

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES OF MOTORCYCLE MODE AS URBAN PUBLIC PASSENGER TRANSPORT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The conveyance of people and goods from one place to another has been an indispensable activity and it is as old as the history of mankind. Transportation system of all kinds have played and are still playing a significant role in the movement of people and goods in towns and cities all over the world- However, despite all methods of movement, the problem in the city at present is still how to move. The emergence of motorcycle mode as urban public passenger transport, occasioned by the rapid population growth with rapid expanding cities, astronomical increase in the price of vehicles and rapidly disappearance of public vehicles from urban roads among other factors, represent a phase in meeting the mobility needs of the urban residents. This paper therefore, attempts a critical look at the problems and challenges of motorcycle mode in the Public Transport scene which is rapidly becoming more ubiquitous in our various urban centers in Nigeria. The study observed that inspite of some problem associated with the use of this mode as public passenger transport, there equally exists several factors favouring its growth. It is therefore, believed that urban residents will continue to make use of motorcycle until better mode is not only available but accessible.

Introduction

That urban transport in Nigeria presently functions in crisis situation is undisputable. The rapid urban population growth with rapid expanding cities, astronomical increased' in the prices of vehicles and rapidly disappearance of public vehicles from urban roads have combined to aggravate the already bad mobility situation of urban residents.

Prior to early 1980's, a good number of self-employed Nigerians owned private means of transport; with which they could meet their mobility needs. The situation has, however, changed in the last few years when the prices of new vehicles went out of the roof and those who own vehicles increasingly find it difficult to maintain, let alone replace them. As a result of this many more people in urban centers throughout Nigeria are now public transport captive rides. Thus, "despite all methods of movement, the problem in the city at present is still how to move" (Daniels and Warnes 1983).

The problems of how to move in the urban centers has been aggravated by deteriorating GNP per capita, galloping inflation and overall declining purchasing power of majority of Nigerian particularly since the introduction of structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. These negative economic trends coupled with rapid growth of population and deficient land use planning has a knock-on effect on urban mobility. Urban transport demands are greatly ahead of supply; public and private vehicles of all descriptions are disappearing from the roads owing to old age and exorbitant prices of vehicles that prevent replacement (Ogunjumo 1987; Oiko 1998, Adesanya 1994, Adeniji 1987; Daily Sketch 1998, Filani 2000).

The declining stock of both private and public transport vehicles with an increasing travel demand have dramatically transformed the urban transport system into chaotic situation featuring the emergence of motorcycle mode in public transport in our various urban centers. About 70% of urban residents now depend on motorcycle as means of urban public transport either for feeder trips to the public transport services or as a dominant public transport services (Ogunsnaya and Galatima 1993, Oyesiku2001).

This paper is therefore, an attempt to critically assess the problems and challenges of motorcycle mode in the urban public transport scene which is rapidly becoming more ubiquitous in our various urban centers in Nigeria. After this introduction, the paper is divided into four different sections. The first section deals with Emergence of motorcycle in public transport in Nigeria, while section two examines the operational characteristics of motorcycle as public transportation. The third section deals with the problems and prospects of the motorcycle mode as a means of public transportation in Nigeria, and the fourth section gives a brief conclusion of the paper.

Emergence of Motorcycle in Public Transportation in Nigeria

Motorcycle, has been described as a bicycle or tricycle propelled by an electric or internal combustion engine (Ogunsanya and Galatima, 1993). The first motorcycle to appear publicly was built by Gottlieb Daimler in 1885; this is two years before the first - light engined motor car of 1887, also by Daimler. The motorcycle grew greatly in importance after 1910. During the first world war, it was used very extensively by combatants for the distribution of mails and after the war it was used essentially for sports.

The importance of the motorcycles even for the distribution of mails started to decline with the advent of mass production and intensive use of motor cars. By the 70's the use has been considerably restricted to short shuttles by dispatch riders, high speed recreational tours, sports and hobby. It is therefore, clear that from inception; motorcycles are meant for restricted activities, and not as public transport mode. Even in such cities like India, Bangkok and Bangladesh where tricycle version of the motorcycle is used for public transport; efforts are being made by the government to introduce the conventional public transport system on a wide scale.

The situation in Nigeria, with regards to motorcycle is not particularly different from the above global picture. Until recently, the use of motorcycle is restricted to private use and to meet personal mobility needs which does not involve long-distance. The involvement of motorcycles in public transportation in Nigeria may not be said to be too recent. It is common mode of inter-city transport in the riverine areas of Delta, Edo, Rivers and Cross River States, due to the water-logged nature of the area, which made road construction difficult. It is also common in the dispersed settlements of the Eastern States where it is a popular mode for inter-rural and rural-urban transport. The use of motorcycles as an alternative mode of public transport has actually spread to cities of other parts of the country. It is referred to as "going" in plateau state, "Okada" in Lagos and Ogun States, "akanke" in Calabar, "achaba" in Bauchi and Yola and "last flight" in Benin City.

