



LASUJOURNALOFHUMANITIES (LASUJOH)

Vol. 16, No. 2 | January 2023 Edition

ISSN: 978-274-384-4

A publication of:

Faculty of Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria.
Email: dean-arts@lasu.edu.ng

LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)

Vol. 16, No. 2 | January 2023 Edition

© 2023 Faculty of Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria

ISSN: 978-274-384-4

PRODUCED BY:

SS/S 12, ECO MARKET, FACULTY OF ARTS,
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY, OJO, LAGOS

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Journal Address: LASU Journal of Humanities
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Lagos, Nigeria. e-mail: lasujournalofhumanities@lasu.edu.ng

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Intra-City Urban Mobility: Dysfunctional Transport System and the Emergence of *Keke-Napep* (Tricycle) in Lokoja 1991 - 2021

Uzoma S. Osuala, Peter L. Oyigebe & Jeremiah O. Memud

Abstract

Since the evolution of transport system, especially automobile, urban mobility in Africa and Nigeria in particular has witnessed and experienced unprecedented growth. Scholars of transport history, especially road transportation have accorded so much recognition to the relevance of automobile in transportation. Undoubtedly, the relevance of vehicular transportation in urban development has gained significance in urban history. In some urban cities, motor transport system is well coordinated which prompted government in these areas to ban other means of transportation, particularly okada and Keke-Napep within the metropolitan cities. In some Africa countries, with reference to Nigeria, and Lokoja in particular, urban transport system, especially vehicular transportation has remained dysfunctional. Consequently, some other means of transportation, such as Keke-Napep emerged and remain relevant within the metropolis. Unfortunately, the city does not have a functional and coordinated urban transport system, hence the commercialisation and growth of Keke-Napep as the major means of urban transport mobility. Therefore, the study interrogates trajectory difficulties in urban commercial transport system and the emergence of Keke-Napep in Lokoja. The methodological approach is thematic and chronological. The study employs textual analysis of data retrieved from secondary and primary (oral tradition/interviews) sources.

Keywords: *Urbanization, Mobility, Transportation, Keke-Napep, Lokoja*

Introduction

TRANSPORTATION INVOLVES THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, GOODS AND services from one location to another (eno, 2006). since its evolution in human activities, transport system has evolved in various categories - head portorage, water, railway, road and air transportation (Walker, 1959; Hawkins, 1985, Falola & Olarenwaju, 1986)). In whatever form these various modes of transport systems are viewed, they have played essential roles in all aspects of human activities, especially in urban mobility which centrally involves the speed of travel and the manner in which movements in any forms are undertaken in an urban setting. Different modes of transport offer different levels of mobility and accessibility under distinct circumstances. Any mode of transport system has in various ways improved people's accessibility to socio-economic, political and cultural activities (Fashina & Olagunji, 2011). Recent development, especially advances in science and technology have encouraged more unconventional mobility transport system to be adopted for commercial purposes. And one of the innovations in science and technology in respect to road transport is *Keke-Napep* (tricycle) - the central focus of this study. The development brought a turnaround in mobility in most urban cities in Nigeria, including Lokoja.

Prior to the emergence of *Keke-Napep* as means of transport in Nigeria, head portorage, water railway, railway and road transportation were primarily the means of conveyance of agricultural produce, extractive raw materials, explorers, Christian missionaries, traders and British troops in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. However, motor transportation had an edge over these other means of transportation after its introduction, for two principal reasons. First, the railway is disadvantaged and undermined because of its rigidity in routing, limited spatial reach, and inflexible nature (Njoku, 2001; Oladipo, 2012). Second, the Achilles heels of the river system included blockage of the waterways by debris and the seasonal nature in its operations (Ofonagoro, 1979). These shortcomings encouraged gradual shift from the extant transport system to road transportation. Subsequently, motor transportation became the major means of conveyance in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. This is not only because of its wide outreach and flexibility in routing but also its relatively affordable freight (Njoku, 2001).

