

# **Development of the National Trunk Roads in Nigeria and the Socio-economic Impact, 1960 – 2013**

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## **Abstract**

The term “trunk road” as used in this paper refers loosely to interstate or federal trunk ‘A’ roads. This definition covers (but is not limited) to roads that are dual carriage which connect major towns or regions of Nigeria. It includes roads which are not dual carriage but which are major highways and which play the role of linking regions of Nigeria together. Examples of these roads are: the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Sagamu-Benin Expressway, Lagos-Sokoto Highway, Lagos-Badagry Expressway and Kano-Kaduna Expressway, to mention just a few. Apart from playing a significant part in the movement of goods and services across the regions, these roads have continued to exert considerable socioeconomic impact on the country. This paper examines the motives behind the development of these roads, accounts for their development, discusses the problems associated their construction, the issue of road financing and maintenance as well as the impact of these roads on the socio-economic life of the people.

## **Introduction**

Transportation plays a vital role in social and economic development of a nation, particularly in facilitating movement of people, goods and services. It has been argued that that a good means of transportation serves as a lifeline of an economy.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the provision of a high quality transport system has been identified as a pre-condition for the full participation of remote communities in the benefit of national development.<sup>2</sup> Among the various means of transportation known to man, road transportation perhaps is of the greatest importance. Road transportation is an important means of transportation in any society. In Nigeria, for example, it is reported that 95 percent of the movements in the country is done by road, while the remaining five percent of movements are done by air, rail and on water.<sup>3</sup> The foregoing therefore, underscores the importance of road development in the overall development of the country.

Our discussion centres on the development of the national trunk road system in Nigeria. The International Road Federation (IRF) statistics put the total road network in Nigeria at about 120,049 kilometres in 2004.<sup>4</sup> This figure placed Nigeria as the second country with the longest road network in Africa after South Africa which had 171,480 kilometres of total road length. In that year, the country also occupied 26<sup>th</sup> position after Romania among thirty countries in the world with the longest road network.<sup>5</sup> By 2012, the total road network in Nigeria had gone up to about 200,000kms.<sup>6</sup>

The road system in Nigeria is classified for administrative purpose as Trunk Road ‘A’, or federal roads, Trunk Road ‘B’ and Trunk Road ‘C’. This system of road classification began in 1946.<sup>7</sup> The Trunk Road ‘A’ or federal roads are the roads under the federal government ownership and they are developed and maintained by the federal government.<sup>8</sup> The “Trunk Road ‘A’ are the skeleton trunk road system upon which the remainder of the road system of the country is built up. The main purpose of the Trunk Road ‘A’ is to provide inter-regional communication between the federal and state capitals and other large towns and to provide international links with important centres in neighbouring territories.”<sup>9</sup>

It is in the light of the foregoing that this study seeks to shed light on the development of the national trunk road system in Nigeria between 1960 and 2013. The study examines how government policies and actions have led to the construction, maintenance, rehabilitation and expansion of the National Trunk road system in the country since October 1960. In so doing, the study brings out the problems associated with the construction and maintenance of these important roads in the country. It equally examines the impact of the national trunk road system on the socio-economic of the life of the people and its importance to nation building efforts.

### **The National trunk road system before 1960**

Although road development in Nigeria started before 1946, the history of the national trunk road system could be dated to 1946 when the road system was classified by the colonial government. The federal principle enshrined in the Richards Constitution of 1945, which came into effect in 1946, necessitated this road classification.<sup>10</sup> The arrangement granted to the respective tiers of government, jurisdiction over different categories of roads. Trunk ‘A’ roads fell under the jurisdiction of the central government, trunk ‘B’ under the regional governments while local or native administrations had authority over local/town roads referred to as trunk “C” roads.