Although the specific date of evolution of motorcycle as a public transport mode in each of these urban centers is not too well known; available information suggests that, the use of this mode became prevalent consequent upon the structural adjustment policy of the government in 1986, with its very stringent attributes. Thus, the emergence of motorcycle as a public transport mode in most Nigerian towns can be attributed to economic hardships; consequent upon the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) with its knock-on-effect on transportation. Import duty and other restrictions on vehicles had seriously affected the automobile supply to meet the ever increasing travel demands and these had resulted in the use of motorcycles as public transport modes to fill the gap created by the inadequate supply of cars and buses in the market. In addition, the phenomenal increase in transportation cost and fare following upward adjustment of prices of petroleum without concomitant increase in wages not only led to high inflation, inability to pay towering taxi fares, but also a decrease in motor vehicles fleet as income could not replenish derelict vehicles (Oyesiku, 2002). To this extent, the emergence of motorcycle as a public transport mode in most Nigerian towns can be attributed to the economic hardship occasioned by the Structural Adjustment Programme of the government consequent upon which the para-transit operators of taxis and mini buses became deficient to cope with increasing demand for transportation.

Operational Characteristics of Motorcycles as Public Transportation in Nigeria

There has been a surge in the influx and use of "used" motorcycles for public transportation in Nigerian urban centers since late 1980s. For instance, newly registered motorcycles increased from around 4000 in 1990 to 25,000 in 1996. The used motorcycles further rose remarkably, almost double fold in 1999 as the newly registered motorcycles in various urban centers in the country rose to about 26,000 in 1997 to about 58,000 in 1999 and 65,000 in 2001, (Oyesiku 2002).

In the past, motorcycles are operated freely in the various urban centers. It was not formally regulated. However, with the formulation of National multi-purpose union of motor Bike Transporters of Nigeria in some major urban centers across the country, any unregistered operators are harrassed until they comply with the registration requirement of the association in the local area. The formation of the motorcycle operators union was born out of the need to take care of the welfare of the operators and to reduce the increasing level of harassment from the police (Adegbite, 1994).

In the existing urban infrastructural facilities, there is no provision for motorcycles as a public transport mode. The consequences of this is that, motorcycles operators in the urban areas are always

at conflict with other road users, particularly more powerful vehicles, and this poses a great threat to safety in the overall transport industry. In fact, going by the Hospital, police and Federal Road Safety Commission sources, accidents involving motorcycle operators is perhaps one of the highest on urban roads particularly in recent times (Adegbite 1994, Osoba 2004). Also, motorcycles riders and passengers often suffer greater injuries during accidents, more so, as they do not usually wear helmet which could have served as a source of protection. That the accident rate of motorcycles operators is higher than that of other modes of public transport is not unconnected with factors such as (i) the motive for the use of motorcycles for public transport, which is income generation. Therefore, the more the trips they make the more the income they earn (ii) many of the motorcycle riders learn how to operate the machine for just one or two days before setting out on the streets and highways and (iii) motorcycle operators are in the habit of disregarding simple conventional traffic signs and regulations (Ogunsanya and Galatima 1993, Adegbite 1994, Osoba 2004).

Available information has shown that this activity is an entirely male business who operate on full time or part-time basis and that most of the people engaged in the operation are young men of between 18 and 50 years old and about 49% of the operators are married. (Ogunsanya and Galatima 1993, Adegbite 1994, Oyesiku 2002). The bulk of the operators as revealed by available information fall in the category of people with no formal educational or with secondary school education. The high percentage of uneducated operators pose very serious problems to the understanding of road signals by these operators who even have no formal training in the use of the motorcycle for public transport. Operators no doubt are quite aware of the risky nature of their business. This is in terms of accidents resulting from fatigue (Since they are exposed to the problem of uncontrived weather throughout the work period) and or the poor consideration of motorcyclists by the other road users.

Motorcycles is patronized extensively by people within the age of 18-50 years, but unlike operators; both male and female of all educational levels; and different occupational structure patronize motorcycles in urban centers for various journey purpose especially works and school trips which characterized the bulk of the peak period travels. The major reasons for use of motorcycle for urban trips include door to door service delivery, its availability, flexibility and fastness in that order (Oyesiku 2002). This mode of travel to say the least is grossly uncomfortable for both operators and users. This brings a situation where reluctant operators are brought, by circumstance, in contact with reluctant users. For a light, two wheeled automobile which requires immense concentration and balancing skill, such reluctance is capable of increasing the propensity for accidents and exposure to many other risks (Ogunsanya and Galatima, 1993).

