed recently on trucks and buses by this present government will not help the growth of the sub-sector of the enlarged economy (Ndikom, 2008).

The government had at one time attempted to operate an urban transport system in form of FUMTA (Federal Urban Mass Transport Agency) in Abuja. The agency could not go far in its operation due largely to maladministration, managerial incompetence, structural defects, lack of operational focus, government policy effects and vested interests, professional incompetence and inappropriate fares system. These same problems affected the Lagos State Transport Corporation (LSTC), which also had grounded its operations. The same fate met with Trans-city Transport Company (TCTC) of Oyo State, which has huge scraps of these vehicles at its office in Ibadan. A similar doom was also experienced in Rivers State during the regime of Dr. (Sir) Peter Odili, of whose vehicles were also grounded, due to inappropriate fares system. The non-adoption of public transport system in Nigeria is apparently what is stagnating the growth and development of the Nigerian economic system. This is because; public transport plays a vital role in the development of any economic survival at the end (Ndikom, 2008). Although, the level of car ownership in Nigerian is still comparatively lower than that of most advanced countries

Over the last two and a half decades, there has been a steady increase in the number of private car owners (Ndikom, 2007). The distribution of car ownership is noticeably skewed in that; the large urban areas have a higher proportion than the small towns and rural areas. In all, the major urban centres in the country, in spite of increasing trend in the proportion of households with private transport, public transport in its various forms continues to be dominant. It is pertinent to state clearly that with the present economic hardships in the country and its attendant problems, employment amongst our able bodied youths, has led to the increase of use of commercial motorcyclist as an established intermediate modes of public transport and a source of job creation. As a result of serious migration of people from the rural "as to urban cities. This is as a result to access to infrastructural facilities and needs which has led to high urbanization of Lagos metropolis and other mega cities like (Kano, Port Harcourt etc) with its detrimental effects of increased youthful employment.

The use of commercial motorcycle popularly known as Okada, which was used as a mode of transport in some urban cities in the early 80s had indeed, dominated the streets of most urban and rural areas in Nigeria as an established mode of public transport and sources of employment for our teeming youths. It is evident that, the majority of urban dwellers in Nigeria's 36 state capitals and Abuja depend on various forms of public transport for their journeys to and from work. In other towns and cities in the country, the percentage of journey to and from work by private car is much lower than that for the respective state capitals in Nigeria. This is because, dominance of non-public transport and other modes of motorized transport in Nigerian cities and state capitals have given rise to worry and concern on the imminent problems of traffic management in most of these cities. Worst still is the level of traffic congestion and level of pollution, most of these para-transit modes emit in our environment. Obviously, the most common forms are the adapted vehicles, as the "molue", mini buses and shared taxis (Adeniji, 1987).

Motorcycles are also used for public transport in Calabar, Port Harcourt, Makurdi and other states of the federation, which is not what it is supposed to be in a developing economy like Nigeria. Apart from Lagos, in the other 35 states capitals and Abuja, these intermediate modes of public transport account for well over 70% of motorized journeys to and from work. In effect, whenever these operators withdraw their services, untold



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hardships are unleashed on the majority of inhabitants virtually all economic activity, both in the private and public sectors, are adversely affected (Adeniji, 1987).

Planning For Public Transport Systems in Nigeria

Planning for public transport system has "never been an easy task over the years, as it requires past and present variables to use in extrapolating future structure and situations, within the confines of the operational system. Planning for public transport is bedeviled with some difficult processes and questions; such include the following:

- Who pays for public transport?
- How do we measure public transport needs in a state like Imo State and any other States in the nation?
- What is the best way of helping the seemingly disadvantaged groups in our Society?
- How do we coordinate the activities of private and public operators of public and para-transit transport in the state?
- What is the appropriate fare- system for public transport system in the state?
- To what extent will the state government subsidize the public transport system culminating into future sustainability of the system and maintenance costs?
- What percentage costs will be appropriate to be chargeable fares to take care of?
- Maintenance and replacement costs for future sustainability of the system in the state?