The period after the Second World War saw the colonial government paying very serious attention to infrastructure development in Nigeria. This affected road construction in a positive way. In that year, the colonial government passed the Colonial Development Act. The passing of the Act was followed by a Ten-Year Development Plan. The Act and the Development Plan set the pace for the economic planning and infrastructural development in the country during the colonial era. During

this period, some trunk 'A' and 'B' roads were tarred to link major cities. Indeed, available record shows that the total road network in the country which was 13,240kms in 1946 went up to 45,993kms in 1952. In 1952, internal self-government was granted to the Western and Eastern regions of the country. Subsequently, the regional governments began to play significant roles in the development of roads in their respective regions.

### **The National Trunk Roads after 1960**

But on a general note, road development in Nigeria since 1960 was anchored majorly on the various national development plans drawn up by the government between 1962 and 1985. The progress made since that period resulted in the development of new roads and the expansion of some existing ones inherited from the colonial government at independence. For convenience sake, we can discuss of the development of national trunk roads in Nigeria since independence in 1960 under four distinct phases. The first phase is from 1960 to the end of the civil war in 1970. During this period, the development of trunk roads was slow but steady until it was interrupted in January 1966 by a political upheaval which was to plunge Nigeria into a civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The second phase lasted from the end of the civil war in 1970 till 1975. During this period, tremendous infrastructural development took place in Nigeria especially in the area of road construction. The third phase was from 1975 till 1980, being the terminal date of the Third national development plan. During this period, the economy of the country was buoyant to support the development of road infrastructure across the nation. The fourth phase can be dated from 1980 and lasted till 2013 which is the closing date for this paper. In this fourth phase, the challenges of managing the existing road network in the country became pronounced.

### **The First Phase, 1960 to 1970**

At independence in 1960, Nigeria had a central government and three regional governments. Given the limitation of the national railway network in the country at that time, road development acquired an increasing importance in the movement of goods and services across the country.<sup>11</sup> Most of the roads in the country at this time were single carriage ways. The total road network in the country in 1960 was about 65,704 kilometres out of which the trunk 'A' roads were about 8,000 kilometres.

Road development formed an important part of the 1962 to 1968 national development plan as can be seen in the N156.8 million allocated to road construction during the plan period by the central and regional governments. During the period, new roads were constructed across the various regions of the country, an example of which was the Lagos to Benin road built between 1962 and 1963.<sup>12</sup>

The outbreak of civil war in July 1967 did not allow for a full execution of the 1962 to 1968 development plan. The civil war disrupted economic activities in Nigeria and slowed down

infrastructural development nationwide. The war led to the destruction of lives and properties particularly in the eastern part of the country. Besides, the war did not allow for the continuation of any meaningful development in other parts of the country. The resources that could have been utilised to finance development were mobilised to prosecute the war. The war lasted till January 12, 1970. Nevertheless, the country emerged from the war richer because of the oil boom. At the end of the war, the federal government embarked on a process of reconciliation and rehabilitation, a policy which involved reconstructing infrastructural facilities destroyed during the war.

### **The Second Phase, 1970 to 1974**

The period between 1970 and 1974 was when road development in Nigeria witnessed tremendous progress. It coincided with the end of the civil war and era of oil boom in the country. Government revenues increased largely from the rise in the price of crude oil and the increase in the demand for Nigeria's Bonny light crude in the international market. The oil boom enabled the government to initiate and finance major infrastructural development projects and more importantly road projects across the country as part of the Second National Development plan, 1970-1974.

The Development Plan, launched in 1970 contributed immensely to the development of the national trunk road network. The total amount allocated to road construction by the federal and twelve states of the federation during the period was N332.6million.<sup>13</sup> But a revision of the various road projects in 1973 by the federal government increased the expenditure to N887.3million. Inflation was among the factors responsible for the revision of the plan. In addition to this, there were changes in the scope of the project as well as the inclusion of new projects in the original plan.

