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AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF PARA-TRANSIT MODE IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES

Dosunmu V. A., Ajiboye A. O., Ayantoyinbo B. B. And
Olaogun O. B.

*Department of Management Science
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines to how para-transit mode of transportation, especially the use of motorcycles for public transport interrelates with urban poverty in the developing economies with emphasis on Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa. The paper examines the principle of a poverty focus in urban transport generally and specifically in motorcycle para-transit mode popularly called Okada in most Nigerian cities. The safety aspect of para-transit mode vis-a-vis its social and economic consequences was also examined in this paper. A number of specific examples of pro-poor transport initiatives are discussed with some lessons and recommendations presented, especially as they are relevant to urban poverty alleviation strategies of most developing nations.

Keywords: socio-economic, para-transit, employment, urban poverty, economy.

INTRODUCTION

The influx of motorcycle as unconventional mode of public transport in most developing countries is alarming and exacerbated (Somuyiwa, 2006). This is predicated on inadequate, uncoordinated, unplanned and unmanaged public transport-system that characterized most developing nations. Transport problems of the urban poor have been highlighted in the literature in the past

(Dimitriou, 1995; White, 1990; Oyesiku, 1995; Adesanya, 1998; Badejo and Bawa-Allah, 2000). Nevertheless, the connections and inter-relationships between poverty and urban transport are poorly understood (Hook, 1998). Although equity (fairness) is often cited as a concern in transportation decisions, it has in fact received little attention both by the researchers and policy makers especially when it concerns the issue of

urbanpoor. In Nigeria, empirical studies has revealed that in the past decade or so, motorcycle accident

accounted for over 70% of accidents fatality rate, yet no concrete policy has been implaced to address this issue. The high accident fatality rate of commercial motorcycle mode has in turn, tangentially increased the fatality index of accident rate, and consequently, has negative effects on the socio-economic development of the country (Somuyiwa, 2006). People who are economically, physically, and socially disadvantaged are harmed by transport policies that focus on economic efficiency (narrowly defined) and by automobile-focussed transport priorities that do nothing to meet their travel needs. They also tend to suffer a disproportionate share of external costs, since they can afford less protection against traffic impacts. Increased dependence on private motor vehicles tends to displace non-motorised and low cost motorised transport and reduce the variety of public transport available to the poor (Harter, 1998). There is a threshold

effect in motorisation which means that a small increase in a city's level of income (when it is within the lower-middle-income range) can lead to a sudden rapid surge in the ownership of private vehicles. It is early in the motorisation process that public policy intervention can apparently have the greatest impact and helps preserve the viability of those modes that the poor depend upon most.

People living in poverty travel, on average, less far and make fewer trips but take more time to do so than higher-income people (Hook, 1998). There are intimate links between the mobility of the poor and their range of housing and employment options. For low-income people in many Asian cities even public transport fares are not affordable or a very great burden.

In most cities of developing countries the majority of trips by the urban poor are on foot. Thus, the transport needs of the poor have been neglected. The prevalence of long walking trips is a key indicator of poor accessibility by the urban poor.

mobility. Clearly, an important approach in a pro-poor transport strategy is to make improvements that benefit the modes most widely used or potentially used by the poor (Hook, 1998). Making non-motorised and low cost motorised vehicles, especially bicycles and motorcycles, more available and safer to use also benefits the poor and has enormous potential in many cities. However, such policies are often ignored or trivialised. Several Asian countries have successfully pursued policies in the post -World War Two era which enabled local bicycle manufacturing industries to flourish and for large numbers of affordable bicycles to be available on the local markets.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND BRIEF SURVEY OF LITERATURE

As in most developing nations, the use of motorcycles for public transport is not an entirely new phenomenon in Nigeria (Adesanya, 1998). From the available evidence, the use of motorcycles for public transport in Nigeria dates back to the mid 1970s and early 1980s in

different urban centres, (Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993). Apart from private sector initiatives to fill the gaps in passengers' demand, which existing conventional transit modes were usually unable to satisfy, informal or para-transit modes did develop spontaneously in some towns and cities where conventional public transport was previously non-existent. Indeed, this situation actually characterizes the emergence of para-transit modes in many Nigerian towns and cities. From a very broad perspective, para-transit modes, particularly in developing countries, are often operated on a small scale, largely because small vehicles are involved basically. One inherent advantage of the small size of some para-transit modes is their ability to provide frequent and viable services (Armstrong-Wright, 1993). They are also able to ply narrow streets and sometimes-bad roads that are usually found in core or downtown parts of cities and squatter areas. Adesanya 2008 has observed that the existence of different types of unconventional or para-transit

modes clearly points to the fact that many developing world cities, particularly in the South East Asian countries, have provided a fertile ground for a bewildering array of these modes, and this has significantly helped in bridging the gap between public bus and the private automobile.

