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# Road transportation as lifeline of the economy in Western Nigeria, 1920 to 1952

**Oladipo O. Olubomehin**

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Nigeria.  
E-mail: [olubomehind@yahoo.com](mailto:olubomehind@yahoo.com). Tel: +234 803 406 9943.

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**The complex but vital interconnection between road transportation and the economy is what this paper seeks to explore. Our primary focus is not to determine whether road transportation developed or underdeveloped the economy; rather we want to see how road transportation served as a “vehicle” for the pursuit of economic goals. The paper discusses how the introduction of modern means of transportation by the British colonial administration brought about a change in the economic landscape of Western Nigeria. It shows that road transportation opened up new areas for economic activities, increased agricultural production, revitalised trading activities and impacted positively on urbanisation process. Although, there were other means of transportation such as rail and water in the study area, these means of transportation would have been greatly incapacitated but for the complementary role played by road transport in the economy. The paper concludes that road transportation indeed acted as the lifeline of the economy of the study region. The method adopted for the study is basically historical, involving the use of primary sources such as archival documents and oral interviews as well as secondary source-material.**

**Key words:** Road, transportation, economy, lifeline, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

“Formerly important trading towns on the local caravan trade routes [when] by-passed by modern lines of communication... declined as trading centres” (Hodder and Ukwu, 1969:38).

This quotation underscores the inter-connection between transportation and the economy. Most scholars agree that a good means of transportation serves as a lifeline of an economy. By “lifeline”, we mean that transportation is extremely important for the survival of the economy. 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 (Camemark, 1979). Writing on the importance of transportation, Carapetis et al. (1984) point out that adequate, reliable and economic transport is essential for the social and economic development of rural areas especially in developing world. They noted that the “absence of regular and reliable transport services ... [will] condemn remote

communities to subsistence production in perpetuity”. In the same vein, Mallon argues that transportation has an important role to play not only in serving the productive sectors such as agriculture and industry but also in bringing about economic growth. He points out that it was no coincidence that the periods of intensive railway construction in Britain, the U.S., pre-Soviet Russia, Italy and other countries were also their periods of most rapid economic development (Mallon, 1960).

In Africa, the role of transportation as lifeline of the economy is aptly captured in the statement made by the apostle of indirect rule in Africa, Sir Fredrick Lugard that “the material development of Africa is summed up in one word – transportation” (Lugard, 1965:5). Put differently, transportation was the lifeline of development in colonial Africa. It is against this background that this paper seeks to discuss transportation as the lifeline of the colonial economy in Western Nigeria. Our concern is to discuss the complex but vital interconnection between road

transportation and the economy. Our primary focus is not to determine whether road transportation developed (or underdeveloped) the economy. That has been done in other studies (Olubomehin, 2011). Rather we want to discuss how road transportation served as an indispensable tool in the pursuit of economic goals. Thus, the paper examines how the introduction of modern means of transportation by the British colonial administration brought about a change in the economic landscape of Western Nigeria; how road transportation opened up new areas for economic activities, which led to increased agricultural production, provided employment opportunities for the people and also encouraged commercial and trading activities. We will also look at the impact of transportation on the process of urbanisation.

It is necessary to clarify from the on-set that although other means of transportation such as water and rail existed in Western Nigeria in the period of our study, these means of transportation would have been greatly incapacitated but for the complementary role played by road transport in the economy. In fact, as we shall see later in this paper, over time road transport became the dominant means of transportation in Western Nigeria. Thus, there is a justifiable reason to consider the central role of road transport in the economy of the region.

By Western Nigeria, we mean the Colony of Lagos, Ijebu, Abeokuta, Oyo and Ondo provinces, which corresponds to the present Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states of Nigeria. It excludes the old mid-western region or present Edo and Delta states of Nigeria. In Western Nigeria, the period between 1920 and 1952 falls into the era of colonial rule. It is thus correct to say that the role of road transportation in the economy can only be understood within the context of the colonial economic philosophy.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the British had succeeded in incorporating Western Nigeria into the British Empire through a series of treaties signed with the local people. The incorporation was to enable the British exercise full control over the human and material resources of the area. In order to tap the material resources, the British realised that it needed to develop a modern transport infrastructure in the area to replace the traditional means of transportation which had existed in the area since the pre-colonial days. This was what prompted the development of modern transportation system. It began with the railway, and later on road transportation was introduced.

