



# DAILY INDEPENDENT

■ A VOICE OF YOUR OWN ■

"We shall be independent in all matters, but shall never be neutral on any matter, especially those concerning the well-being of the Nigerian people."  
— Independent Newspapers Limited, October 1, 2001

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# Apapa Traffic Congestion

The gateway to the nation's economy is getting clogged up. The Apapa traffic route, encompassing the network of highways to and from Apapa Quays and Tin Can Island Port, imposes grievous strain on hauliers and other transport operators who have to move huge volumes of imports and personnel to various destinations.

Not surprisingly, the delay has been having a detrimental effect on the cost structure of all the participants and players, in this vital area, thereby driving up the cost of doing business. This cannot possibly be in the interest of consumers and other end-users. The loss of revenue to the Government is huge. The opportunity cost here is that most importers have been diverting their consignments to neighbouring countries due to this bottleneck. It has been very beneficial to the neighbouring countries, who have been mopping up income which as of right, ought to be going into the coffers of the Nigerian government.

In the recent past, both the Transportation Minister, Chief Cornelius Adebayo, and the Managing Director of the Nigerian Ports Authority, have taken the bull by the horn in an attempt to proffer lasting solutions to the problem. On their assessment tour of the area, they received the 'Apapa treatment,' when they got caught up in the terrible traffic nightmare. The identified causes of the problem include influx of trucks into the Apapa Port area; presence of broken-down and clogged-up trucks along the Port access; lack of holding bays for loading trucks; indiscriminate granting of operating license to tank farm owners by the Directorate of Petroleum Resources (DPR); non-compliance with road traffic rules and regulations as well as indiscriminate parking and usage of road space.

The Ports Authority has suggested short-term measures to immediately tackle the problem. These are centred around giving NPA the right to exercise strategic control in the issuance and eventual usage of Authority to Load (ATL); immediate purchase of a large number of tow trucks to be deployed to the port access roads to assist in road traffic control and management duties; vehicles coming to load at Dangote Cement factory, Flourmills premises in Apapa and those returning empty containers should access the Port between 7.00 p.m. and 7 a.m. only, save weekends and public holidays. Enforcement mechanism would be done through the use of overhead clamps; NPA to coordinate the proposed traffic control efforts from Mile 2 to Apapa Port via Creek Road and from Nigeria Police Area B, Apapa to Apapa Port; urgent need to set up multi-agency task force comprising Port Police, Navy, LASTMA, Lagos Commissioner of Police and NPA security. This is to be headed by an NPA official or Commissioner of Police (Port Authority Police Command), with the involvement of DPOs whose areas of jurisdiction include the port access

roads; need to compel the Terminal Operators to have and operate Holding Bays and adopt the usage of electronic call-up system; Greenview Development Nig. Ltd. to use Seaplane Road to access their Terminal in the short term and eventually use same as exit.

We believe that these measures must be adopted straightaway. It has to be recalled that during the Buhari/Idiagbon military regime (December 31, 1983 - August, 1985) congestion was effectively tackled by restricting the movement of heavy duty trucks to between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. By-passes should also be built as dedicated routes for them. The Apapa-Oshodi Expressway should also be comprehensively rehabilitated. Like many other issues bedeviling the Nigerian polity, it is imperative that in solving the problem, the political will must be mustered to take on the powerful, politically-well-connected vested interests who are amongst the major culprits.

A lot of the congestion is due to the absurdity of having tank farms cited besides the ports. The lack of proper

physical planning is obvious in their location, as no provision for parking space was made for trucks lifting petroleum products. There are no records available of anywhere else in the world where tank farms are built in residential areas, like the ones we have here, congesting the road to Apapa. Obviously, there was a lack of attention being paid to details, when the government policy of ports concessions to private terminal operators was put in place.

The ports concession programme over-looked the infrastructure to be used outside of the ports. The level of the congestion is attributable to the fierce competition for swift delivery by the terminal operators. Also, the Association of Maritime Truck Owners (AMATO) has correctly pointed out that it foresaw the problem and had specifically advised the Management of the Ports Authority to give truck owners the abandoned Lilypond Terminal as a transit loading bay. Lamentably this was not done.

In the long term, the opportunity cost to the economy is too crippling to rely on short-term measures alone. Redesigning of the port approaches and associated points of interchange must be undertaken. Finally, there is no getting away from the need to have a well worked out, holistic and properly implemented transport policy. For instance, the rail system would have been useful for haulage, as it would have freed the said highways of heavy duty trucks. It is clearly important to proceed with rehabilitation of the rail system and spend more on road building. It is heartening that the Transport Minister has already pledged to move mountains to solve the problem. He should embark on a decisive implementation of all worthwhile proposals proffered, irrespective of whose ox is gored, and spare the nation, especially the business community, further anguish.

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