

Tech, Transport and Sustainability: The undefined prospects of Lagos Ride

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The Centre for Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation (CEMRI) is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and a multidisciplinary conclave committed to collaborating and sharing scientific research findings amongst African scholars and professionals with the ultimate aim of knowledge sharing, research and development across Africa. A focus on collaboration among African researchers and institutions is crucial in an attempt to finding solutions to issues confronting African nations. The problems are so enormous but can fortunately be addressed through collaborations as Africa countries are mostly faced with common challenges. Africa has been losing thousands of professionals every year to developed countries owing to the frustration of the lack of infrastructure and mentorship. There should be a deliberate effort to promote collaboration across the continent and this is why African researchers' forum exists to fill this gap. Currently, CEMRI is registered in Ghana, Nigeria and Finland.

Executive Summary

The Lagos State Government of Nigeria signed a partnership agreement with CIG Motors Company Limited to revamp road transportation in the state. The agreement heralded a new e-hailing taxi scheme known as 'Lagos Ride,' which kicks off with a pilot fleet of 1,000 cars. While this initiative is commendable, it is imperative to reflect on this project and explore its prospects and challenges amidst the growing clamour for a more sustainable mode of transportation and decarbonising transportation. This report acknowledged that a crucial decision had been taken, which indicates the cars were bought and seen in convoy on Lagos's streets. The question remains what stakeholders can learn from this initiative and possibly if there are things that the government can do differently in the future. With this additional number of cars, we cannot disregard the impact on traffic congestion in the city. The number of vehicles will increase, yet the road network and infrastructure are not growing to meet this growing demand for transport services. Most government and transport operators around the world have recognised the need for decarbonisation. It is imperative to remind governments who are still investing in the ICE mode of transportation to start looking out for a more sustainable way of transportation.

Introduction

Transportation is vital for human activities, providing access to work, social, religious, and economic activities, including the distribution of goods and services. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the governments taking the initiative to enhance transportation services. Especially in a city like Lagos, Nigeria, with its growing population, the government's efforts commendably make sure everybody can move around the city. There is the BRT, an increasing number of terminals like the Oshodi terminal, and investment in Monorail. Still, it is doubtful if these investments are enough to address the growing demands of commuters for a sustainable, safe, and conducive transport system.

Possibly to address these challenges, the Lagos state government has recently acquired 1000 cars to commute people around the city of Lagos (Ijaseun, 2022). While this initiative is commendable, it is imperative to reflect on this project and explore its prospects and challenges amidst the growing clamour for a more sustainable mode of transportation and decarbonising transportation. This report acknowledged that a crucial decision had been taken, which indicates the cars were bought and seen in convoy on Lagos's streets. The question

remains what stakeholders can learn from this initiative and possibly if there are things that the government can do differently in the future.

This opinion piece critically evaluates this business decision by the government from three lenses - tech start-up, transportation mode, and sustainability with a government and political undertone. This approach examines the impact of these transport initiatives and highlights their implication on transportation, the transport tech ecosystem, and consumers' experience. Likewise, it will raise concerns for the future of this initiative on the stage and other governments considering similar approaches.

The following section provides a brief background on Lagos Ride. This section is followed by the practical lenses through which this piece is explored. It offers practical implications for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, tech start-ups, and stakeholders interested in sustainable transport management, even those beyond Lagos and other developing countries considering investing in their transport infrastructure.

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Figure 1: Lagos Ride Mini SUV



Image from <https://lagosride.com/>

Lagos Ride

In 2021, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, governor of Lagos, signed a partnership agreement with CIG Motors Company Limited to revamp road transportation in the state. The agreement heralded a new e-hailing taxi scheme known as 'Lagos Ride,' which kicks off with a pilot fleet of 1,000 cars - Two forms of GAC vehicles will be used for the scheme; a mini SUV (Figure 1) and a saloon car with full options. The project is expected to compete with other e-hailing services — Uber and Bolt — and provide employment for thousands of drivers (Uthman, 2022).

According to the Lagos government, The Lagos Ride Scheme aims to eliminate all rickety cars used as taxis on Nigeria's economic capital roads. It is also considered an empowerment scheme for residents of the state who fall into any of these categories; the unemployed or workers under the present taxis scheme are not owners of the taxis they are operating (Ijaseun, 2022). The scheme allows operators, who are not owners of the taxis they drive, to acquire a vehicle through the "lease-to-own" scheme. The Lagos Ride Scheme will help the driver/operator own the car three to four years after fully paying.