In what appears to be similar to the shortcomings associated with other mode of transportation, especially the use of tax/cab as means of road transport in urban centres, *Keke-Napep* appears to appeal to commuters in Lokoja for a number of reasons. First, Lokoja urban planning is constrained by the topography of the region which inhibited proper planning. The area is surrounded by mountainous rocks that dotted most settlements and obstructed road constructions. Second, the city is located in a valley enclaved by mountains and rivers Niger and Benue. The rivers compacted the city in a manner that compress long distance road construction obtainable in some other mega cities in Nigeria. Inconsistent government policies and politics of exclusion have stalled policy continuation which have affected urban mobility in Lokoja. The consequences have been abandoned policies which affected road transport system in Lokoja. The dysfunctional state and shortcomings associated with road transport system gave room for the emergence and demand for *Keke-Napep* in Lokoja. It is to this development that the study focuses on. The paper is segmented into seven unequalled sub-themes beginning with the introduction.

Geography and Dysfunctional Transport System in Lokoja

Lokoja is lies between the Latitude $7^{\circ} 45'.56''$ - $7^{\circ}51'04.34''$ N and longitude $6^{\circ}41'55.64''$ - $6^{\circ}45'36.55''$ E of the equator with a total average landmass of about 63.82sq.km. Lokoja is strategically located on the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue in Kogi State, Nigeria. Thus, given the city a unique geographical location both nationally and internationally. The State has a total land area of 1,230 square miles (3,180 km²) and a projected population of 741,000 as at 2021 estimate.

Geographical features have influenced growth patterns in Lokoja over the years from a small fishing village to its present small, medium and large economic status. The linear development along Kabawa, Ganaja and Muritala Mohammed roads is one of the prominent features of the city. Cluster population areas are in Kabawa, Adankolo, Ganaja, Anguar Yashi and Lokongoma areas of Lokoja. These features have influenced the concentration of commercial activities' and residential areas along the major aforementioned roads and subsequent heavy traffic generated by them.

It has a geographical feature depicting young sedimentary rocks and alluvium along the river beds, which promotes agricultural activities. Lokoja is surrounded by mountainous rocks with the famous Mount Patti that stands 1500

meters above sea level (Howard, 1960; Hassan, 2010). The climate oscillates between the wet and dry seasons with the daily temperature of between 24°C-38°C while annual rainfall is between 1250-1700mm. Lokoja is mostly and generally hot throughout the year even during rainy season. The vegetation of the area is mixed savannah and forest types.

Lokoja is blessed with precious mineral resources like columbite, coal and aquamarine. The city is home to the largest iron and steel industry in Nigeria, Ajaokuta Steel Company Limited and the largest cement factory (Obajana Cement Industry) in Africa is located in the region. The study area is heterogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition. The major ethnic groups that make up the semi-urban city are Igala, Ebira, Nupe, Yoruba and Igbo are widely spoken throughout the city. There are also minor ethnic groups in the area like the Oworo, the Bassa and the Gbagyi peoples (Habi, 2010; Ehimony, 2011; Ali, 2012). The presence of Igbo migrant businessmen have immensely contributed to the growth of the city (Osuala, 2017).

Commercial Taxi Transport in Lokoja: A Dysfunctional System

Prior to the advent of *Keke-Napep*, intra-city commercial transport system in Lokoja was controlled by urban taxi drivers and later supported by the emergence of commercial motorcyclists also known as *okada*. The transport system at the time could best be described as dysfunctional given the operating system of the operators. Given the limited geographical size of Lokoja, the operating system and the roads covered were not too distant. The incongruent planning pattern of the city, ineffectiveness and dysfunctional nature of the taxi transport system provided background for the emergence of *okada* and later *Keke-Napep* operators.

Like commonly prevalent in most cities in Nigeria, the shortcomings associated with commercial taxi road transport encouraged the usage of *okada* among the peoples of Lokoja. Prior to this time, government had tried to ban the operation of commercial motorcycle but did not succeed, hence the introduction of tricycle under the National Poverty Alleviation Program (NAPEP). The programme was introduced primarily to reduce unemployment among the youth and to serve as an alternative to the fast disappearing urban cab and commercial motorcycle (*Okada*). It is worthy to note that the challenges that confront commercial cab operators and motorcyclists gave reasons for the increase in the use of tricycle as a means of transportation in the city (Asekhome and Oisamoye,

2013). Motorcycle appearance in Lokoja urban transport scene is faced with many safety challenges which include the use of drugs, over-speeding, overloading, non-observance of traffic laws, non-use of rear mirror, receiving calls while riding, etc. Commercial motorcycle operation is also associated with robbery incidence, insecurity, kidnapping and other social vices, which prompted the emergence of Tricycle as a recent means of Transportation (Alkani, 2018).

