

**TOWARDS AN IMPROVED NIGHT-TIME ROAD TRANSPORT IN
THE NEXT MILLENNIUM**

BY

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Abstract

Night Travels in Nigeria by road have recently become an important aspect of inter-urban distant travel journeys. However, little consideration has been accorded the safety management, despite the increasing accidents implications. The critical problem is that the sole authority charged with the responsibility of Accident Data Collection do not operate in the Night and as such collect no Night Travel data. Whereas, the night travel nowadays generate very heavy traffic that requires attention. This paper therefore highlights the latest state of the art in road traffic safety management in Nigeria with the considerations of this night travels aspect.

A geographic analysis of night travels in Nigeria and the need for road safety measures enforcement is attempted. This paper concludes that sustainable night travel safety management requires a multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted approach and effort, with reliable data collections for effective policy guidelines, adequate monitoring and sustainable night travel.

1.0 Introduction

Man is a highly mobile animal. The uneven distribution of resources at his disposal at any given time makes it quite inevitable for him to often move from one place to another to enable him satisfy certain needs. Ordinarily, man travels in the day time; however, he can, and in fact does travel in the night time too. In Nigeria, overnight travel is increasingly becoming so popular. The number of transport operators offering night-time travel services is ascending, and steadily too. Similarly, there is an unprecedented rise in the volume of night time travellers and the frequency at which they travel. Almost every major city in the country now witness an increasing tempo of this phenomenon of night travel. If the current rising trend persists, as it is expected to, the next millennium will be characterised by a burgeoning demand by commuters for night-time travel services. Whether the transport operators and existing transport facilities will be able to meet the explosive demand is a question that begs for urgent attention.

The rapidly increasing demand for overnight travel services obviously poses fresh challenges to transport operators, but most importantly to transport planners and managers, in the country. Night journey, though in most respects similar to day time travel, still has its own peculiarities. Moreso, overnight travel makes some operational, structural and organisational demands which are not necessarily the same with what obtains in the day travel. No doubt, in comparison with day time journeys, night travels have got some advantages as well as disadvantages.

There is every need to properly plan and execute night-time travel activities. This calls for a well-tailored, purpose-oriented research effort. Such research should, among other things, be geared towards unravelling the nature of overnight travel; its organisational, structural and operational demands; the behaviour of both nocturnal drivers and commuters while in transit; the merits and demerits of night travel; policy considerations, the problems of night-time travel; strategies and tactics for improving overnight journeys; as well as the role of night time transportation in national economic development. The ultimate goal of research efforts on this subject matter should be articulate an appropriate framework for night travels development in the country.

This paper tries to x-ray the phenomenon of night-time travels in Nigeria, with Lagos as a focal point. Some of the issues discussed include reasons why some commuters embark on night travels, the advantages and disadvantages of night travels, the advantages and disadvantages of night journey, peculiar demands of night journey. Also, some recommendations are made towards improving night travels. Most of the issues presented in this paper are based on the

preliminary results of an on-going research being conducted to obtain empirical data on night journeys in Nigeria.

2.0 Brief Overview of Night Travels in Nigeria

Traveling at nighttime is a human activity that existed in Nigeria even before the advent of merchandised and motorized means of transportation in the country. Even in the remote past, people traveled on foot, on horse or Camel backs, or in canoes from one region to another for the purpose of trading. However, one must concede to the fact that overnight travels in the olden days in the country were very limited in scope - in terms of the geographical distance covered at any given trip, the frequency of such night trips, and the volume of traffic (number of people embarking on such trips). No doubt, the introduction of modern means of transport into our transportation system greatly helped to push nighttime travels further afield. Today, not only that overnight journey is widely accepted, it has become the preferred method of traveling to so many commuters.

Night travel in the country is mostly inter-state and inter-regional in nature. Major industrial, agricultural, commercial and administrative centres are also the major origins and destinations of most night journeys. The country can be arbitrarily divided into five main axes in terms of night travel. These are the Lagos (West) - East axis, West-West axis, Lagos (West) - North axis, North-East axis, and North-North axis. The major nodes (urban centres) and routes, as well as traffic in each of the axes are shown in Table 1.

Various kinds of vehicles are used by operators of night travel in the country. The range includes trucks, vans, lorries and trailers which are mostly used for conveying agricultural and industrial goods. Others are luxury buses, mini-buses and cars (especially station wagons) commonly used to transport passengers along with their luggage.

A look at the ownership structure of night-time road transport operations in the country will unveil the fact that both the public and private sectors are involved in this business. However, it has to be quickly pointed out that the private sector - made up of the organised group of transport companies and individual transporters - far dominates night travels operations in the country. Conservatively, the private sector accounts for as much as 90 percent of the total night travel operators.