It is of interest to examine all these questions as we go through this proposal for the new face of Imo State public transport project for the present and future benefits of her citizenry.

Private Sector Management and Routes allocation

Over the years, the ABC Transport had showed enough prowess, technical know-how and managerial capabilities in the management of private luxurious bus fleets in the last (2) two decades. The Ikedi Ohakim administration of Imo State in the last three years has decided to take a policy thrust in allowing ABC Transport to manage the new buses of Imo State public transport system is a cheering and commendable effort, signaling a responsive and responsible government. This is because, ABC Transport over the years, has been a good manager as regards their fleets. There is no doubt that they will do excellently well for the 20 buses in their custody for now. Notably, the number of buses for this initial phase of New Face of Imo State project is grossly inadequate since the route is from Owerri Township to nearby towns of Orlu, Obinze, Umuagwo, Ikeduru, Ata, Mbano, Mbaize and FUTO etc. There is need to increase the fleet if a meaningful impact is going to be achieved at-the end of the project (Ndikom, 2008)

In Lagos State for example, the project concept is managed by Lagos City Bus Initiative which is a private company. The number of buses released for the initial phase of the project is one hundred and twenty five (125) buses, funded by Eco bank and currently is maintaining only two (2) routes:

- (a) Mile 12 to TBS/CMS
- (b) Moshalashi in Mushin to TBS-CMS in Central Lagos business district.

The Abuja public transport project is also being managed by three different private companies and maintains routes like Kubwa to Berger and Nyanya to Berger and Wuse central business district.

Public transport operations in Nigeria lack the necessary coordination, control and obvious policy blueprint for effective management and operational supervision. It is pertinent to note that the intermediate mode lacks quality control which affects the three following area:

- (i) Entry control into the urban public transport market especially the number of vehicles allowed to operate.
- (ii) Service standards with regards to the types of services to be allowed, vehicle standards including type, condition of vehicles, passenger capacity and drivers age limit.
- (iii) Fares charged which is also exploitative in nature.

Public Private Partnership and Professional (PPPP) Concept of Public Transport

The advent of globalization on world economy and trade, and the threshing hold of concessioning and



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commercialization effect on the commercial transactions and linkages in business relationships between nations of the world, has indeed call for an urgent need to have a professional technocrat as a rallying point in the coordination and obvious management of public transport outfits either established jointly or owned by a private sector or also owned by government. The trend now in this deregulated globalized setting is to entrench serious professionalism as a service oriented factor in the service delivery package to customers of most organizations. This is obviously aimed at the satisfaction of your customers in the offering of your services competitively and optimally at a profit. This also could be seen by these 'kings' called customers as valued for money paid of services offered to them within a given period of time (Ndikom, 2010). The PPP concept adopted over the years in service delivery has never seen the light of the day, as the 'Professional component' touch" in the management and obvious coordination of the service delivery of most public transport organization was missing hence, the crashing of some of these outfit originally set up in Lagos-LSTC, TCTC in Ibadan and recently that of River state to say just a few (Ndikom, 2008).

The globalized world order and trend in today's business and commercial activities and commercial transactions and its attendant coordination and management principle insists on entrenching the concept and spirit of professionalism in public and private sector service orientation if we must be efficient and effective in the offer age of our services to customers satisfaction at a profit (Ndikom, 2010).

I sincerely call on the institute's management to braze the trail by preaching the gospel of professionalism by placing right people in right places with cognate experiences if we must get thing right in the sustainability of public transport system in Nigeria.