The operational characteristics of motorcycles as discussed evoked some conflicting issues:

- (i) Though the conventional transport system have never dominated public transport provision in Nigeria, the increasing transport demand that is increasingly being met by motorcycle, have further reduced its importance,
- (ii) Some motorcycle operators as in the service essentially because of their own economic situation, both the operators and users are exposed to environmental hazards such as air pollution and fatalities,
- (iii) The operators prefer another job and users prefer another mode. This suggests that motorcycle is not an appreciated mode of passenger transport, yet its proliferation in urban centers is increasing daily. This is a pointer to the fact that the Government mass transit programme has not performed its expected role,
- (iv) **The "motorcycle operators union" wants more recognition and encouragement in the use of this mode for public transport, but the users would rather prefer a more risk-free, efficient and comfortable alternative introduced by the Government particularly Bus Services.**

From these conflicting issues, there is no doubt that motorcycle still remains a controversial mode of public transport particularly in urban centres.

Problems and Prospects of Motorcycles as a Public Mode of Transport

In lieu of the above short discussion on the operational characteristics of motorcycle as a public transport in urban centers; the problems and prospects of the mode is herein considered. There is no doubt that motorcycles is not an efficient mode of transport for the movement of people particularly in urban area. Apart from its limited carrying capacity, and the problem of

uncomfortability, other problem of motorcycle as a mode of public transportation in the urban centers include the following:

- (i) It is more prone to accident; and other road users treat motorcycles' and their operators with levity. This is due to the complete absence of necessary facilities for motorcycles in the urban transport infrastructural facilities,
- (ii) It's relevance as a mode of public transport is also limited by its inability to carry load/freight,
- (iii) This mode can not cater for every rank of the society. For example, because of its instability, it cannot be suitable for use by children, pregnant women as well as the aged people,
- (iv) Because of the free-for-all nature of this business in our urban centers, people with no formal training in the use of motorcycle as well as underage riders are easily infiltrated into the business.

In spite of these problems of this mode, its use is increasing and fastly spreading to other urban areas that were hitherto not using it. In addition, more attention is being given to promoting its use along with other unconventional modes of transport in many developing countries. For example, there are many motorcycle based modes in Asian Countries playing crucial roles in meeting the ever growing demands for both conventional and unconventional modes of Transport (Rimmer 1980, Dimitrius and Banjo 1990). Also, the introduction of Tricycle in Lagos state by the Marwa administration, in Lagos is another effort at promoting motorcycle based transport modes in Nigeria. This suggests the existence of certain factors favouring its growth. This however, is not unconnected with the depressed economic situation as earlier mentioned. In addition to economic situation that compel urban residents to motorcycles, there are some certain potentials that make this mode appealing, and these include:

- (i) It's potential to operate in conjunction with the conventional fixed-route urban passenger services and to serve as feeder services;
- (ii) It's potential to play an increasing role in situation where low-demand for travel renders conventional public transport inadequate,
- (iii) It's ability to play a noticeable role for home to work trips and for local movement within urban activities centres.

In addition to the above, the flexibility in routing pattern of motorcycle compared with fixed routes of minibuses services makes it appealing to urban commuters. Also, motorcycle services is particularly valuable to the riders whose urban travel requirements do not match with fixed route or schedule service. Furthermore, its low initial cost, low operating expenses, door to door services and its readily availability to commuters constitute another advantages of this mode.

Conclusions

From all the above, we have noticed that motorcycle is grossly inadequate for urban passenger movement in Nigeria. It cannot serve as substitute for much needed efficient and functional mass transit programme in our urban areas. However, considering the factors that forced people to embrace this two-wheeled machine as mode of public transport, there is little doubt that urban residents will continue to make use of motorcycle until better mode is not only available but accessible.

In the light of this, we are suggesting that the performance of the mass transit programme in our various urban centers need to be evaluated. Conventionally, intra-urban mass transit should not be diverted to inter-city routes as presently the case in many parts of the country.

Due to the persistence economic crisis, there is little doubt that motorcycle will still continue to operate; and as such adequate infrastructural facilities in addition to thorough screening of the motorcycles for road worthiness and testing of the operators for efficiency, standardization of motorcycle to be used among others should be done. There is need for more effective regulation of the services at least for now and these should include the following:

1. Enforcement of the regulation on the wearing of crash helmet and protective glasses by both the operators and passengers.

2. Operators should have a formal education up to primary school at least before operating licence are issued.
4. Law enforcement agents should ensure the following:

- (i) That only one passenger is carried at a time*
- (ii) That the passenger or the luggage's carried are not too heavy, too large or too long,
- (iii) That passenger under 6 years of age is not allowed to use motorcycle and women with advanced pregnancies should also be denied motorcycle-transport services.

It is however, being emphasized once again that what Nigerian urban residents needs for their mobility now is nothing short of functional, efficient and reliable public transport including mass-transit and this should be given top priority by the Government. Also, there is the need for an integrated urban public transport system whereby the different modes function as to complement one another.

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