As it is now, night travel in Nigeria is a free for all business. Anybody is at liberty to enter and exit this business at will. Presently, there are no strong and effective checks, control, coordination and monitoring strategies for checkmate the excesses of night journey operators as well as evaluate the performance of this sub-sector. Moreover, there is an observed laxity in adherence to safety rules and regulations on the part of transport operators. On the other hand, the agencies on whose onus it lies to enforce night time travel rules and regulation are simply lackadaisical about it all. Consequently, operators of night journey in the country often violate traffic rules either by over-speeding, over-loading, or operating vehicles that are not road worthy.

By and large, night travel has come to stay in the country. Although, there are calls at present in various quarters for night travel to be banned outright due to the risks associated with it, we however believe that it should be given a chance. As Adalemo (1998) reasons, rather than ban it, "we should confront it, accept the challenges it represents and be innovative in the way we deal with it".

3.0 Methodology

As stated earlier, this paper presents preliminary result of an on-going study on night travel. The research is designed such that all the primary data will be garnered through questionnaire interview. Two (2) categories of people are targeted for interview namely: 1. Transport operators rendering night travel services and 2. night travellers. A total of seventeen (17) transporters were selected for study, while by the end of the data gathering stage, it is expected that a total of 500 commuters would have been interviewed. Presently, all the 17 transporters have been served with the appropriate questionnaire. However, only 11 or 65% of them has so far completed and returned the questionnaire. On the other hand, 273(55%) of the passengers have been interviewed. It should be noted that the commuters were interviewed on the spot, at the loading point; they were not allowed to go home with the questionnaire.

The transport operators and passengers targeted for interview are located at six major road terminals in Lagos. These are Oshodi, Ojuelegba, Oyingbo, Jibowu (Yaba), Maza-maza and Okokomaiko. In terms of geographical coverage, the transporters selected have vehicles that move to different parts of the country, although most of them ply the Lagos-East axis and the Lagos-North axis.

4.0 Data Analysis

The responses of both the operators of nighttime transport services and the night travelers themselves, are used in the analysis done here. The respondents were asked a wide range of questions on various aspects of night travel. However, only certain variables are considered in the analysis that follows shortly. Responses from the 11 transport operators and 273 night travelers so far interviewed, are evaluated.

4.1 Categories of Night Travelers

Question was asked to know the categories of people who commonly embark on night travel. Table 1 shows the occupational distribution of the respondents. As the table reveals, traders/businessmen(women) form the bulk of passengers who often embark on night time travel.

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage(%)
Trading/business	156	59.32
Civil servants	60	22.81
Students	24	9.13
Housewife	16	6.08
Others	7	2.66
TOTAL	263	100

Source: Fieldwork 1999.

4.2 Income Level of Travelers

The average monthly income of the respondents is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Monthly Income Level of Travelers

Income Level	No of Respondents	Percentage(%)
Below N1,000	13	4.76
N1,000 -N2,000	40	14.65
N2,001 - N3,000	42	15.38
N3,001 - N4,000	50	23.95
N4,001 - N5,000	58	21.25
Above N5,000	49	17.95
No Response	21	7.69
TOTAL	273	100

Source: Fieldwork 1999.

4.3 Frequency of Travel

Attempt was made to ascertain the rate at which those who embark on night journey do so. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate how often they embarked on night travel. Their responses are contained in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency of Night Time Travel

Rate of Travel	No. of Respondents	Percentage(%)
More than once a week	8	2.95
Once every week	22	8.11
Once every fortnight	43	15.87
Once in 3 weeks	11	4.1
Once every month	64	23.62
Less than once a month	49	18.1
As often as the need arises	52	19.19
No response	22	8.12
TOTAL	271	100

Source: Fieldwork 1999.

4.4 Transport Fare

The transport fares charged by the transport operators vary from one operator to another and from one type of vehicle to another. The fares also vary according to distance. Expectedly, cars attract a higher fare than buses.

4.5 Reasons for Night Travel

Certain factors make it necessary for some people to travel at night. Whereas some commuters personally relish embarking on overnight journey. Some do so for not having another choice, although this may be against their will.