One of the important Trunk 'A' roads constructed by the federal government during this period was Lagos-Badagry expressway. In addition, several roads across the country were improved. Two contracts, namely Nos. 1201 and 1226 were awarded at the cost N4, 887,000 and N3, 894,000.00 respectively in January 1974 for the modernisation of the Western Avenue to Agege Motor Road.<sup>14</sup> The various state governments also constructed additional trunk 'B' roads to link some of the federal roads in their states in addition to several other feeder roads constructed by local governments across the country. Furthermore, in 1974 the federal government took over about 16,000 kilometres of road from the state governments and reclassified them as trunk 'A' roads. The reason for this was that those roads were considered by the federal government to be of more national importance than their status as state or regional roads.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Third Phase, 1975-1980**

The trunk road system in Nigeria was developed during this period leading to an increase in the total road network in the country. On March 29 that year, the Third National Development Plan, 1975-1980, was launched by the federal government.<sup>16</sup> Under it, many roads were constructed and

completed across the country. The federal government rehabilitated and constructed 16,800 kilometres of roads and strengthened 5,000 kilometres with asphalt concrete overlay.<sup>17</sup> Some of the roads constructed and rehabilitated during this period were the Lagos-Inner Ring road, with extension to the Third mainland bridge, new Carter Bridge, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Shagamu-Benin Dual Carriage Way, the Port Harcourt –Enugu Dual Carriageway, the Calabar-Ikom-Ogoja-Katsina Ala-Moyolope Road, the Jos-Bauchi-Kari-Birni Sheik Road, Kano-Katsina-Jibiya Road, Warri-Benin-Okenne-Kaduna Road, the Warri By-pass Extension, and the Gusau-Jeredi-Sokoto Road<sup>18</sup> During the same period, seven major dual carriageway bridges with a total length of 8.1 kilometres were completed. These included the Jebba-Kotonkarfi Bridge, Makurdi, Numan, Jimeta, katsina Ala and Cross River Bridges.<sup>19</sup>

At the onset of the third development plan, the federal government awarded the contract for the construction of the Port Harcourt-Umuahia-Enugu dual carriageway. The Port Harcourt-Enugu-Aba-Umuahia section of the road was awarded to Guffanti Nigeria Limited at a cost of N125.38million while the construction of the Umuahia-Okigwe and Enugu section of the road was awarded to Fougerolle (Nigeria) Limited at a cost of N126.81million.<sup>20</sup>

Another federal road project conceived and executed during this period was the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway otherwise known as the “Federal Route 20”.<sup>21</sup> The 110 kilometre road from Oworonsoki in Lagos passed through Ogun State and terminated at Ojoo in Ibadan, Oyo State. The section from Oworonsoki in Lagos to the Sagamu interchange was constructed by Julius Berger Nigeria, while the other section from the Sagamu interchange to Ojoo in Ibadan was constructed by Dumez Construction Company. The road was designed as a limited access highway, with exits only at Sagamu and Ibadan Toll Gate. It was also equipped with a tollgate in the middle at Ogere in the Remo area of Ogun State. It was completed and opened to the public in 1978.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Fourth Phase, 1980 - 2013**

Until the mid 1980s, Nigerian road network was considered adequate in length and quality. At that point, most of the roads in the country whose construction and rehabilitation began after the end of the civil war had been completed. However, by the end of the decade most of the federal roads had begun to show signs of distress. By that time, the roads, especially the federal ones were in a state of disrepair. For example, the 327 kilometres road from Okene to Lokoja failed few years after it was constructed, thus making driving along the road very tedious.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Lagos-Ibadan expressway which was opened to the public in 1978 had become riddled with potholes. Apart from this, the Lagos-Benin expressway that was constructed at a cost of N229.5million also degenerated less than five years after it was completed and commissioned in 1981.<sup>24</sup> Another road that fell into

disrepair few years after it was constructed was the 230kms Enugu-Port Harcourt road commissioned in 1979.<sup>25</sup>