The development of road transportation took place within the wider context of British economic policy in Nigeria. The colonial economic policy was based on the belief that a colonial territory existed primarily for the benefit of the metropolitan country. The economic relationship between the metropolitan country (Britain) and her colonies was expected to be governed by the principle of comparative advantage, implying that a

country should specialise in the production of what she was best suited for. Thus, the British Empire was divided into two distinct camps, namely the colonies and the metropolis, the two being "regions of the same country" (Oluwasanmi, 1966:19 to 21). Consequently, a colony was expected to supply the raw materials needed by the industries in the metropolis. Nigeria as a colonised country was expected to provide not only the basic raw materials for the industries in Britain but also serve as market for the sale of European manufactured goods.

Against this background, the British realised that to achieve their economic objective, the transportation system in the country had to be improved because by 1900 when colonial rule became fully established in Nigeria, transportation in the country still depended on traditional means such as human portage and water transportation. These means of transportation had limitations which, in the context of the colonial economy became exaggerated. The traditional transport system could not cope with the demand of the colonial economy. It, therefore, required a modern transportation system which was provided by the railway and road transportation. The period between 1900 and 1919 belonged to the foundation years of the colonial economy and by extension the establishment phase in the development of road transportation in Western Nigeria. During this early stage, not much was done to develop the transport system of the country. However, realising that it needed to do more to tap the resources of the country, the colonial government moved away from the cautious approach which characterised its road development programme prior to 1919 and began to take serious steps to develop the road transport system of the region. This is the reason why the opening date of our study is 1920, a date which signifies the commencement of an ambitious phase in the development of road transportation in Western Nigeria.

### **ROAD TRANSPORTATION AS "VEHICLE" OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, 1920 TO 1939**

As pointed out, by 1920, it was clear that the government needed to improve the conditions of roads in South Western Nigeria. The pre-1920 roads, being the first roads were just a little better than mere footpaths and tracks. They could only carry light motor vehicles. But from about 1920, the government began to take frantic steps to improve the conditions of the roads so that they could carry heavy motor vehicles in all weathers. Road development in Western Nigeria involved the government, the people and the missionaries. At the level of government, both the native authorities and the provincial administration were involved. They constructed roads, where they never previously existed and carried out maintenance of already existing ones. They constructed many miles of road, ranging from 452 miles

in Oyo province to 399 miles of roads in Abeokuta province'. The trend was replicated in Ijebu and Ondo, the two other provinces of Western Nigeria.

Apart from the government, the indigenous people were also involved in the building of roads. In the 1920s and 30s, many of the local communities built feeder roads to ease the problem of evacuating farm products from the farm. This period also saw the involvement of certain missionaries in road construction. In the Lagos Colony, Gershion Ricketts who was a missionary spearheaded the construction of a road to link Agbowo with Sagamu and Ikorodu (Adefuye, 1983:145). Ikorodu was a popular Remo commercial and river port. Hitherto, the link with Ikorodu from Agbowo was by canoe. Ricketts recruited labour from the age groups in Agbowo for the road construction. He gave the technical direction and also provided most of the equipment used. The Agbowo – Ikorodu road completed in 1923 injected life into the economic development of the Colony because it facilitated the transportation of food products from Agbowo and rubber products from Itoikin - Ago Hausa area to Lagos.

While the post-first world war period witnessed a renewed demand for Africa's agricultural produce, the colonial government's road development programme brought about a revitalisation of economic activities which had been disrupted by the disturbances that accompanied the World War. The roads made it possible for the colonial government to intensify the export of agricultural produce from Nigeria. As the demand for agricultural produce continued so also was the expansion in the road transport system. Thus by 1926, road development in the country had reached such a point to warrant the government to set up a road board known as communication board to co-ordinate road making in the country. By this time the country had a total of 6,000 miles of motor-able roads compared to 2,000 miles it had in 1914 (Helleiner, 1966:14). South Western Nigeria had the highest proportion of tarred roads in the country.

Evidently, road transportation contributed to the transformation of the economic milieu of our study area in many positive ways. One important way in which the transformation manifested was, in its provision of a new line of business for the people. This was the road transport business. Although motor transportation was already a part of the economy of Western Nigeria before the First World War, most of the transport outfits were owned by the government. However, from the 1920s there was an expansion in the transport industry as more transporters entered into the business. Several of the new entrants were private individuals. Their entry into the transport industry can be said to have added vitality to the economy. The indigenous motor operators were spread across the Western region of Nigeria. In Lagos, the leading transporter was W.A. Dawodu, while Messrs S.O. Ojo and Maiyegun operated in Abeokuta. In fact, evidence shows that there were twenty-one Lorries

operating in Egba division alone, in addition to many others working in the district, but which were registered outside the province<sup>2</sup>.