The various factors adduced by passengers as been responsible for their taking to night travel are contained in Table 4 below. From the table, it is clear that “nature of job” is one major factor making it inevitable for some people to travel at night; as much as 160 (27.21%) respondents cited this factor. Interestingly, most of those who picked this factor belong to the civil servants. For those in business, their job demands constant attention and at the same time requires that they move about to transact one business or the other. Thus, in order to satisfy these competing demands, the businessman would rather travel in the night, so that he may still carry out his business in the day time. In the same vein, civil servants whose jobs demand that they be at their duty posts all through the 5 working days of the week, find night travel quite suiting. To maximise their little freedom from work, they join a night bus at the close of work on Friday so as to arrive at their destination Saturday morning. They would thus have the opportunity of spending time with their relations and friends on Saturday and Sunday, and then join the night bus again on Sunday night to arrive the following for resumption of duty.

Economic consideration is another major reason why some travellers make their trips at night. Night journey is considered cheaper than travelling during day time. As much as 124 or 21.09% of the respondents take to night traveling for this reason. Many commuters (103 or 17.51%) find more convenient traveling at night than during the day.

Another major factor behind the decision of some commuters to journey at night is personal interest (92 or 15.65%). Shortage of vehicle during day time is yet another factor that forces some people to embark on night journey (68 or 11.56%). This factor particularly affects commuters who for one reason the other must unfailingly be at their intended destination on or before the following day. Also during festive periods such as Christmas/New Year and Easter, the volume of passengers increases sharply, thus putting undue pressure on the vehicular facilities available for day time travel. Usually, some desperate passengers who could not secure seats in day-time vehicles often opt to travel at night.

Table 4 Reasons for Embarking on Night Journeys

Reason	No. of Respondents	Percentage(%)
Nature of job	160	27.21
Economic considerations	124	21.09
Conveniency	103	17.51
Personal interest	92	15.65
Shortage of vehuicles during day time	68	11.56
Prevailing or unforeseen urgent circumstances	28	4.76
Others	13	2.21
TOTAL	588	100

Source: Fieldwork 1999.

This figure is higher than the 273 people interviewed; this is so because some of the respondents indicated more than one factor as the reason for their opting for night travel.

4.6 Merits of Night Time Travel

Some of the factors favouring overnight travel as discussed in subsection 4.5 qualify as part of the advantages of night travel.

There are however more specific advantages which nocturnal commuters see in night time travels. Based on the responses of the respondents, the following are the merits of night journeys:

1. it is time saving
2. it is more comfortable than day time travel. Night travelers are usually saved from the scorching heat of the sun
3. it is relatively cheaper than day travel. The fares are lower. Also, expenditure while on transit is drastically reduced since the road side hawkers are mostly absent. Equally, absent are mobile traders who specialise in selling their wares inside moving buses. The near - or total absence of these sellers during the night means that the night travelers can minimise their expenditure while the journey lasts.
4. Night journeys is usually faster, being free from the traffic hold-ups that often characterise day-time travels. Also, stoppages to pick “attachments” or squatting passengers are almost completely absent, and this helps to facilitate night travel.
5. Night travel helps to reduce or decongest an otherwise congested day time traffic.

4.7 Demerits of Night Travel

Travelling at night time by road has its own possible disadvantages. Interestingly, both the night time travelling class and the transport operators are very much aware of the potential dangers one faces travelling at night. However, most of the respondents did not consider the demerits of night travel as being strong enough to deter them from traveling at night. The following are what respondents identified as the possible risks associated with night travel:

1. armed robbery attack
2. accidents due to:
 - i. driver sleeping of
 - ii. impaired vision on the part of driver due to poor visibility
 - iii. temporary blinding of driver’s vision by the undimmed light of approaching vehicle in the opposite direction
 - iv. overspeeding
 - v. bad road condition
 - vi. mobile or stationary vehicles without adequate lighting or reflectors
3. vehicles veering off the road into the bush without anyone knowing till the following morning.
4. commuters being stranded when their vehicle breaks down or is involved in an accident
5. people missing their destination either because they were asleep or could not easily identify their supposed point of disembarkment due to poor visibility caused by darkness
6. lack of first aid services or prompt attention to accident victims or commuters who took ill while in transit.
7. inability to obtain services of a motor mechanic if vehicle should break down at night, thus forcing the journey to stop
8. loss of luggage to some other commuters as a result of mistaken identity
9. inability to continue with the journey owing to shortage or lack of fuel

10. raping of female passengers by hoodlums

5.0 Findings and Discussions

Travelling at night by road is one transport activity that now enjoys the involvement of all categories of road travellers in the country. However, as revealed by this study, majority of those who often embark on overnight journeys are mostly traders and other businessmen and women. It is interesting to note that women constitute a significant amount of overnight travellers. Again, greater percentage of the women are traders and they engage mostly in the buying and selling of agricultural produce such as vegetables, tomatoes, fruits, garri, and so on.

