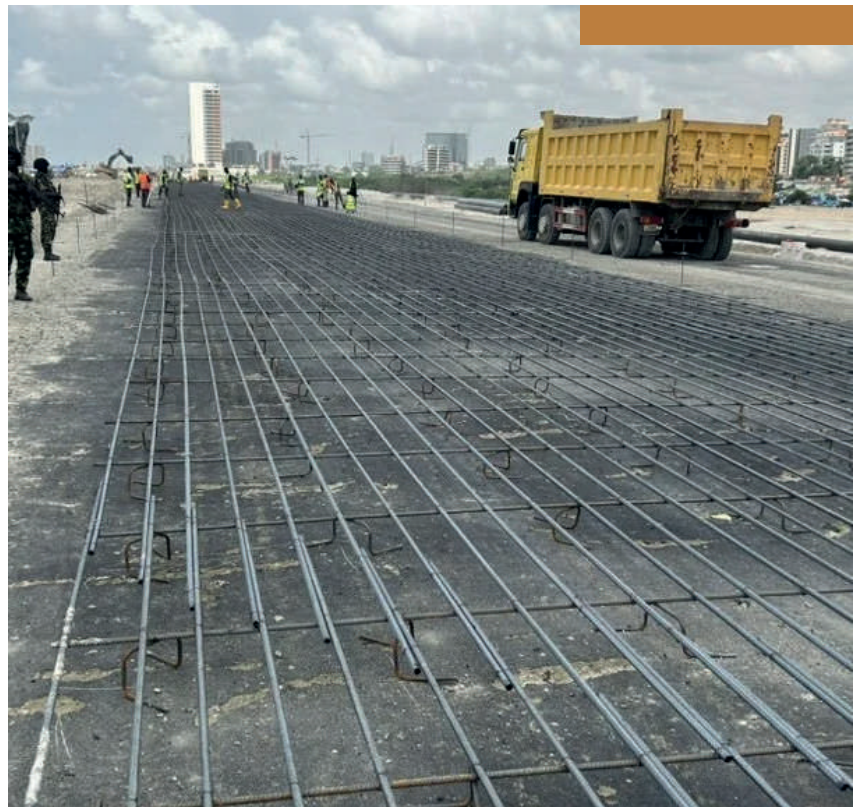

ATHENA NOTE

Opinion Articles of Athena Centre Staff and Guest writers

Democracy and The Coastal Highway: An Examination of the Lagos-Calabar Project



//Democracy means that we adhere to and live by the enlightened premise that all human beings are of essential value and possess fundamental rights and liberties, which cannot be arbitrarily taken away or denied." ~ Sen Bola Ahmed Tinubu June 12 2020.

A Test of Commitment To Democracy

These were the words of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2020, expressing his philosophical commitment to democracy. As work commences on the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, President Tinubu's commitment to democracy faces a critical test. A test of his commitment to the idea of democracy as an organising principle of the Nigerian State.

The Lagos to Calabar Coastal highway Highway project is a 700km road connecting the coastal states of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River. The highway will cost over \$13 billion, according to media reports. Proponents argue it will reduce travel time and transportation cost, improve ease of doing business and grow Nigeria's GDP.

The opponents, however, point to the high cost, the opaque procurement process, the absence of competitive bidding, the general secrecy around the project and the absence of budgetary provision for compensation and construction. Yet, the crucial issue for many is the test of the President's commitment to democratic norms and a clear indication of what critics point to as an emerging authoritarian instinct.

Examining the Democratic Process in Infrastructure Projects

The first concern about the coastal highway project is the glaring absence of citizen engagement and lack of information on the economic studies and design of this most important highway. Projects of this nature require deep and evidence-based thinking plus robust and transparent stakeholder engagement.

My question to Mr. President; in line with you avowed democratic credentials do you sincerely believe that stakeholders and those impacted by the Highway Project have truly been heard or offered opportunities to express their views? Do you think the due process of environmental impact assessment, economic cost-benefit analysis and return on investment models, financial models for a funding plan, and traffic count to ascertain volume share between existing roads and the new highway were followed and reports shared with Nigerians?

Drawing example from Britain, we are witnesses to how effort to build the third runway at Heathrow Airport has been stalled for the past seven years due to citizen opposition and desire to ensure stakeholder management to assuage concerns.

Proponents of the 3rd runway argue that the airport expansion is projected to deliver substantial economic benefits to the UK and generate up to £61 billion in economic benefits over 60 years and create more local jobs.

But, opponents insist that the expansion has significant issues around the environmental impact, noise pollution, and carbon emissions associated with LHR's third runway expansion plans. Also they point to the potential violation of climate change commitments. The matter has gone all the way to the UK Supreme Court which ruled in favour of the government.