In Ijebu, there were two leading transporters, namely T.A. Odutola and Obafemi Awolowo. Indeed, there were at least thirty Lorries operating in Ijebu province in 1924. Most of the roads were well served by motor transport services. Oyo and Ondo provinces were not left out in growth the motor transport business. Mr. Salami Agbaje was a leading motor transporter based in Ibadan, Oyo province. Agbaje had a successful transport enterprise and the operation of his business was cited as one of the reasons for the closure of the government motor services in Southern Nigeria (Drummond-Thompson, 1993:55). By 1921, there were 174 motor vehicles in Oyo province and by 1924; the number had increased to 504. In Ondo province, motor transport service was provided by the government and private individuals. Consequently, the colonial record shows that it became possible to transport large quantities of agricultural produce "from Ondo and Oke Igbo... to Oshogbo", a development, which had "never previously occurred"<sup>3</sup>. Further in 1924, the District Officer reported that "the transport difficulty, always acute in Ondo... has been to a certain extent overcome by the utilisation of ... lorries which have conveyed cocoa [and other produce] for sale at Ilesha"<sup>4</sup>.

The foreigners were not left out in the motor transport business. One of them was a European enterprise named Weekes Transport which expanded from Eastern Nigeria to Osogbo, Oyo province in 1927 (Drummond-Thompson, 1993: 56). Weekes was later sold to Beeres Transport Company in 1934. It operated between Ibadan and Abeokuta, Ife, Ijebu Ode and Ogbomosho. Its operations extended to Oyo and Ede. Several other European exporting firms which had become established in Western Nigeria during this period had Lorries for transporting produce and distributing imported goods. A few Syrians and Lebanese were also involved in motor transport business. They had trucks drawing trailers which were used mainly for hauling cargoes (Walker, 1959: 111 to 113). Compared to the African operators, the Levantines ran fleets of vehicles, which in the 1930s numbered thirty or more vehicles apiece. They had offices, yards and sheds that were equipped for maintenance. From the above analysis, we can see that road transportation contributed to the transformation of the economic terrain of Western Nigeria, thereby supporting the thesis that road transportation was a lifeline of the economy. Indeed, it acted as an instrument of economic transformation in the study area.

Furthermore, road transportation paved way for European trading firms to move from the coast into the hinterland of Western Nigeria. From 1920, many of the firms started opening shops in different parts of Western Nigeria. In Ijebu province, Messrs John Holt and Miller Brothers which had been in the Ijebu lagoon market of Ejinrin since 1917 moved to the in-land town of Ijebu Ode

and opened a store there in 1923. Further in-land, Messrs G.B. Ollivant and Paterson Zochonis started business in Oyo in 1921. Between 1923 and 1924, Messrs MacIver Limited and MacNeil Limited operated in parts of Ondo province. The presence of the European trading firms injected life to the economic activities of Western Nigeria. The firms acted as agents for the exploitation of the agricultural wealth of the region. They purchased produce through their African agents who acted as middlemen between the farmers and the exporting companies. They also distributed imported merchandise to smaller markets in villages through these African middlemen. In this way, these trading companies helped to intensify economic activities in the study area.

Road transportation aided the evacuation of produce from the interior to the coast. In the 1920s, many of the major towns in Western Nigeria had been linked by road. These roads made it possible for the lagoon or coastal markets to receive commodities from the hinterland. From these lagoon markets produce were transported to Lagos for onward shipment overseas. From the lagoon markets also, imported goods found their way to various markets located in the interior.

An important way in which road transportation acted as lifeline of the economy was in its intensifying the conduct of internal trade. Motor transporters had fixed days of the week when they went to the villages to convey farm products to the markets located in the town. Some of the famous markets were Oshele in Akoko district, Oja Oba in Owo and Akure towns of Ondo province. In Oyo province, the popular markets were in Ibadan, Ilesha and Osogbo. Other provinces of Western Nigeria had their own important markets. Just as motor transportation was useful to the indigenous traders, the European trading companies also used the roads to distribute European manufactured goods.