Economically speaking, most of those who take to night time travel belong to the middle class income group. Closely following this group is the group of low income earners. The class of high income earners ranks a distant last in patronising night time travel services. It is easy to deduce from this scenario that both the low and mid-income group of road travellers embark on overnight travel more often than their high income counterparts. The average night time traveller does so at least once in every twenty-one days. Contrary to popular expectation, most night commuters do so during week-days instead of during week-ends. The week-end night travel class is mostly made up of weekenders, notably students and civil servants.

On the average, travelling at night seems to be comparatively cheaper than day time travels. This trend stems from the fact that unplanned expenditure on road side items such as snacks, fast food, drugs, and so on, is significantly reduced. Apart from its relatively cheapness, many night travellers have had other wide ranging reasons to do so. This includes self interest, need to satisfy one's curiosity, the comforting and salutary weather of night time, inability to secure seat in day time vehicle and so on. However, the greatest factor that has made overnight travel the in thing to many a traveller is its fastness, hence, ability to save time. This perhaps explains why the business class mostly patronise night time travels. As it is commonly believed in the business world, time is money. Time, therefore, is so precious to the businessman. Anything that affords him the opportunity of maximising his limited time will consequently be warmly embraced by him.

Although so many people enjoy travelling at night, it is apparent that overnight journeys are prone to certain risks. The greatest danger that could threaten night travellers is accident, which could result from overspeeding, reckless driving, poor visibility, fatigue, and bad road. In most cases, accident victims are hardly promptly attended to owing to the non-availability of first-aid facilities or vehicles to convey them to the nearest hospital or medical centre for treatment. Consequently, some night travel accident victims suffer untold agony before receiving any form of medical attention, some who otherwise could have been saved, actually die for lack of prompt treatment. Another major risk of night travel which makes many travellers to dread it is armed robbery attack. The likelihood of attack by armed robbers is greater at night than during the day time. Indeed, many night travellers are reported to have either lost their lives or luggage or both at the same time.

It does seem as though the risks or disadvantages of night time travel outweighs its benefits. Consequently, there have been persistent calls in many quarters for the outright banning of night time travels. However, though there might be some merits in such calls, we are of the view that utmost care must be taken before responding positively to such calls. Presently, the benefits of overnight travels are not yet fully understood, some of the benefits are tangible while some are

intangible in nature. There is the need for a more objective study of the real and potential gains and pains of night travel, before deciding on whether or not it should be banned.

6.0 Improving Night Travel in the Next Millennium

The 21st century promises to be an era of fresh challenges in all facets of human activities, including transportation. Expectedly, road transport needs will increase by the next century. The desire to satisfy the rising needs will make night time travel more compelling, hence, many people in the traveling class will resort to travelling at night. There will therefore be the need to provide more road transport facilities, improve on existing facilities and make night travel safer and more comfortable.

Thus, to improve on night travel in the next millenium, there is need for a workable and enforceable policy framework that will guide the operations of transporters who offer night time travel services. Towards the formulation of such an all-embracing policy, we submit the following recommendations, namely:

1. only road-worthy vehicles which can withstand the stress of long distance journeys should be allowed for use in night travels.
2. there should be two drivers in each bus used for night travel
3. more than one armed escort should be provided in night buses
4. a motor mechanic should be attached to a vehicle on night journey. The bus conductor could be given some training as a motor mechanic so that he would double as both the conductor and mechanic.
5. the vehicles should be properly equipped with first-aid boxes
6. the vehicles should also be furnished with telecommunication gadgets
7. every vehicle on night journey should carry passenger manifestoes
8. regular night patrol by security operatives along the major roads used for night journey should be introduced
9. in line with Adalemo's (1998) observations, to prevent or minimise road accidents, selected danger or accident prone sections of the road should be installed with flashing lights, pavement markers, rumble strips, cat's eyes installations, reflective edge marking or reflector posts.

7.0 Conclusion

Night time travel is one aspect of our transport sub-sector that is witnessing a rather unprecedented rate of growth. Unfortunately, this aspect of our national development has received little or no attention in terms of understanding its peculiar characteristics, potentialities, challenges and problems. Night travel is generally considered riskier than day time travel (Doherty et al, 1998), and for that reason opinions are rife that this aspect of road transport should be forbidden. However, we are of the humble view that the call for overnight travel to be banned due to the potential risks involved, is to say the least, unjustifiable. Night travel plays an invaluable complimentary role to day time travel. Moreover, some commuters find it more convenient travelling at night. Thus, rather than ban night travel, concerted efforts should be made to evolve appropriate modalities to guide its operations. Night travel in the next millennium will be more challenging than what it is now. Hence, transport planners, operators,

managers, researchers, road safety agents and allied bodies should brace up for the 21st century intriguing challenges of night travel.

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