The deplorable condition of the road network in the country attracted the attention of the Federal government. Thus, the government embarked on the rehabilitation of roads across the country. By May 1985, the federal government had reportedly spent about N185million to rehabilitate and maintain about 1,600kms of trunk 'A' roads across the country.<sup>26</sup> This was in addition to N82 million spent to reinforce about 680kms with asphaltic concrete overlay.<sup>27</sup> The breakdown of the various contracts awarded for road maintenance revealed that in Anambra State alone, N11.9million was awarded for the maintenance and rehabilitation of road measuring about 820kms. In Bauchi, N11.7 million was awarded for the rehabilitation of a total of 1,044kms road across the state. Other states spent various sums of money ranging between N5 and N13million naira to rehabilitate roads within the same period.<sup>28</sup>

Speaking at the inauguration of the Kano-Kaduna dual carriageway project in Kano on December 29, 1986<sup>29</sup> President Ibrahim Babangida (1985 – 1993) noted that contracts worth N350million were awarded in 1985 by the federal government for the maintenance, repairs and rehabilitation of federal highways and bridges throughout the country. He pointed out that government's huge investment on road maintenance was necessitated by the drop in maintenance votes from N180million in 1981 to between N49 and N60million in the period between 1983 and 1985. And at the end of Babangida's administration in 1993, the total road network in Nigeria was estimated at 196,300 kilometres.

Very minimal development, however, took place in terms of road construction in Nigeria between 1993 and 1999. The General Sanni Abacha led administration which ruled the country during this period was preoccupied with political problems which did not allow the government to focus on meaningful infrastructural development. Evidently during the period, few roads were developed with little impact on the length and quality of roads across the country.

The problem of maintenance which had become a feature of highway development in Nigeria since the 1980s became more glaring due to the apparent failure of most of the federal roads in the country. Several factors were responsible for the failure of these roads in such a short period after they were constructed. One of the reasons was that government concentrated on the construction of new roads without putting a strategy in place for the maintenance of existing ones.<sup>30</sup> The major faults with Nigerian federal roads were depressions on the road surfaces, presence of pot holes and cracks, presence of gullies due to erosion and the washing away of the road shoulders. Others included faulty drainage systems, faulty traffic signals, wiping off of pavement markings, and cracking in the rigid pavement of the roads. Evidence from fieldwork shows that most of the roads in the country were

designed by engineers in the government ministries and in some cases by consultants some of who were not within the environment of the road work. In addition, preliminary studies of the environment meant to help the design and construction decisions were in most cases not done. This usually resulted in poor understanding of the road environment, leading to poor road design and construction. Heavy vehicular traffic is another factor that had contributed to the deterioration of most roads in the country. Expert's opinion suggests that road surfaces wear under the action of traffic, particularly during the very early life of the road. Nigerian roads are overloaded with traffic that would have been conveyed by other transport modes other than the road.<sup>32</sup> The capacity of the Nigerian roads is overstretched because 95 percent of the nation's passengers and freight movement depends on road transportation.<sup>33</sup>

The civilian government headed by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office in May 1999 and met a country with dilapidated infrastructure including electricity and roads. Most of the existing roads in the country were in complete state of disrepair. Apart from this, there were several other road projects planned for execution since independence in 1960 but which had been abandoned. Determined to change this situation, the Olusegun Obasanjo administration (1999 – 2007) initiated and completed several road projects after 1999.

The Lagos-Abeokuta expressway, for example, was redesigned and expanded between 2001 and 2008.<sup>34</sup> The contract which was awarded to Julius Berger Nigeria Plc involved the expansion of the road from a single carriage way into a dual carriage way from Abule Egba in Lagos to Lafenwa in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The initial cost of the project was about N70 billion but it went up to N90 billion due to the modification of the design to accommodate an overhead bridge at Sango Ota in Ogun State and the beautification of the road up to Ikeja.<sup>35</sup>