In addition to what had been stated, introduction of tricycle was necessitated by constant and alarming persistence of the commercial motorcycle accident and the quest to provide employment for youths, and to eradicate poverty across Nigeria by President Obasanjo administration. Tricycles are filling the huge gaps that presently exist in Nigerian road transportation sector. They are still a very popular mode of transportation in Nigeria today. Thus, tricycle business is one aspect of transportation that has flourished in recent past. As the population of Nigeria keep increasing day by day, the need to transport and move people from one place to the other is also on the rise (Madu, 2014).

Commercial tricycle is an intra-city commuter transportation system in Nigeria. The purpose for its birth is to assist the government to achieve its goal of eradicating poverty in Nigerian economy, particularly among the unemployed categories of Nigerians. The business of *Keke-Napep* is important because it offers series of economic advantages to the operators. Among other reason for the introduction of tricycle include to ensure gainful employment for idle work force, to sustain wealth creation, to provide affordable mass transit services, to provide opportunity for the growth of ancillary services such as, vending , portal water , mobile food , canteens , grocery shops , post-delivery, to facilitate technical entrepreneurs and related small business that will in turn facilitate transfer of technology; to facilitate other subsidiary businesses such as the sales of tricycle, spare parts, artisanal mechanics and building of local contents among others (Magnus, 2004).

The use of tricycle is the dominant means of road transportation in intra-city mobility among commuters in Lokoja. The increase in the use of tricycles for urban public transport mobility emerge to fill the gap in the demand and supply of public transport in most urban centers in the country. The surge in urban population without a corresponding available commercial taxi has influenced the use of tricycles for most desired means of public mobility in Lokoja (Ken, 2011).

One of the significant factor that led to the proliferation of tricycle is the ban on motorcycle otherwise known as *okada* as a means of commercial transportation in several cities like Lagos, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Owerri, Umuahia, Uyo, among others in Nigeria. Several state governments at different times banned the use of motorcycle as a means of commercial transportation in major cities in their states as their operators were allegedly collaborating with criminals. With the ban on *okada* and the paucity of other means of intra-city transportation, people began to import and make use of different types of tricycle as a veritable means of commercial transportation (Obot, 1986). Tricycle has powerful diesel engine and a fuel tank of 10.15 litres capacity of four passenger, payload capacity of 320kg adequate room for passenger's luggage with top speed up to 80km/hr. It is suitable for intra-city commuting and commercial passenger carriage and it also has a low fuel consumption of 38km per litre (Isiaka, 2014).

4WFrom a Dysfunctional Commercial Cab to Emergence of *Keke-Napep* in Lokoja

The history of *Keke-Napep* (Tricycle) as a means of commercial transport is traceable to the administration of Mohammed Buba Marwa, who was the sole-military administrator of Lagos State between 1996 and 1999 (Mbemena, 2013). He was the first to launch the use of tricycle as means of commercial road transportation in Lagos state. Hence, it was named *Keke-Marwa* after the military administrator. Ever since then and till this day, tricycle is known as *Keke-Marwa* in Lagos State. The word *Keke* means bicycle. It is derived from a Yoruba word, the dominant indigenous language in Lagos State, Southwestern Nigeria.

The widespread use of *Keke-Napep* otherwise known as '*tricycle*' across Nigeria was attributed to one of government programmes known as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The programme was inaugurated in 2001 under the administration of President Obasanjo to alleviate poverty and provide economic empowerment to the people. Thus, the coinage *Keke-Napep* subsequently gained widespread usage across Nigeria. In 2001, NAPEP launched and distributed two thousand units of green colour tricycles with the inscription *Keke-Napep* written on them as commercial means of road transportation in the federal capital territory, Abuja.