Related to this point is the way in which road transportation led to an increase in the number of markets in our study area. Although we do not know the actual number of new markets established but there is evidence that the inauguration of road transportation brought about an increase in the number of existing markets. B.W. Hodder observes that as from the 1920s when motor transport system became more widespread in Western Nigeria, "application for opening of new markets increased" (Hodder, 1963:70). For example, in Abeokuta area, applications were received for the opening of markets at Arikola station in 1934 and at Opeji in 1935. Applications also came in for the improvement of stalls and sheds in the existing markets as in the case of Itoku in Abeokuta province and Ejinrin in Ijebu province.

Another way in which road transportation served as the lifeline of the economy was in its promoting inter-regional trade between the people of Western Nigeria and their neighbours. For example, road transportation connected traders in Egbaland with their neighbours in Dahomey (now known as Benin Republic). It also enabled traders in

parts of Ondo province to trade with their neighbours in the Middle Belt and Northern Nigeria. Thus, the Resident Officer, Ondo province could report in 1926 that vehicles may be seen daily in the province transporting goods to Ilorin<sup>5</sup>, a town located in the northern part of the country. It is on the basis of the impact on inter-regional trade that one feels safe to say that road transportation brought about an expansion in trade and also intensified the pre-colonial trade relations among the peoples living in Nigeria.

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR PERIOD, 1939 TO 1945

As is well known, the second world began in 1939 and lasted till 1945. During this period, road transportation played an important role in keeping the economies of the colonial territories alive. The economies needed to be kept in a vibrant state for several reasons. First, the British colonial authorities required the economies to produce the required foodstuff to feed the African soldiers who were fighting on the side of the allies in the war. Secondly, it was necessary to keep the indigenous economy in a good functioning state to enable the people engage in profitable economic activities and as such, discourage acts capable of undermining peace in the colonies. Of course, the colonial administration knew that civil disturbances in the colonies were capable of undermining efforts at successfully prosecuting the World War.

In order to facilitate the pursuit of economic activities, the colonial government had to put basic infrastructure in place. This involved the construction of new roads where necessary and the maintenance of the existing ones. The government did not pursue a general programme of road development during the war. Rather, it devoted attention to areas that were rich in the production of agricultural produce needed in connection with the "win the war" objective. One of the commodities which drew the attention of the colonial government during this period was rubber. It was used for the production of tyres for army vehicles. It was reported that each ton of rubber exported helped in putting back on the roads four vehicles immobilised through lack of tyres<sup>6</sup>. Before 1942, the bulk of rubber supply to Britain came from the Far East. But as a result of the war, Britain lost her supplies of rubber from the Far East. Consequently, it became imperative that the rubber production in Nigeria be increased to meet the needs of Britain. Thus, during the war, the government intensified the production of natural rubber. It also encouraged the people to collect all scraps containing rubber such as old motor and bicycle tyres, tubes and anything containing rubber and they were shipped to Britain so as to meet the war-time needs.

In consequence of government's measures to promote rubber production, the people began to bring rubber to the European exporting firms. In Ijebu province,

businessmen purchased rubber in the producing areas south of Ibadan and transported it by road to Ejinrin market where they sold it to the exporting firms. The U.A.C. was particularly involved in the shipment of rubber scraps. It acted as a collecting agent and all scraps were handed to its nearest branch. The supply of rubber came not only from Ijebu but also Oyo and Ondo provinces. The Resident, Ondo province, reported an increase in the quantity of rubber brought to the market in 1945<sup>7</sup>. He also remarked that the quality was better than that of the previous year. In Ondo province, rubber was brought by road from Ekiti districts to Agbabu port and from there, shipped in lighters to Lagos. In Oyo province, colonial officials toured the rubber farms on road to persuade farmers to increase rubber production. From Oyo province, rubber was transported by road to Ejinrin port from whence it was shipped to Lagos.

Apart from rubber, the British also demanded for palm kernel during the war. However, unlike rubber whose demand was stable, the demand for palm kernel fluctuated. Between 1939 and 1940, the demand for the commodity was high but in August 1940 the demand fell drastically because the exportation of the produce was prohibited. This was because the international situation made Britain to receive large quantities of fats originally destined for other countries<sup>8</sup>. Thus, she was unable to take the whole of palm kernel produced in Nigeria.