Problems associated with public transport system in Nigeria

It is often said that transport is a *trademark* of a developed society; hence, a nation is described to have attained a given level of development by the nature of its transport systems. For this reason, Nigeria can be described as an undeveloped society, as its transport systems are rather appalling, chaotic and traumatic in nature.

a. *Lack of Planning*

The lack of planning is often a major problem encountered by most public transport organizations, especially in developing societies. This problem ultimately leads to failure and, ultimately, to closure of the organization - according to the popular saying that 'failure to plan, is planning to fail'. Planning is the bedrock of management. It involves the assessment of past events and extrapolating them with current events so as to predict, in near-certainty, future events; it involves carefully analyzed facts for forecasting the future trends the performance of a transport organization.

b. *Unsuitable Transport Vehicles*

This is a major problem usually encountered by most public transport organizations. The unsuccessful transport business could be as result of the use of unsuitable or unfit buses or vehicle in its fleet. The manner in which most public transport organizations are managed does not give room for efficiency and effectiveness; hence, the incapable managers, in their effort to make the organization profitable, could hurriedly bring in some buses in the fleet, thereby putting in jeopardy the operations and services of the organization. Most of these buses do not run for long before they are parked off the road because they do not have the capacity to perform in the competitive environment. This was the main problem that led capacity to perform in the competitive environment. This was the main problem that led to the collapse of the Lagos State Transport Corporation.

C. *Lack of Maintenance Culture*

In Nigeria generally, maintenance culture is not part of the people's way of life; they practice preventive and routine maintenance. Consequently, public corporations in the country seem not to understand the relevance or need of maintenance to the survival of their fleets and, thus, turn a deaf ear to this aspect of management.

d. *Operational Problems*

The operations and services of most public transport systems carried below levels that are abysmal and unproductive. Most of these organizations do not understand the relevance of routine planning and assessment



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to the success of their operations and provision. This is also a major problem that saw to the demise of Lagos State Transport Corporation.

e. *Insincerity*

This is also a problem that bedevils most public transport corporations in recent times. Insincerity of managers and staff towards business operations and service provision hampers progress and negatively affects real growth. In Nigeria generally, workers and managers are cruel and dishonest in business. For example, an insincere worker might keep back the spare parts to the bus or other vehicle put under his care or, where he returns them, keep back some of these.

f.. *Political Interference*

Political interference in business management is a problem that has seen to the demise of most public transport corporations. The government of the day can issue instructions or make legislation on new management policies of certain organizations, on how they are to be run henceforth, which could sometimes make of non-effect all other managerial plans, objectives and goals that had been in place.

g. *Finance*

Ordinarily, a government is expected to finance a public transport organization, to make it viable. Thus, when the government is not full involved in providing finances for a public transport organization, the latter's growth and efficiency could be hampered. Often, for some selfish political reasons, a government decides to starve an organization of funds, to put out of business.

h. *Vested Interest*

This is a problem most public transport organizations face in their day-to-day operations and service provision for the public. The interests of the owners of a business have an important effect on the management and operations of such business concern or organization.

i. *Operating Environment*

There are a number of environment factors that negatively affect public transport business. Somehow, the Nigerian environment has not proved to be conducive for the operation of public transport business. Market segmentation, for example, is required for the effective and efficient operation of a public transport system. But rather than create this favorable environment, the Nigerian market only support unhealthy competition and rivalry among transport service providers.

i. *Identification of Primary Routes*

The failure to identify primary routes for each public transport system and private transport system has been the bane of the Nigerian transport systems. Most public transport service providers cannot identify specific primary routes for their bus Operations and this has led to ineffective, inefficient and non-functional operations and service provision for members of the public.

k. *Transport Legislation*

The absence of workable and viable transport legislations constitutes a major problem to effective and efficient operations and service provision in the public transport system Most transport legislations that are in place adversely affect the performance of the nation's public transport systems.

I. *Manpower Planning Problem*

Manpower planning often constitutes a major problem in a transport organization, as man is the most difficult resource to manage in any given enterprise. This has led serious development and growth problems for most organizations and, sometimes, to industrial unrest and even closure of industries

Funding process of public transport system in Nigeria

Over the years, the operations and management of transport issues have suffered greatly from the problems of inadequate funding and policy inconsistencies. These are two major reasons the industry has not found her feet



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in terms of growth and development, when compared with what obtains in the transport systems of advanced economies

Funding is a critical component in the operations of a public transport system. It plays a vital role in the growth and development of the system, especially in a developing nation like Nigeria (Ndikom, 2006). In other parts of the world, the government commits a LOT of money to the management and operations of public transport systems. But in Nigeria, the releases of funds into the industry by successive governments have been epileptic in nature, thereby stagnating the system. The various budgetary allocations do not give due attention to the operations of transport (Ndikom, 2008).