The federal government encouraged every state government to align with the vision of the programme in order to eradicate poverty and get idlers out of the streets and make them productive work force. Hence, in the same year (2001),

Kogi Government, like its other counterparts launched *Keke-Napep* within the national objectives of the Federal Government. According to Three Wheelers Association of Nigeria (TOAN) in Lokoja, the *first Keke* to ever operate in Lokoja was brought by Late Prince Audu, former Governor of Kogi State in 2002 (Interview with Oshei, 1980). Later in 2004, the then Governor Alhaji Ibrahim Idris brought additional *Keke* to empower the youth in the State. It was popularly described as *!bro-Trust* (also refer to as *Ibro-W ahala*). Consequently, state governments strengthened partnership with the federal and local governments in combating poverty among Nigerian peoples. In other to support the efforts of various governments, in 2004, Federal government provided five thousand (5000) units of tricycles to the thirty-six states of the federation to further ensure the actualization of the set goals and objectives. There are categories of *Keke* and they include Agagu, Dayun, TVC, etc.

With the initial efforts of government at the Federal and State levels, the spread gained serious momentum, especially because of its profit making venture, accessibility and wide outreach. Consequently, several small scale and medium businessmen ventured into the importation, selling and operation of *Keke-Napep* as means of intra-city commercial road transportation in several cities in Nigeria, including Lokoja (Ojonemi and Ajibola, 2015). According to Ali, *Keke-Napep* usage as means of commercial road transportation is not a recent development in Lokoja, especially after the creation of Kogi State (Interview with Ali, 1959). He further narrated that the idea of *Keke-Napep* started from bigger metropolitan cities such as Lagos. Ali explained that the product was imported from India where tricycle was largely used as means of road transportation (Ali, 1959). It was narrated that with about N200,000, distributors and some entrepreneurs acquired tricycles and gave it out on hire purchase to prospective operators who claimed ownership of the tricycle after full payment have been made. It speedily became popular means of transport because of the nature of roads in Lokoja. Tricycle accesses rough and difficult terrains, its flexibility at meeting the demands of commuters and hardly stay too long in heavy traffic made it to be acceptable by the people. It takes commuter right to their doorstep unlike the commercial taxi. In fact, given the four market day nature of Lokoja International Markets, tricycles was widely patronized by market women who in most cases charter them to carry their goods and wear to and fro the market places (Ali, 1959).

Tricycle Owners Association of Nigeria (TOAN)

With gradual degeneration of commercial taxi operators between 2011 and 2020, there was tremendous influx of *Keke* riders in Lokoja. The increase in *Keke-Napep* operators within the period was occasioned by number of factors. The factors range from government policy, immigrants who settled in Lokoja following insurgency in northeastern Nigeria to some individuals who lost their jobs. There were others who also got self-employed in the business of *Keke-Napep* road transportation having abandoned the dwindling commercial taxi city transportation. Given the influx of operators of *Keke-Napep*, the early operators founded an association known as *Keke-Napep* Goods Carrier Association in 2010. It was later reamed Three Wheelers Keke Association. In 2012, the Association got influx of individuals who imported different types of tricycles to complement the existing tricycles in the city. Among newly imported *Keke-NAPEPs* included Bajaj, TVS KINGS (Passengers Keke) and they released them to members and intending members at higher purchase. Some other individuals and group entrepreneurs also imported Dayun, (load carrier), Piao (passenger carrier) and others models of tricycle into Lokoja. Consequently, the population size and the operational outspread of the association progressed and expanded.

In 2015, the Three Wheelers Keke Association metamorphosed into the present Tricycle Owners Association of Nigeria (TOAN). The development was encouraged by the state government in its reform in the transport sector. As part of modernizing the association, the association changed its name in order to suit the traditional image of the business. The association got a big boost as some businessmen imported more types of tricycles such as Bajaj and TVS KINGS (Passengers Keke). Registered members of the association were able to own these types of tricycles on hire purchase from marketers who already established strong relationship with the association. Other prospective members acquired their tricycles through one form of socio-cultural groups or personal relationship with either tricycle marketers or some entrepreneur who bought and released the tricycles on hire purchase. The headquarters of Tricycle Union is located in No 3, Old Liberty Hotel, Lokoja (Interview, Adeniyi, 2018). In December 2021, the Association has a membership strength of over 2,900 with over 1,500 members owning their own Keke and over 1300 members riding on hire purchase (Interview, Shettima, 2021). Lokoja TOAN is affiliated to the national body with its headquarters in Abuja.