While the government restricted the exportation of palm kernel, it began to promote the production and export of cassava starch. Britain turned to Nigeria and her West African colonies for the supply of starch because the world war had cut off Britain from the previous sources of supply. In Nigeria, the British looked up to Western Nigeria especially the Ijebu and Abeokuta provinces for the supply of cassava starch. This is because there was already an existing local starch industry in the two provinces. Thus, during the war, Ijebu farmers and women starch makers showed great interest in the export of cassava starch. In Sagamu, for instance, purchases of starch by European firms during the last three months of 1940 alone exceeded £1,000. And between 1941 and 1942, the British bought a total of 728 tons of cassava starch from the province, while in Abeokuta province, 37 tons (½ years only) and 78 tons were passed for export in 1941 and 1942 respectively<sup>9</sup>. As usual, all exports in Abeokuta province went by motor lorries to Lagos while that from Ijebu province came by road to Ejinrin port before being shipped to Lagos.

In May 1941, the government removed the ban on the export of palm kernel. But because most farmers had taken to the production of other commodities during the period of the restriction, the government now had to carry out intensive propaganda through the Agricultural Department to persuade farmers to return to palm kernel production. Road transportation played an important role in the palm kernel production drive. This is because the success of the palm kernel production drive depended

largely on the availability of access roads to the palm kernel production centres. It is, however, necessary to stress that in spite of the government's efforts to stimulate the production of palm kernel, little success was achieved as farmers had taken to the production of other commodities such as cassava starch and *gari* (known as cassava flakes).

It was not only cash crops production that government paid attention to during the Second World War. She was also concerned with the production of food crops. But it must be remarked that this drive towards increased local food production was stimulated not so much by a concern for the welfare of the colonial subjects but mainly to ensure that Britain supplied food for the nutritional upkeep of the African soldiers who were engaged in the war. An army full of hungry and disgruntled soldiers could frustrate Britain's prospect in the war. Thus, the British wanted a ready and constant supply of local food for the West African regiment. Consequently farmers were encouraged to grow food crops. In Oyo province, farmers were advised to plant rice. Thus, in 1943, the District Officer observed that rice cultivation was "clearly becoming popular with the farmers in Ibadan Division"<sup>10</sup>. Farmers in Oyo and Ogbomosho areas of the province also responded satisfactorily to the government's demands for yams and corn. In Abeokuta and Ijebu provinces, government encouraged the production of rice and maize. Consequently, the acreage under cultivation for both crops reportedly increased by between 40% and 50% in Abeokuta province in 1941 compared to the previous year<sup>11</sup>. In Ijebu province, the farmers excelled not only in the production of rice but also that of cassava. Cassava was used for making *gari*. The province, along with Abeokuta province, supplied a large quantity of *gari* to the military during the war. In 1943, for example, the Egba supplied 2,003 tons of *gari* to the British, a greater part of which was bought in Sagamu area of Ijebu province and delivered by road to the Army supply Depot in Abeokuta<sup>12</sup>. In 1944 and 1945; Ijebu province also supplied 490 tons and 660 tons of *gari* respectively to the military.

The role of road transportation in the production of foodstuffs is very instructive. Firstly, the agricultural officers made use of road transport to reach the farmers. It will be recalled that in Ibadan Division where rice cultivation was actively promoted, forty-seven miles of new roads were opened to traffic during the World War period<sup>13</sup>. Once there was access to the food production centres, the agricultural officers could visit the farmers to advise them and urge them to increase the production of essential foodstuff needed in connection with the war. Secondly, farmers were able to bring to the market and the Army Depots, foodstuffs which they had produced because many of the production centres had been reached by roads. But in villages that were not linked by motorable roads, farmers made use of their household members to head-load farm products to the town. Thirdly,

motor Lorries did the distribution of foodstuffs between towns. For example, rice, yam, and other foodstuffs were transported by road from Ondo and Abeokuta provinces to Ibadan markets during the war. The Ijebu also supplied markets in Lagos with *gari* during this period. In Abeokuta province, Army Lorries were used for transporting foodstuffs to the railhead.

Road transportation also aided the conduct of internal trade during the Second World War. But the impact of the transport system on the economy was limited due to the various war-time control and economic measures. However, in spite of the constraints imposed on road transportation by government's war-time economic measures, motor transporters found ways of circumventing some of the measures. Thus, for as long as indigenous transport operators could outwit official transport control measures, road transportation was able to contribute to the conduct of internal trade in Western Nigeria during the war. It thus aided the distribution of foodstuffs between towns. Oral evidence shows that foodstuffs were transported by road between one province and another. For example, in Abeokuta province, kola nut was transported by road from the neighbouring villages and towns into Abeokuta; from there by the railway to the Northern provinces. The kola nut transported to the north by the railway from Abeokuta included that brought by road from Sagamu by the Hausa kola nut traders. It is instructive that in this instance, both the railway and road transportation played complementary roles. This contrasts with the pre-war period when motor transport was engaged in an intense competition with the railway.