Currently, there are indications that the government would give due- attention to the industry, that is, if the current Seven-point Agenda of the Yar'adua administration is anything to go by. The 2008 budgetary allocations, passed on the 12th of February by both sessions of the National Assembly, is a pointer of new things to come and a strategic vista for progressive development in the sector, as the allocation to the transport sector (one of the highest in the last decade) would go a long way in the management and resuscitation of the sector. Most private transport operators usually borrow money to buy and run their fleets (Ndikom, 2008).

It is noteworthy that the plan by the Imo State Government to investing in the public transport system, through the introduction of a fleet of vehicles, for running to some local routes and providing town services, is a welcome development. But this good project must take into cognition the fact that the fare of N30 per drop (no matter the destination from Owerri municipality) is not ideal, especially if the government hopes to sustain this effort for a long time. The fare is not realistic in modern economic terms. The future maintenance cost of these vehicles might rubbish the government's efforts; hence, the sustainability of this fleet is not guaranteed, because when the realities of depreciation begin to set in, there may be telling the extent of the damage. The fleet may be even be better managed if handed over to private operators, for instance, ABC Transport Company. What I am advocating here is that, the government should go a step further to plan the management of the fleet, by looking at future depreciations and inflationary-values, so as to come up with more realistic fare system.

To remedy the funding problem, the government can create a pool of funds and encourage private transport operators to borrow from it to procure the necessary equipment and infrastructure and also to run their firms. Both the borrowing and service provision would be well-regulated within the confines of the law. But it is unfortunate that, practically, no transport policy is in force in Nigeria (Ndikom, 2006).

The toll system, which is a means of generating funds for road and other infrastructure maintenance, should be reintroduced. Also, the government can generate funds for the sector by taxing retail fuel purchase by vehicle owners; the money so realized should then be given to road transport operators. With regard to tollgate collections, a certain amount of the money should be used solely for management and maintenance of the public transport system (Ndikom, 2008)

Apart from toll and fuel tax, the government can generate funds through draw lotteries and then use the money to run the public transport system, as it is done in most advanced economies. Also, a certain percentage of property tax could be set aside to help manage and maintain the public transport system (Adeniji, 1988).

Furthermore, real estate development is a source of funds generation for the public transport sector. In this regard, some very rich individuals (estate developers and real property persons) are expected to give of their wealth to support the public transport system in the country. Again, shares of the 'National Public Transport Corporation' can be sold to raise funds for the sector.

More so, the government can deduct some percentage from the wage bill of workers in both state and federal enterprises, to fund the public transport system. This practice is common in France and Japan, and has helped the operationalization of their public transport systems.



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Finally, a viable source of funding for the sector is the value-added tax (VAT). In some countries, however, insurance companies assist in the funding of public transport systems. Also, contract financing is a good financial assistance for the public transport system (Adeniji, 1988).

Fares System

Fare systems are charges paid by the individual beneficiary for the services officered by bus operators for a given distance of travel or journey made within a given geographic location. A key factor in the demand for public transport is the level of fares charged and the method by which the charge is made. What constitute an appropriate fare charged for any public transport system is dependent on so many factors such as:

- (i) Distance covered
- (ii) Vehicle newness
- (iii) Operational expenses
- (iv) Level of maintenance structure
- (v) Future depreciation value of the vehicle
- (vi) Replacement
- (vii) Value costs
- (viii) Staff salaries
- (ix) Government policy consideration, and
- (x) Fare range

Appropriate fare charges for new face of Imo State Public Transport System

The thirty Naira (=N=30) flat rate charges for any distance covered from Owerri between origin and destination on any route location in the state is good and commendable. For the first time in the history of Imo State, that a state government considered the establishment of a public transportation system in the state. That shows a government with vision and a purposeful understanding of grassroots problems at heart. It also shows a responsible and responsive government, who wants to fulfill her political promises to the electorate. The clear leadership skills of the present administration in Imo State and the level of achievements made so far in the last three year administration in Imo State is very glaring to all and a testimony of a visionary leader who is a servant of the people. Obviously, a real economic appraisal of the present fare charge of N30 for any distance covered from Owerri does not portend a realistic fare charges when compared with charges in the same distance coverage in Lagos and Abuja respectively. It is a good idea if the present efforts of the government can sustain it in the next four years (Ndikom, 2008).