The association is saddled with the following responsibilities: registration of new *Keke-Napep* riders in the city; ensure that their members have a reasonable bargain with an entrepreneur who is willing to release Keke on hire purchase, The association also endeavour to provide guarantors or referees for their members (Shettima, 2021). The association also collect tax through the branch executives from Keke riders according to their routes. The levy ranges from N2,500 to N3,000, depending on the operation sites. In addition, the association assist members to procure plate numbers for their members. Each plate number cost about N20,000. Also, the association collects daily N200 ticketing from Keke riders (Interview with Yabagi, 2018). A certain amount of the ticketing goes to the Trade Union Congress (Yabagi, 2018).

The association provides adequate and necessary information from the law enforcement agencies to their members, especially in relation to criminal activities. In this regard, the association endeavours at all time to keep bio-data of their registered members in an event of road accident or case(s) with the law enforcement agencies. Updates on operations of the association are usually disseminated to members on weekly programmes. The association also sanction members who violates the rules and regulations governing the modus operandi of the members. It is the responsibility of the association to monitor the mechanical and technical functionality of members (Shettima, 2021). Furthermore, in an event of accident, the association assist in ensuring that their members are rescued from the hospital. And finally, the association financially, socially and morally support members in an event of wedding, child dedication, burial ceremonies, among other socio-cultural activities (Adeniyi, 2018).

Socio-Economic Place of *Keke-Napep* (Tricycle) in Lokoja Urban Mobility

Tricycle business in Nigeria is one aspect of transportation that has gained tremendous attention from the end user in urban mobility. Therefore, the socio-economic importance of *Keke-Napep* in Lokoja cannot be over-emphasized. The need to move people, goods and services from one point to another is occasioned by the geometric rise in Lokoja population. As already noted, the influx of migrants from the northern part of the country as a result of terrorism, kidnapping and banditry have influenced the new migrants to settle for *Keke-Napep* business. The choice to settle for this nature of survival is facilitated by government policy in the eradication of poverty given the fact that job seekers

outweighs job creation. Thus, the contributions of tricycle in urban transportation in Lokoja would be explained under the following categories: employment opportunities, crime reduction, social welfare mobility, population increase, good standard of living and poverty reduction, revenue generation to government (Majekodunmi, 2010, 16).

Employment Opportunities

Salaam narrated that given the unemployment rate that have confronted the nation, *Keke-Napep* commercial road transport system has offered employment opportunities to thousands of Lokoja residents (Interview with Olakunle, 2018). Many job seekers who could not be gainfully employed in civil service of the state have taken to operating the business of *Keke*. Through this means, many have been able to meet the socio-economic needs that confront them (Interview with Yusuf, 2018). Unemployed graduates organised themselves to acquire tricycle on hire purchase in order to cater for themselves and their families (Olakunle, 2018). During a group oral interview section, Sanusi narrated that in order to arrest unemployment among the youths, procurement of tricycle for those who needed them was achieved through micro-credit system (Interview with Okeke, 2018).

The increasing growth in the number of tricycles has come to solve the mobility needs of many urban residents and provide self-employment opportunities to thousands of youth. The development is as a result poor and inadequate public transport system, poor road conditions particularly those routeing to inner parts of the city where many people reside. The ripple effects of *Keke-Napep* extend not only in job creation but also artisans who repair tricycles, those selling spare parts of tricycles, revenue generation to government through licensing and tax collection (Kenneth, 2011, 25).

Reduction in Crimes

During an oral interview session, Abdullahi stated that since the inception of *Keke-Napep*, crime rates, street thuggery among other social vices among the youth has significantly reduced. According to him, a good number jobless youth who were into different crimes have taken to the business of riding *Keke-Napep* in order to be socio-economically relevant in the society (Interview with Okonkwo, 2018). Salami argued that crime cases such stealing, robbery, attacks, aiding child-trafficking, gang-robbery, rape, among others have drastically reduced (Yusuf, 2018).

Increase in Population

According to Joseph, one of the most flourishing business in Lokoja is tricycle transport system. He narrated that prior to the high demand for tricycle, taxi cab had been the major means of urban mobility for persons and goods and services. The decline in the use of taxi cab is associated with poor coordination, unplanned urban road system and the rigidity of taxi cab operation. Hence, the surge in the demand for tricycle by unemployed persons. Government support for the use of *Keke-Napep* as a means of urban mobility further encouraged its use. While some State governments formulated and implemented policies that ban the use of tricycle in their cities, Kogi state government did not. Hence, more migrant migrated to Lokoja to engage themselves in tricycle transport system. Also, the insecurity that has been ravaging northeast and some other parts of the north compelled people migrate to safer areas. Lokoja is one of the destination of millions of migrants who later became self-employed in tricycle road transport system (Onyemaechi, 2018). As population increases in the area, the demand for transportation is intensified and *Keke-Napep* operators have always been there to support urban mobility (Taaffe, et al, 1963).