Apart from kola nut trade, internal trade in other commodities benefited from road transportation during the war. An example of such commodity was palm oil. Due to the poor price offered for the commodity by the exporting firms, very small quantity was brought for export. In the absence of an export market for it, the commodity was sold for local consumption at the internal markets. From Abeokuta and Ijebu provinces, palm oil was sent by road to markets in Lagos, Ibadan and Ilorin. In Owo district of Ondo province, native woven cloths were also taken by road to market in Akure, Ikare-Akoko, Okene, Lokoja and Onitsha. From Akure, Ikere and the neighbouring Ekiti towns, traders travelled by road to Owo to buy *elu* (locally made dye). In Osogbo where a lot of Aso Oke (native woven cloth) was made, traders carried the cloth in Lorries to sell in neighbouring markets and in far places such as Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria (Personal Communication, Mr R.A. Bamidele, 16 April 1998; Madam Esther Omoya, 17 April, 1998 and Mr. G. M. Akande, 17 April, 1998). In addition to the items identified above, internal trade in other commodities benefited from road transportation. Foodstuffs of different varieties were transported by motor lorries to the market while livestock of all kinds were also brought to the market by lorries. Thus, road transportation made it

possible for farmers and traders to bring their goods to the markets. The consumers were, therefore, able to purchase what they needed.

## THE AFTERMATH OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

After the Second World War, the road development programme undertaken by the colonial government was aimed at further opening up the economy of western Nigeria. Roads were built to enhance the exploitation and evacuation of agricultural produce from the interior of Western Nigeria to the Lagos port. The roads were also to enable European manufactured goods reach a wider market than hitherto. In sum, the material resources of Nigeria were used to aid the recovery of the British economy. In view of this, the colonial government proceeded to carry out an expanded programme of road development. The building of road paved way for the evacuation of produce from the hinterland directly by road to the Lagos port.

Apart from constructing many important trunk roads, a number of feeder roads were built. Between 1950 and 1951, the government approved a substantial grant for a wide programme of road development in Nigeria. It set to build an estimated 16,000 miles of new feeder roads while some 17,000 miles of existing roads were slated for improvement. The construction of these roads was to ensure that the trunk road system was adequately fed and that there were "proper opportunities for the movement of produce in and out of the more remote districts"<sup>14</sup>. The feeder roads were built mainly to stimulate and increase the production of cocoa. Indeed, government's road development programme after the Second World War was concentrated in the cocoa producing areas. The government through some of its agencies built many feeder roads (or cocoa roads, as the roads were commonly called) and it also surfaced some roads with bitumen in the different provinces of Western Nigeria.

In the pursuit of its policy of road development, in 1949 the government pointed out that it was not its intention "to provide money for the improvement of town roads" but for the construction and improvement of feeder roads "used for the carriage of goods and produce" (Osiyale, 1989:46). It thus constructed a number of feeder roads to facilitate the evacuation of foodstuffs and produce. Apart from constructing new roads, government also carried out routine maintenance of trunk roads between 1945 and 1950. It also made progress in the bitumen surfacing of Osogbo - Ilesha - Ife road. In consequence, cocoa and palm kernels were taken from the province by road to Lagos. In Abeokuta province, a similar situation occurred. Routine maintenance of all existing roads was done but the difficulty of obtaining labour at the approved wage rates prevented the completion of government's resurfacing programme. In Ondo province, the

government also kept the roads in a moderate state of maintenance. In addition, thirty-two miles of feeder roads were built in 1950 while the construction of eighty-one miles of other feeder and cocoa roads was started. In consequence, direct evacuation of produce by road from Ondo province to Lagos became a reality in 1951. Also in Ijebu province, a number of new feeder roads were built in 1948 by the government. This included the Ago – Odoye road (4 miles); Araromi – Shimawa Likosi (5½ miles), Ikorodu – Imota – Agbowo road (8 miles) and Ikorodu – Ijede road (4½ mile)<sup>15</sup>. Also in Remo Division of Ijebu province, twenty-one miles of feeder roads were constructed into farmlands in 1952.