My fear is that government might not sustain the present tempo of subsidy on the current public transportation in the next four years. The fear stems out from the obvious reasons of other possible contending state issues and problems that require proper funding within this space of time. Secondly, the fare charges cannot look after the present salaries, output of the staff and consultant (ABC Transport) managing its affairs for now. Also, it will not take care of the operational and maintenance costs of the public transport system, irrespective of the level of government subsidy presently. More so, it will not generate enough funds for savings in regard of future replacement programme and sustainability of the system. There is no way that the present fare charge of =N=30 can take care of all the above issues enunciated above. This means that, there is no way the present effort of subsidy can continue in the next four years without obvious neglect of other pressing issues of the state. Therefore, there is need for government and the managers (ABC Transport) to realistically review the present pricing policy or fare system now that the vehicles are still brand new. When depreciation sets in on the vehicles (either straight line or reducing balance method, whatever choice), it will be difficult to actually sustain the system in the future. The right thing to do now is for a possible review of the fare charges now, as the buses are still few and reflects zero value depreciation. It is pertinent to note that the appropriate fare charges to any distance or location in the state from Owerri municipal town is = N=60 (Sixty) Naira with a minimum subsidy by the state government.

In Lagos State, the same distance from Mile 12 to TBS/CMS cost = N= 100, while in Abuja, from Kubwa to Berger or Wuse market attracts = N=80 for the same distance. The sixty naira (=N=60) to any location in the



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state is most appropriate and competitive when compared with the other similar operational buses in other states of Lagos, Abuja and Cross Rivers.

Table 1. Fare charges of public Transport System in selected states in Nigeria

S/N	Operational States	Distance Range	Fare Charges	Remarks
1	Imo State	Owerri to Futo	=N=30.00	Not competitive
	Imo State	Owerri to Orlu	=N=30.00	Not competitive
	Imo State	Owerri to Obinze	=N=30.00	Not competitive
2	Lagos State	Mile 12 to TBS/CMS	=N=100.00	Competitive
	Lagos State	Moshalashi to TBS/CMS	=N=100.00	Competitive
3	Abuja	Kubwa to Berger	=N=80.00	Competitive
	Abuja	Kubwa to Berger	=N=80.00	Competitive
	Abuja	Nyanya to Berger	=N=80.00	Competitive
	Abuja	Gwagwalada to Berger/Wuse	=N=100.00	Competitive

Table 1 shows that Lagos State recently released 125 buses, and assigned them to only two routes as indicated and the fare charges of =N= 100.00 for any distance are competitive appropriate. This means that ₦30 could be allocated for salaries and operational management, another ₦= 30.00 for maintenance and replacement of spare parts, and finally = ₦= 40.00 for savings and future replacement cost for vehicles. The same cost allocation and application could still be possible for the public transportation system in Abuja. Obviously, it could be seen that =N= 30.00 for the new face of Imo is not appropriate and competitive when compared with others in similar states operations. Finally therefore, there is need for a review of present fare charges, if the government wants to sustain the system in the near future.

Sustainability of the Public Transport System

No doubt, the present government had done a good project for the benefit of the entire citizenry in the state. Currently, the present government effort in this regard needs to be commended, as they have made a giant stride in the establishment of a public transport system in the state, of which no past government had ever considered such laudable project. In spite of the fact that, it is a good idea, there is need for us to look at the appropriateness of the present policy in place, impact on the economy, potentials and future challenges, effects of subsidy on other government pressing problems in the state, then conclude if the present effort is viable or needs a review upwards (Ndikom, 2008).