The cars have been branded Lagos Ride, painted blue and white. Lagos Ride-branded SUVs start from N10 million (\$26,000), but the governor revealed that the Cooperative Society in the Lagos Ministry of Wealth Creation would allow drivers to pay monthly instalments over four years (Lagosride, 2022).

The government is taking pride in the security

features of the cars. It has security embedded with dashboard cameras installed in each vehicle for real-time monitoring of the car, passengers, and drivers' activities for safety purposes. The initiative's other shared mobility and transport tech features have also been flaunted. Lagos Ride is positioned as a mobility solution that will allow users to book and share the cost of a ride with similar transit patterns. Lagos Ride will enable users to secure and split the ride price with other users with similar transit patterns. It will connect users based on their preferred pick-up and drop-off points, which must be 1 km apart and no more than 5 minutes apart. All trip fares are expected to be remitted electronically via the Lagos Ride platform.

While the enormous prospects are recognised, Critics have questioned the initiatives from two perspectives. First is the government's involvement in shared mobility, saying it competes with Uber and Bolt. The second is the idea of the 'empowerment scheme', which many people believe does not make much commercial sense. One critic said: 'If I am a driver and I have 1.8m, will I be fool enough to go and subject myself to all the above or get a good Toyota car of my own and register with already available e-hailing platforms?' (Autojosh, 2022). While these points may be considered valid, there is enough focus on these two areas but instead this reflective piece looks beyond that to provide a holistic view of the implications of this decision on urban transportation and sustainability in a city like Lagos.

Figure 2: The Three lenses



The Lenses

This reflective piece is explored from three lenses to understand the implication of these initiatives on the key stakeholder and the environment. These initiatives impact stakeholders, and therefore it is imperative to explore how they are being affected now and possibly in the future. Figure 2 illustrates these three lenses and Lagos Ride initiative at the intersection of these lenses and recognises the political undertone and the government initiatives in an emerging economy like Lagos, Nigeria.

The first lens of exploration is **Tech start-up**. Many people have raised concerns about the disruption this Lagos Ride will bring to the transport tech ecosystem; it is acknowledged that Uber and Bolt are presently operating in the state. There is no need for the government to get involved in providing e-hailing and ride-sharing. Many have questioned why the government is engaged in the business operations of transportation instead of regulating it or driving the crowding-in of private actors through functioning public-private collaboration and investment.

The second lens is **transportation**, which recognises the government's effort to ease the transportation challenges in the city. The government has promised that these new taxis will replace the old taxis that ply the city; however, the concern remains why the focus is not on mass urban transportation and a long-term solution to the need to transport people within the city. Other aspects revolve

around the fiscal implication of starting and maintaining the transport initiatives amidst calls for governments in developing countries to reduce borrowing and recurrent expenditures (Mogaji, 2021). The inherent governance challenges such as corruption and stringent bureaucracies that often plague public-led initiatives may further worsen fiscal inefficiency in the state.

The third lens is the **sustainability** perspective which questions the need to buy more cars for public transportation amidst the growing demands for decarbonisation of transport and reducing the CO₂ emissions from vehicles—having several such vehicles on the Lagos road will further contribute to increasing the greenhouse gas (CO₂) emission that the world is trying to reduce. Underlying all these perspectives is the role and involvement of the government in these transport initiatives.

We discuss the relevance of these transport strategies and identify practical implications with these three lenses. We recognise that the government must address the current situation with global best practices, consider how to solve the transportation problems with existing technologies or resources, and ensure sustainable earth for the future generation.

The Implications

There are vital implications for stakeholders as we explore the prospects of these new transport initiatives in the city. The cars are here, and commuters need to be ready for their impact on the transport infrastructure. However, it is important to recognise key implications for stakeholders, government policy, and the environment.

1 Reducing Congestion

With this additional number of cars, we cannot disregard the impact on traffic congestion in the city. The number of vehicles will increase, yet the road network and infrastructure are not growing to meet this growing demand for transport services. Therefore, the government and policymakers need to reduce the number of cars on the road, reduce congestion, and improve the air quality in the city. There is a need for more investment in mass urban transit, ensuring that commuters have access to affordable, conducive, and safe options for them to commute.