As the old roads were maintained and new ones constructed, more Lorries were given permission to operate. Most of the new vehicles were ex-military vehicles. More people also entered into the transport business. Many of the people were ex-servicemen. Thus, after the Second World War, it can be said that road transportation in Western Nigeria received a boost. Consequently, the colonial government was able to pursue its objective of exploiting the agricultural resources of Western Nigeria through the means of road transportation. The region's agricultural produce such as cocoa, palm produce, rubber and cotton were evacuated from the interior to the Lagos port by road transportation.

Road transportation certainly contributed to the production of this export produce. Many of the farmers made use of motor Lorries to bring their produce to the market. Also the government's Agricultural Extension Officers who toured the palm oil producing areas between 1945 and 1952 to persuade farmers to improve the quality and quantity of their palm produce did so by means of road transportation. Government's effort to increase the production of palm oil yielded some results. For example, in Ondo province, farmers were able to bring palm oil for export as from 1946 where since 1939 no palm oil had been graded for export. In 1946, the tonnage exported was 2,333 tons. By 1947, the quantity had risen to 2,743 tons, moving up to 3,466 tons in 1949<sup>16</sup>.

As in the pre-war period, road transportation aided the development of internal trade. This was especially so in kola nut and *gari* trade. Thus, due to the high demand for *gari* after 1945, about 1,799 tons of the food item were supplied to the military from Ijebu province between 1946 and 1949<sup>17</sup>. This excludes *gari* consumed locally and that taken to Ibadan, Ilorin and other towns in Northern Nigeria. The trade in *gari* between the Ijebu and other people in Western Nigeria was done principally by road transportation. Lorries were used to carry bags of *gari* from Ijebu towns to markets in Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin and other towns in Northern Nigeria.

Road transportation also played an important role in the kola nut trade between Western Nigeria and the Northern provinces. In Northern Nigeria, the Muslims consumed kola nut as a good substitute for alcoholic drinks and

cigarette. This created a high demand for kola nut in the northern part of the country. Western Nigeria was one of the major sources for the supply of kola nut to the Northern provinces. In Western Nigeria, farmers normally replaced aging cocoa trees on their farms with young kola trees, in the hope that the kola trees would replace the cocoa when the latter was no longer productive. Therefore, throughout the post war period, kola nut was one of the important commodities transported by road from Ijebu and Ondo provinces to the Northern provinces. Oral evidence collected in Ekiti district of Ondo province shows that kola nut trade went on between the district and the Northern provinces (Personal Communication, Mrs. Beautrice Ajibade, 17 April, 1998). This trade was carried on by motor transportation as lorries were used to carry kola nut to markets in the North. These Lorries carried on their return journey commodities such as onions and beans, which were sold not only in Ekiti towns but also in places such as Oyo, Ile-Ife, Ilesha and Ibadan. In Ijebu province, Remo kola nut traders made use of lorries to carry on their trade with Hausa land. Some of the Remo women traders went as far as Kano, Jos and Maiduguri by road to trade (Afolabi and Olukoju, 1989:77).

Apart from the trade in *gari* and *kola nut*, road transportation enhanced internal trade in foodstuffs, livestock, native woven cloths and other household consumer goods. Although, the colonial government built many roads to aid the evacuation of produce, the roads eventually became avenues that helped internal trade to gain momentum. During the off-season when there was no produce to carry, vehicle owners often used their lorries to transport traders who were not engaged in the produce trade. This was usually the case between February and August when there was little cocoa to carry. In this way, road transportation intensified internal trade among the people of Western Nigeria.

Related to trade was the way that road transportation impacted on the fortunes of markets. It led to the expansion of certain internal markets. Markets which by their strategic location were well served by road transport network had their fortunes enhanced. Such markets increased in prosperity as accessibility to them was made possible by means of modern transportation system. Such was the fortunes of Ejinrin, Epe and Ikorodu in the Lagos Colony as well as Agbabu, Okitipupa and Igbokoda in the coastal area of Ondo province. B.W. Hodder has pointed out the positive impact of roads on markets in Western Nigeria (Hodder, 1963). Firstly, the quantity of goods involved in commercial transactions was increased as road transport made it easier to find markets for surplus production. Secondly, goods that were formerly handed along chain of intermediary from one market area to the next were now moved much longer distances by professional or semi-professional traders. Thus, internal trade and markets were in this way given an important fillip.