A narrow economic efficiency focus helps the rich more than the poor (and may actually harm people living in poverty). For example, an efficiency-focus leads to a bias towards "strategic" infrastructure, higher-speed, longer-distance links and projects that "save time" for motor vehicle users.

Urban Transport and Land-Use Pattern

The intimate interconnections between urban transport and land-use patterns are well-known (although policy implications are controversial) Newman and Kenworthy, 1996). However, the importance of urban form in understanding transport in Asian cities has not been widely acknowledged or ignored (Barter, 1998). Furthermore,

there has been surprisingly little analysis of the connections with poverty (which are somewhat complex) and this issue urgently needs thorough investigation. Common features of the land-use patterns of large low-income cities in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa include: high urban densities (usually well above 150 persons per hectare) despite a generally low-rise built fabric; intense mixing of different land uses at a fine scale, especially in inner areas; low-income settlements interspersed or mixed with other land-uses throughout the urban area; a high proportion of jobs (in both secondary and tertiary sectors) located in the central and inner areas of the city; however, within this inner area jobs are often relatively dispersed with no intense concentrations of employment

Such land-use features developed in response to the requirements of transport systems dominated by non-motorised transport, motorcycles and buses. They also developed in ways that tended to minimise the need for expensive

motorised travel. For example, high densities and intense mixing of land uses allow for many daily trips to be very short and thus able to be made by foot or by non-motorised vehicle. Once a city grew too large to be served primarily by non-motorised transport, a relatively centralised pattern of employment maintained a potential to support plentiful bus and jitney service (although for various reasons this potential is not always realised). Although there are some problems associated with high levels of crowding, such an urban form is apparently in many ways intrinsically pro-poor, in the absence of significant numbers of private cars.

However, a number of trends associated with motorisation (and other factors) have begun to undermine the pro-poor features of many large cities of developing countries (and have created other transport-related problems) (Hook and Replogle, 1996). As upper and middle-income earners have acquired private vehicles, real estate developers increasingly locate new developments to

be easily accessible by private vehicle, even if this leaves them inaccessible by public transport and non-motorised transport). To the extent that high-speed, high-capacity roads have been built, they have tended to encourage haphazard development in long corridors, resulting in longer trip distances for residents of such areas (Although Asian cities have spread out to some extent as they have motorised, this is a slow process and most still retain high urban densities, especially in their inner areas. High-density cities are unsuited to high rates of private car use and inevitably have low levels of road capacity per person (Barter, 1998). Congestion has therefore become serious even at low levels of motorisation. The rise of private vehicular traffic has decreased bus speeds and service levels drastically and made non-motorised transport dangerous and difficult. Travel for the poor has thus become slower and more difficult even as other economic and planning forces have caused many of them to be displaced from central

urgent need for greater attention to the safety of vulnerable road users, using such measures as control of vehicle speeds, safer vehicle exteriors, conspicuity of non-motorised vehicles and motorcycle users and locally-appropriate (and affordable) traffic calming techniques. It is important that measures that are supposed to improve the safety of vulnerable road users do not unduly restrict their mobility or discourage walking or cycling (Hillman, et al., 1990).

Employment

The urban labour market of developing economies is largely informal. (Ogunrinola, 2007). Marjo-Rita Liimatainen (2002) has posited that informal employment account for over 60% in Africa for which public urban transport has the largest share of employment of about 25%. Urban transport interacts with employment issues for the poor in two main ways: indirectly by providing access to employment opportunities and directly

through employment of low-income people in the transport sector. The relative immobility of the urban poor, especially poor women is a central feature in their lives and severely limits their employment options. It has already been mentioned above that the poor must trade-off the time and cost required to access livelihood opportunities against security and quality of housing.

Employment in transport for the poor can be in both transport infrastructure construction and in transport service. There is now widespread recognition of the benefits for employment of the poor of the promotion of labour-intensive techniques for transport infrastructure building and this could be pursued to a greater extent in urban areas than it has so far (Gannon and Liu, 1997). Informal sector transport services, such as jitneys and pedicabs (and associated industries), employ especially large numbers of low-income people in certain Asian cities, particularly in South Asia (Gallagher, 1998; Replogle, 1992). Policies towards these modes thus have

an impact on the poor as customers, as operators and as employees. The issues involved may be complex. There has been a great deal of debate over what policies should be adopted towards the various 'non-corporate' transport modes (Meakin, 1993; Mogridge, Replogle, 1993; Rimmer, 1986; Rimmer, 1987; and World Bank, 1986;). However, focussing on poverty issues, it is widely agreed that reducing barriers to the informal supply of both passenger and goods transport will be a 'pro-poor' policy (Gannon and Liu, 1997; Hook, 1998). Investments in motor vehicle industries are sometimes justified on the basis of generating employment. However, this industry is a capital intensive one and such investments generate relatively few jobs.