2 Decarbonising Transport

Most government and transport operators around the world have recognised the need for decarbonisation. They are moving away from internal combustion engines (ICE) and trying to go green by adopting electric vehicles. While electric vehicles are not the complete answer to a sustainable mode of transportation, the government needs to intensify its effort to invest in infrastructure to support and enhance the adoption of EVs. It is imperative to remind governments who are still investing in the ICE mode of transportation to start looking out for a more sustainable way of transportation.

3 Alternative Mode

Beyond the road mode of transportation, including cars, taxis, and buses, there should be measures to start exploring other modes of transportation to complement the existing infrastructures and take pressure away from the road. There should be continued investment in the river, Monorail, and even cable cars. We should start looking beyond the road as the only mode of transportation. The structural changes to existing infrastructures are recognised, but the government needs to realise the enormous benefits of exploring alternative modes of transportation beyond roads and cars.

4 Sustainable Mode

Likewise, beyond the road, railway, and waterways, another mode of transportation that is very sustainable needs to be explored. There should be an investment in the cycling lane, electric scooters, and even walking. Infrastructures should be developed to allow commuters to explore this other form of transportation (Mogaji, 2022). The built environment needs to start incorporating these cycling and walking lanes (Yang et al, 2019). People should start seeing the benefits of walking and cycling. The unique situation of Nigeria is recognised, especially as it is not buoyant enough to fund transport networks like many developed countries. These limited funds are, however, not an excuse. Proper management backed with the zeal to get things right is essential.

5 Education

Education is also essential for the commuters to understand what is available and what they can access. People should be educated and supported to use non-motorised transportation, especially bicycles and walking (Mogaji, 2020). There are opportunities for transport social enterprise to train and teach people how to access alternative and non-motorised forms of transportation. Specifically, bicycles will play an important role, provided the built environment is being developed to support this need. This education could involve working with primary school children and possibly patterning with bicycle-sharing platforms to access adults who want to cycle.

6 The Political Influence

We recognise the political undertone in developing and maintaining transport infrastructure for a developing country and an emerging economy like Nigeria. It has been known that many governments will start a project while the next government may not want to continue with it because it does not align with their political agenda. As Pojani and Stead (2017) noted, transport governance, decision-making, and financing infrastructure development present considerable challenges in managing transportation in many developing countries. Therefore, policymakers, governments, regulators, and funders must monitor and regularly evaluate the project's progress (Mogaji, 2021), even if their political party has not championed it, provided it benefits the citizen of the state.

7 Economic Empowerment

Following on from the political influence of the project, we cannot but reflect on what defines economic empowerment. We can deduce that the goals have not aligned with what people need in the state. The government needs to be reminded about what the people want and put measures to address these needs. We acknowledge it might be difficult due to political pressure, and the government must fulfil its promise to provide actual economic employment. Likewise, stakeholders should hold the government accountable for its commitments.

The cars are here, and commuters need to be ready for their impact on the transport infrastructure. However, it is important to recognise key implications for stakeholders, government policy, and the environment.

Conclusion

This reflective piece critically evaluates the new transport initiatives in Lagos, Nigeria, which introduces 1000 cars into the road network to meet the growing demand for transportation services. This piece was evaluated through the lens of technology, transportation, and sustainability to evaluate the undefined prospect of Lagos Ride. The car initiatives have been flagged off, the cars have been made readily available, and it is acknowledged that this is where to start. This report envisages the need to look at the prospect and critically evaluate the relevance of this sort of initiative.

There is a growing need to decarbonise transportation, invest in urban mass transit and invest in infrastructure that will support a more sustainable mode of transportation. It is assumed that the government and policy-makers are aware of the need for sustainable transport, but notwithstanding, it is essential to continually provide a reminder about the benefits and for the government to take action.

Research-led policy making is also essential. Here is a call for researchers interested in transportation management, service quality,

and urban planning to carry out our rigorous research and provide theoretical and managerial implications that stakeholders will find helpful.

It is essential to reiterate the limitations of this piece, and therefore findings should be interpreted considering those limitations. This study is an opinion piece to address the emerging issues around the Lagos Ride initiative and provide a swift response with relevant implications for stakeholders. No primary data has been collected.

This report presents opportunities for future research, which may involve empirically carrying out sentiment analysis from the Lagos ride hashtag on social media to establish public opinion and attitude towards this initiative. In addition, an ethnographic study could be carried out to understand the perspective of commuters on Lagos Ride; perhaps would people prefer to use a branded and customised taxi instead of an unbranded taxi like Uber. Possibly researcher can triangulate these insights with qualitative insights from the policymakers to understand their motivations for this initiative.

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