The Obasanjo administration also awarded the contract for the construction of Itigidi Bridge and approach roads along Aba-Omega-Itigidi-Ediba-Ugep road in cross River State in April 2003. The cost of the 25km road was put at about N5.2 billion.<sup>36</sup> The contract was awarded to Gitto Construzioni Nigeria Limited with a construction period of 36 months.<sup>37</sup> The project was completed and commissioned in 2006. Available evidence suggests that the Itigidi project was conceptualised in the late 1950s during the premiership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the Eastern region but remained a dream until it was reactivated in 2003 during the Obasanjo administration. Within the same period, government awarded the contract for the construction of the Abuja-Nyanya-Keffi road at the cost of N13.2 billion to Setraco Nigeria Limited. The 50km road was completed in 2006. The Obasanjo led government also embarked on the expansion of the Ibadan-Ilorin road in 2003. The project was part of the development of the Lagos-Kano expansion project. Dare Longe who worked as a consultant during the evaluation exercise on the Ibadan-Oyo section of this road reliably informed us that the total cost of the road was in excess of N80 billion apart from the money spent to compensate those

whose properties were demolished during the exercise.<sup>38</sup> The project is yet to be completed especially along the Ibadan-Oyo end of the road.<sup>39</sup> The reason, of course, is not unconnected with government's lackadaisical attitude to some of its projects.

The Obasanjo administration also initiated the construction of the East-West road, planned to traverse five states namely Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers in the Niger Delta region.<sup>40</sup> The cost of the project was estimated at N138billion when the contract was initially awarded in 2006. The project was however, not completed during the lifetime of the Obasanjo Administration. During the tenure of President Goodluck Jonathan, the Federal Executive Council approved additional sum of N106.9billion in August 2011 for the continuation of the project.<sup>41</sup> In approving additional sum of money for the continuation of the project, government explained that the original road design was faulty. It explained that the difficult terrain of the Niger Delta was not taken into consideration in the original design. The contract was awarded to Setraco Nigeria Limited.

Poor budgetary allocation by the government to the road sector contributed to the poor state of roads development in Nigeria in the period under discussion.<sup>42</sup> The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Works was N73billion in 2008.<sup>43</sup> In 2011, the allocation to the ministry for road rehabilitation was reduced to N70billion by the federal government. Even though the Obasanjo administration spent over N1trillion on road rehabilitation between 1999 and 2007, evidence shows that much more required to be done. In 2011, it was estimated that the government needed about N3.3 trillion to complete the Federal roads being constructed across the country.<sup>44</sup> Contractors handling federal road projects were being owed money due to poor budgetary allocation for road construction. In 2010 alone, contractors were owed N60billion.<sup>45</sup> The point being made is that the amount allocated by government for road development was often inadequate to solve the problems associated with the construction and maintenance of roads in the country.

Some measures were introduced by President Olusegun Obasanjo between 1999 and 2007 to address the problem of dilapidated road infrastructure in the country. One of such initiatives was the establishment of the Federal Road Maintenance Agency (FERMA) in November 2002.<sup>46</sup> The agency was saddled with the responsibility of monitoring and maintaining the Federal trunk roads.

Apart from the federal government, some state governments were also involved in road development. An example was the Lagos State which had undertaken the expansion of the Lagos-Badagry expressway, a road originally constructed by General Yakubu Gowon's administration between 1972 and 1974. The Lagos State government under the leadership of Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu (1999 – 2007) initiated the idea but it was Tinubu's successor, Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola who kicked off the project in 2007. The massive construction work of the first phase of the project measuring 7.3 kilometres between Eric Moore road and Mile Two in Lagos is being handled by Julius Berger Nigeria Plc. The project is almost completed with the light rail facility in the middle.