The Role of Motorcycles

Small motorcycles are now within the reach of a surprisingly high percentage of households in low-income Asian and Sub-Saharan African cities. A high prevalence of motorcycle use in low or

middle-income cities is often associated with a poor supply of public transport (as in Nigeria, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and increasingly also in India) (Barter, 1998,). There is an urgent need for a wide-ranging debate on the role of motorcycles in Asian and sub-Saharan African cities and the implications for the poor and for future policy options. Motorcycles are problematic in many ways but do provide relatively affordable mobility. So what is an appropriate and equitable policy, taking into account long term synergies with public transport and with urban land-use patterns? Would a policy of gradual restraint of motorcycle use have a disproportionate impact upon the urban poor? It has already been argued that a pro-poor transport policy must not emphasise the requirements of fast-moving private motor vehicles and large-scale infrastructure projects at the expense of walking, cycling and low-cost public transport facilities and at the expense of an emphasis on local, low-speed access. These comments dovetail with the emerging paradigms of

transport planning even in high-income settings, which are increasingly abandoning the approach of attempting to expand transport capacity in a never ending but futile attempt to cater to "demand". Accessibility planning is increasingly replacing "automobility" planning (Cervero, 1997). At a fundamental level, a pro-poor approach to transport policy is compatible with most aspects of the emerging worldwide push towards "sustainable transport". Nevertheless, it is important to keep the poverty focus explicit so that it does not get submerged by the enthusiasm for ecological sustainability.

Stigma

There is an unfortunate tendency everywhere that if any mode of transport comes to be seen as being for the poor, it tends to become stigmatised as being suitable ONLY for the poor. Thus in certain cities, walking, cycling and/or the use of public transport may all be considered to be beneath the dignity of a middle-class person. For example, in

Dhaka and Nigeria middle-class people are embarrassed to be seen on bicycles and they are accorded with little respect if seen on motorcycles. The stigma that attaches to certain modes can also influence decision-makers to ignore them, despite their importance to a majority of the population. The impact of social status issues on transport policy is complex but needs to be born in mind when attempting to devise pro-poor policies.

Low cost strategies in transport and urban development

A pro-poor approach to urban transport must inevitably be a low-cost approach. Such a strategy is also compatible with economic efficiency, an emphasis on ecological sustainability and with the creation of highly livable and attractive cities. The successful low-cost strategy of Curitiba in Brazil with its "surto metro" using busways is now well known (Cervero, 1995). A low-cost pro-poor approach is also not necessarily a second class transport approach. It is

widely realised that a number of cities that are now quite wealthy but which have successfully retained a high role for public transport (and in some cases also bicycles) actually adopted a low-cost strategy during the early stages of motorisation. Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen are all cities in which the ownership of private cars was restrained severely for decades when motorisation rates were low. Investment in public transport and road infrastructure were also kept at modest levels until incomes per capita had risen to high levels). Few low-income cities can afford mass transit systems such as those now seen in Singapore, Seoul and Hong Kong (Allport, 1994).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has highlighted many ways in which current transport-related practices can be changed to promote the welfares of people living in poverty. There is need for transport planners to influence and raise awareness among many of the

key actors in transport sector. Some of the actors that can be a focus for these efforts include: multilateral aid organisations; the United Nations system; regional organisations, national governments as well as provincial/state and municipal governments; academia; professional bodies and NGOs of various kinds and their networks and coalitions.

It is impossible to list here the long list of specific policy reforms that could be advocated by the forum to improve the lot of the poor in relation to transport. However, action by the forum on this issue can fall under the following broad areas: *Firstly, this paper has highlighted a somewhat shocking level of ignorance on many aspects of urban poverty and transport in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. There is thus an urgent need to commission well-focussed research that is action-oriented and policy-oriented in order to answer most important questions and to fill the crucial gaps in knowledge that have been highlighted.

* Secondly, the research group must simply highlight the issues and call for greater policy attention by all relevant actors. An energetic advocacy effort is required to encourage a much greater poverty focus by transport planners as well as greater attention to transport issues by those focussed on poverty. Despite the ignorance mentioned above, there are still many steps that are already well-known and which would make an enormous difference to people in poverty. Many pro-poor initiatives in this field are desirable on many grounds over and above their benefits for the poor. A number of these synergies have been alluded to in the paper. * Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, a much greater effort must be made by a wide range of actors to ensure that the voices of the poor are heard on this issue, as on all others that concern them. Effort is required to facilitate meaningful participation by people living in poverty in the transport-related decisions that effect them most. This is not a simple matter but the rewards appear to be high. Therefore, appropriate resources need to

be directed into making this possible.

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