Providing Social Welfares/Mobility

According to Federal Government of Nigeria, the fundamental goal of the national transport policy is to develop an adequate safe environmentally sound, effective and affordable integrated transport system within the framework of a progressive competitive market economy. The significance of public transport services in a successful transport system is derived from the fact that it provides mobility for those who cannot afford to buy a car. It helps in creating and maintaining viable urban mobility and relieving highway congestion and assuring long term sustainability in terms of resource consumption and the environment exploration (Atomade, 2016).

Public transportation provides a very efficient means of moving large number of people with considerable flexibility in order to meet demand throughout the city. Public transport is one of the social facilities which is provided with the aim of improving social welfare. However, providing social welfare, equitable and efficient public transport for the ever increasing demand with limited resources available is a challenge in developing countries (Majekodumi, 2016). Hence the emergence of tricycle in developing countries as a means of intra-city transportation. It is very convenient to customers and can

penetrate parts of the city that cannot be reached by taxi due to rough terrains and bad roads. Tricycle loading capacity also outweighs that of motorcycles hence city commuters prefer it to any other (Adeoti, 2019, 56). According to Margaret, tricycle is preferred any day, anytime, anywhere because of its relative comfort. It's more accessible to people than buses or taxi because of its flexible movement. Given its size, tricycle could manoeuvre heavy traffic (Interview with Kehinde, 2018). Majority of commuters who uses tricycles were mainly for educational, marketing and religious purposes and they patronize tricycles because it is cheaper, safe and readily available in comparison to other means of road transport.

Revenue for Government

Tricycle operators have contributed a lot to the growth of the economy through income generation. Thousands of self-employed *Keke-Napep* operators who are fully and gainfully engaged are contributing their quotas to the internally generate revenue (IGR) to government through levies and other taxes.

In addition, those who are in the business of importing and selling *Keke-Napep* also pay taxes and import duties which are all sources of income generation to government (Interview with Salam, 2018).

The transport sector has over the years been a major area of government investment among African countries. This is due to the widespread belief that the development process, depends to a very large extent on efficiency of country's transportation network. The impact of transportation facilities on the expansion of markets has been well expressed in the improvements in transportation communication which has increased outlets in turn raise demand for linkage of markets which has steadily become parts of developmental process (Somuyiwa, 1977, 37).

Conclusion

Commercial Tricycle is an intra- city commuter transport system in Nigeria. Over the past eight years, there have been a significant growth in the use of tricycles as a commercial public transport model. While offering certain transport advantages in form of easy measurability and ability to travel on poor roads and demand responsiveness, tricycles are relatively cheap to own and it provides convenient and relatively inexpensive alternative to mobility. It is less regulated (in term of licensing, enforcement and insurance) and can be faster than other

means of transportation on heavy traffic roads. In Nigeria, the use of tricycles for private and public transportation cannot be overemphasized as numbers of tricycles on Nigerian roads particularly in strategic urban centers and rural areas outnumber taxi. It is in the light of this undocumented contributions in literature that this study on commercial *Keke-Napep* road transportation examined.

This research interrogates the trajectory emergence and contributions of tricycle to urban transformation in Lokoja. The study submits that *Keke-Napep* emergence is occasioned by dysfunctional taxi transport mobility in Lokoja. It further avers that the urban plan and the geological formation of rocks that intersect supposedly motorable areas were properly designed and constructed which invariably affected the plying of roads by taxi operators. The situation was worsened by inconsistent government policies enshrined in discontinuity of policies of every successive administrations from the previous government. The emergence was also spurred by Nigerian government efforts to eradicate poverty through some sort of small-scale enterprise. Hence the introduction of tricycle as an intra-city road urban mobility. The relevance of tricycle since its usage as means of commercial urban transport system cannot be overemphasized and has come to stay. It is not doubtful that the advent of tricycle did not come with its challenges as already pointed in the discourse, its significance and discussion will continue to be interrogated among scholars, urban planners, government agencies and commuters in public spaces.

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