As the economic setting became transformed, people were encouraged to move from one location to another. There were three major directions of the migration. Firstly, there was the movement of people from the rural areas of less economic activity to those of greater economic activity within Western Nigeria. Secondly, there were movements of migrant peasant farmers across regional frontiers. This involved people moving into different parts of Western Nigeria from outside the region. The main recipients of such migrant labour were the cocoa producing areas in the late 1940s and 1950s when there was a remarkable boom in the cocoa business and the flourishing lagoon markets (Osoba, 1969: 517). The third line of migration took the form of a drift from the rural areas to the new urban centres of commerce and administration which developed as a result of the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria. The influx of people into the towns and cities brought about population increase with consequent increase in the demand for goods and services. Lagos, which was perhaps the greatest recipient of the immigrants had its population increased from 73,766 in 1911 to 230,256 people in 1950. By 1963, the population figure stood at 655,246 (Olukoju, 1994:35). The population increase has been attributed to immigration rather than the natural process of expansion (Ajaegbu, 1967:78). It is also necessary to stress that the movement of the people between one town and another was greatly encouraged by motor transportation.

Finally, it must be added that the road transport industry was an employer of labour and in so doing infused life into the economy. Many people were employed in the business as drivers, lorry conductors, panel beaters, vehicle mechanics, painters, rewires, etc. We have already mentioned the names of some of the leading personalities in the transport business in South Western Nigeria. Suffice to say that the number of the people involved in the business had become so high to warrant the formation of a union as far back as 1932. This was the Nigerian Motor transport Union (NMTU) which consisted of owners of commercial vehicles in Western region and the Colony of Lagos. The road transport system continued to serve as the lifeline of the economy until 1952 when the first indigenous government was voted into power in Western Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis in this paper, we can see that road transportation truly acted as an engine of economic change in Western Nigeria. It served as a lifeline of the economy. It transformed the hitherto simple traditional economic setting into something resembling a complex modern economy. Although, it facilitated the exploitation of the wealth of the region, it equally created

opportunities for indigenous participation in the colonial economy. As shown, road transportation impacted positively on the economy of in many ways. Given the various ways that the transport system injected life into the traditional economy, one can agree with the view that the transport system indeed acted as a lifeline of the economy of the Western region. The situation continued even after the first indigenous political party, the Action Group (A.G) political party under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo was elected to run the affairs of the Western region of Nigeria in 1952. The Awolowo-led government made the development of road transportation a cardinal aspect of her economic development policy.

## Notes

1. N.A.I: CSO 26/06027 Annual Report, Oyo Province, 1922: 39 and 52.  
Also N.A.I: CSO 26/11875 Vol. IV Abeokuta province, Annual Report, 1926: 234  
N.A.I: CSO 26/14556 Vol. III Ijebu province, Annual Report, 1926: 96.
2. N.A.I: CSO 26/11875 Vol. 1, Abeokuta province, Annual Report 1923: 23.
3. N.A.I: CSO 26/11874 Ondo Province, Annual Report, 1924, pa. 129.
4. Ibid.
5. N.A.I: CSO 26/11874 Ondo Province, Annual Report, 1926, p.89.
6. N.A.I: Oyo Prof 2/1 OY. 2443 Vol. I Agricultural Department News-sheet: 210.
7. N.A.I: CSO 26/11874 Vol. XVII Ondo province Annual, 1945: 79.
8. N.A.I: Oyo Prof 2/3 c.234 Vol. I Palm Oil and Palm Kernel, 1940-1941: 73.
9. N.A.I: CSO 26/11875 Vol. XV Abeokuta province Annual Report, 1942: 37.
10. N. A. I: CSO 26/12723 Vol: XVI Oyo Province Annual Reports 1943, pa. 31.
11. N. A. I: CSO 26/11875 Vol. XV Abeokuta Province Annual Report, 1941, pa. 163.
12. N. A. I: CSO 26/11875 Vol. XIV Abeokuta Annual Report, 1945, pa.66.
13. N.A I: CSO 26/12723 Vol. XVI Oyo province Annual Report,1942, 31.
14. N.A.I: Ondo Prof 1/3 D.16 Vol. I Road Development Programme: Feeder Roads (1950/51): 3.
15. N.A.I: CSO 26/14556 Vol. XIV Ijebu Province, Annual Report, 1948, pa. 61.
16. See the Annual Reports for the relevant years.
17. N.A.I: CSO 26/379009/S. 14 Series Vols. I – III “Military Requirements of Local Foodstuffs, 1942 – 49”, cited in Muyiwa Okuseinde, “Gari Production in Ijebu Remo: A Study of Growth and Development in a Local Economy, 1900 – 1950”, MA Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1988: 58.



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