ABC Transport limited has a good track record of managing such fleets over the years successfully. It is my opinion that the consultant should as a matter of policy have a critical appraisal of all the issues raised above and see if the policy will stand a test of time or not. It is very obvious that, there is a possible review of the present fare system of policy in place, if we must have a future sustainability of the public transport system in the state.

Depreciation Costs of Public Transport System

It is never in doubt that the new face of Imo project is the most appropriate and laudable one since the inception of the state and every other past governments that have had opportunities in ruling the state. Truly, every Imo State citizen is in love with the programme including my humble self. This is because, it is meant to benefit the people of the state and her citizenry, of which the public transportation is achieving right now. My worry is the continual future sustainability of this laudable project for the people of Imo State. This fear, (not a pessimistic one), stems out from the fact that continued operation of this public transport on the cost of =N=30.00 for any distance or location in the state, might not guarantee its sustainability in the near distant future. This is because, depreciation costs will soon set in and the government might not be able to give priority attention to this project, mostly when it involves large chunk of money in running operational expenses and maintenance. Whatever depreciation concept (either reducing balance or straight line), the present cost isn't sustainable and realistic, and the continued operational performance of this outfit will soon show either positively or negatively.



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Future Prospects of the Public Transportation Project

Truly, speaking, the project has future prospects, mostly when it is a new concept in our cherished and emerging state (Imo State-under Gov. Ikedi Ohakim's administration). All over the world, public transportation wherever it is adopted, has been the key to growth, trade, increased commercial activities and other economic developmental transactions and transformation. It has no rivalry in terms of provoking and stimulating intra-state trade and commerce. There is need for government to increase the number from 20 to 50 buses. If need be, government can go into collaborative joint business with one of the Nigerian banks for funding the project on a long term basis, as in the case of Lagos bus initiative with Ecobank. Oceanic and Intercontinental banks might be interested in partnering with the state government in this novel and ground breaking project of Governor Ohakim's administration. It is of interest to suggest, that the idea of increasing the number of these buses is specifically meant for wider spread to all the local governments in Imo State. Each of these buses will be assigned to each local government in the state, with the aim of lifting people of the local governments who have business to do in Owerri and back. There will be a bus terminal to be built in each local government specifically meant for people to come to Owerri capital for business and other official matters. There is need to construct different operational bus terminals at some strategic locations in the Owerri capital development area. There is need for government to take a cue from the BRT terminal concept, which built terminal at every strategic position in Lagos metropolis and environs. I don't subscribe that, there shall be a special road designed for these buses, as it is in Lagos State. The reason is that, our city is not yet a mega city like Lagos. A good operationalization of this project in Imo State will technically remove Okada on the streets of Owerri capital, which is the primary objective of government in the first place. It is of interest to note that, some of these buses will still run the present routes they are applying now, irrespective of the new routes dimension that will be added in the management and operationalization of the project. It is my firm trust and belief that ABC Transport management should still be the managers of this laudable project. This is because of their pedigree and latitudinal experiences in the act of managing such projects over the years which is second to none. I sincerely urge the managers (ABC transport) to honestly apply her enduring management skills to appraise the suggested price of = N=60.00 for any distance in the state and see if it is realistic enough to cater for all incidental expenses of the new face of Imo project (public transportation). Obviously, this will augment and complement the efforts of the Imo Transport Corporation (ITC) in reaching at all areas in the state. There is need to transform and reform the technical and structural appearance of ITC by government which is aimed to give it a face-lift in its management and operations nationwide. The present structure needs total transformation if we must achieve a healthy transportation system in the state, aimed at giving Okada operation the back seat it deserves. They can operate in the remote villages and some adjoining towns but not too close to the state capital. The government's effort in complementing the bigger buses with taxis and 18 seater buses in land shuttleservices in the state is also commendable. No doubt, it is a great achievement by this great "Ohakim" government in Imo state if room for future improvements will be accommodated within this new face of Imo project on public transportation. Honestly, this should not be misconstrued as a strategy to over tax the people who sincerely gave their mandate to this government. But this should be looked on the context of an appropriate pricing designed for future sustainability of a laudable project such as this one in the state.