## **The Impact of the National Trunk Roads**

The impacts of the national trunk road system on the socio-economic development of Nigeria are many but the constraint of space will only permit us to look at very few of them. This impact can be viewed from the positive and negative perspectives. An important positive impact is the transformation of hitherto rural communities located along the trunk roads into thriving urban settlements. Examples of this abound across the country. The Lagos-Badagry trunk road constructed in the early 1970s, for example, opened up the various communities located along the corridor traversed by the road for residential, commercial and industrial development. Communities like Amuwo Odofin, Ojo, Okokomaiko, Ijanikin, Oto, Agbara and Badagry town have witnessed considerable influx of people since the construction and commissioning of the road in 1973. Agbara which was a rural community up to the mid 1970s has grown into a major industrial corridor partly as a result of the construction of the Lagos-Badagry Expressway.<sup>47</sup>

Another important way in which the trunk roads have impacted on the socio-economic life of the people is that they have reduced the rates of road accidents on many of the roads. A good example is the Lagos-Abeokuta expressway. Previously, this road was a single carriageway with several bends and curves that often caused accidents. Many lives had been lost to motor accidents on this particular road due to the recklessness of the drivers and because of the nature of the road itself. But with the construction of the new expressway, road accidents have been reduced drastically on it.

Apart from this, this particular road has opened up the entire stretch of Agbado, Sango, Ifo, Papalanto, Itori and Wasimi up for rapid urbanisation. Within a short period of time, people moved to places like Ifo, Papalanto, Ewekoro and Itori, all settlements located along the road to establish their businesses and build houses for residential purposes. The construction of this road also encouraged the West African Portland Cement at Ewekoro to expand its production plant in 2003.

The development of the national trunk roads across the country has contributed immensely to the movement of goods, services and personnel across the country. The roads link the various parts of the country thus serving as an important element of national integration and development. The national trunk road system has augmented the railway as a major link across the various parts of the country and it is a major means of long distance transportation in Nigeria. Apart from this, the construction of the various national trunk roads across the country has provided jobs for many Nigerians and also created the need for Nigerian engineers to acquire the necessary expertise in civil engineering and road construction. Rural and remote areas have been linked to the major cities in many parts of the country through the federal highways.

The expansion of the national trunk road across the country since 1960 has also accelerated the rate of economic growth in the country. It has facilitated the movement of people and brought about a reduction in travelling time across the country. As a result of this, the transportation of goods and services across the country has improved significantly from what it was during the colonial era.

On the negative side, the failure of the road network in the country has brought untold hardship to the people. The dilapidated condition of various roads across the country is one of the major causes of tragic accidents on Nigerian roads. According to statistics released by the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), in the six years period between 2005 and 2010, more than 27,700 persons died and more than 118,900 got injured in 53,111 road accidents nationwide.<sup>48</sup> Apart from road accidents, the poor state of Nigerian roads impede fast and safe movements of vehicles, with the result that journeys are not only delayed but have become extremely expensive.<sup>49</sup> A one hour journey from Benin to Ore according to available reports at some point in 2008 took travellers more than twelve hours. In May 2008, a woman reportedly gave birth to a baby in the heat of the traffic along the Benin-Ore Road.<sup>50</sup> The visit by the Federal Minister of State for Works, Mr. Chris Ogiemwonyi to the Benin-Ore-Sagamu road in October 2010 was a testimony to the fact that government itself was aware of the deplorable state of the roads across the federation.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria has been able to achieve steady progress in the development of her national trunk road network since independence, as evidenced in the growth of the total road network in the country from about 65,000 kilometres in 1960 to over 200,000 kilometres in 2013. The success recorded has been made possible because from the huge revenue derived by the country from the export of her crude oil. It is sad to note, however, that most of the roads in the country have failed to stand the test of time few years after they were constructed and commissioned for public use. This situation is compounded by the fact that the road network has become inadequate due to the large size of the country and its ever increasing large population. Given the fact that road transportation remains the most important means of transportation in the country, this paper recommends that effort should be made by the government to ensure that roads are constructed with durable material and professional workmanship. In addition, government should take seriously the issue of road maintenance and also look into the transportation mix in the country with a view to developing the other means of transportation (rail, water and air) to complement road transportation. Only then will the country be set on the path of sustainable development and progress.

### **Endnotes**

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