Publicity and Enlightenment

Obviously, the people of the state should be adequately sensitized in the appropriateness and genuine benefits of the project to them. They should also be adequately informed of the reasons behind government change of price of the public transport system in the state. The issue of future sustainability of the project and programme is of paramount importance to government than short-lived project that cannot be sustainable in the near future. The Ministry of information and Imo State orientation agency should be adequately briefed of the relevance of this government critical project and its future sustainability for the benefits of the state citizens. That, this price should not be abruptly increased without good reasons if adopted finally, as it will deface the value of good governance in the state.

The government should sustain good advertorials both in Radio, Newspapers and other local media in justifying the good reasons for this upward price review in this new face of Imo project on public transportation. Sincerely, I do hope that the people of the state will accept this without much hesitation. This is because the prices they pay from private buses within and outside this state capital, adds very much pressure on their purses.



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Benefits of the New Public Transport Concept

- It will generate growth and economic development in the state
- It will enhance employment opportunities in the state
- It will enhance trade and commerce within the state capital and the villages
- It will reduce traffic congestion in the state
- It will reduce the ugly menace of Okada operations in the state capital and its attendant accidental problem.
- It will strategically remove the operations of Okada in the state capital and its environs
- It stimulates value for money of services rendered to the people
- It will lead to greater savings on the side of the people as they will pay less from payment of present fares.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the government should review the operational modalities of the public transportation in the state.
- It is also recommended that government should review the present fare payment of ₦30.00 for a distance travelled in the state.
- That, the government should review the price upwards to ₦60.00 aimed at future sustainability and good services to the people of the state.
- It is recommended that government should continue in her initiation, implementation of the New face of Imo Public Transportation Project in the state.
- It is also recommended that the services be extended to all the local governments in the state for greater entrenchment of the project and efficiency and state capital village interactions in business relationships
- That, the government should consider building of bus terminals at strategic places in the state capital and its environs.
- That, the government also will increase the number of buses operational in the state to fifty (50) buses. This is aimed at greater coverage and extended benefits of good governance to the grassroots.
- That, all local governments should join hands with state government in building an enduring legacy effects of the New Face of Imo project on Public Transportation in the state, by starting something similar to this in their various local governments.
- That, there should be a quarterly review of the operational modalities of the project by the managers-ABC Transport management.
- That, a quarterly maintenance policy to be maintained on the buses by the managers supported by a legislative backing, as it is aimed at future sustainability.
- That, there should be a quarterly operational performance report to be submitted to the Governor for his appraisal and notice by managers –ABC Transport Limited. This is aimed at enhancing the operational modalities and performance of the project and for better services to the people of the state.

CONCLUSION

The initiation and final take off of the New Face of Imo Public transportation will give the state a structural face lift in terms of entrenchment of good governance to the grassroots in the state. It will also provoke and stimulate economic growth and developments in terms of enhance trade and commerce in the state's commercial activities and transactions. The proper implementation of the New face of Imo Project on Public Transportation will not only enhance integration of states resources, entrenchment of good governance over the people, but will also lead to channelization of financial resources to appropriate use for the benefits of the citizenry. The appropriate pricing policy of the public transport system, will enable the state to sustain the project in the near future and also to avoid a repeat experience of the history of what happened in Rivers State under Dr. Peter Odili's administration, where the project he started couldn't be sustained, as it died naturally due to inappropriate fares system. The same experience happened with Transcity Transport Company (TCTC) of Oyo State. Some of the buses have been abandoned and the management is somehow incapacitated due largely to inappropriate fares system. Therefore, the sustainability of any public transportation system depends on accurate



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and appropriate pricing (fares) system. Hence, the people and generations to come will benefit from a system that is well managed and sustained through proper pricing system, than experiencing a short lived benefit, which will lead to future castigations of a mismanaged project of this nature.

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