The consultations, court cases and use of independent consultants in the Heathrow 3rd runway case to ascertain economic benefits and engage citizens are hallmarks of democracy - the type President Tinubu spoke about in 2020. Imagine a local farmer, a resort owner or a forest reserve preserving our eco diversity, whose land lies in the path of the new highway without proper consultation, their livelihood and the eco-system could be disrupted without consent or eco-friendly conservation plan.



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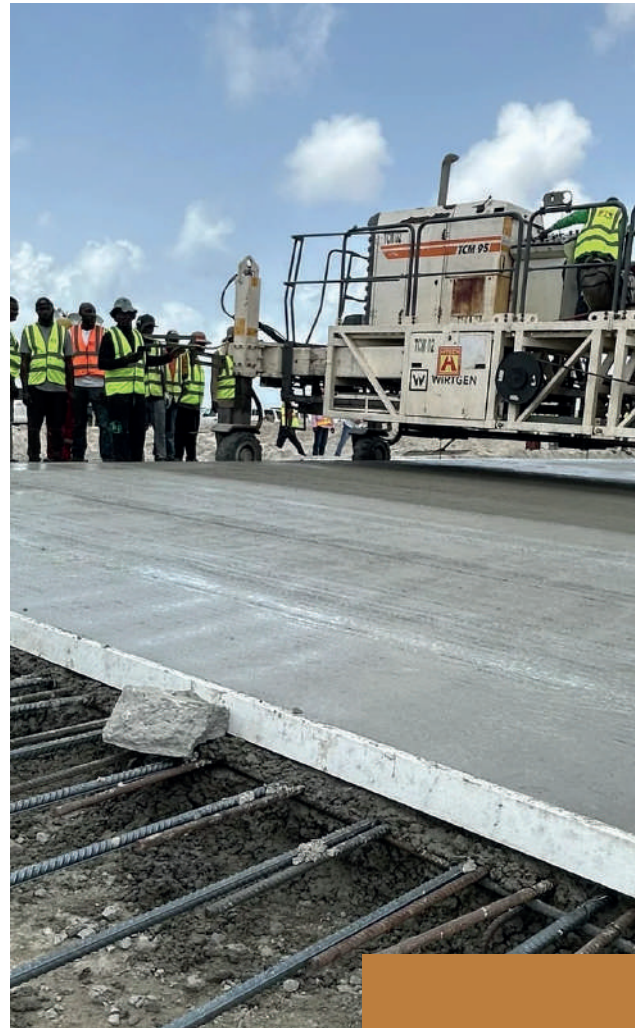
Economic Viability of the Coastal Highway

Let's look at the economic viability of the coastal highway. In some countries coastal highways play critical roles in connecting communities and providing avenue for tourism. In Nigeria, controlling for security concerns, the coastal road may beyond traffic offer opportunities for local and international tourism.

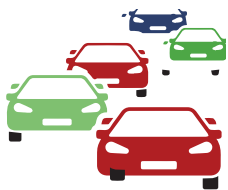
As with most infrastructure projects, the construction phase of the project will create jobs and stimulate local economies along the corridor. New towns, businesses and economic activities will sprout along the corridor and if projected traffic is achieved, the area could witness economic growth. New transport infrastructure are difficult to model in entirety as to long-term benefits but initial costs can be assessed to ascertain alternative use of funds in the light of projected benefits.

Beyond the tourism potentials and other projected benefits, a cursory analysis of the traffic on the current Lagos to Calabar roads does not suggest full capacity utilisation. Simple analyses indicates that improving existing roads could be more effective than building a new costly highway, given the current traffic patterns and goods transportation routes in the country

A 2019 traffic count by the Federal Ministry of Works reported Average Daily Traffic (ADT) of 45,815 vehicles on Lagos - Ibadan expressway at Shagamu South and 27,940 at Ogere North.



Shagamu to Benin at the Ore Lagos end reported ADT 13,556 and at the Ore - Benin end of the road reported 18,768.



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Minister Umahi's reported assumption of 50,000 daily vehicles on the coastal highway lacks supporting traffic studies, raising concerns about the project's economic viability. A detailed analysis is needed to compare the projected benefits of the new highway against the costs and potential alternative uses of funds.

As a former Corps Marshal of a data-driven Federal Roads Safety Commission (FRSC) I hold the empirical view that current congestion on our highways are primarily due to bad roads and not a capacity issue.

I have doubts about the economic viability of the coastal highway. The traffic on the current Lagos to Calabar roads does not suggest full capacity utilisation as shown by the Federal Ministry of Works data earlier referenced. Simple analyses suggest that improving existing roads could be more effective than building a new costly highway, given the current traffic patterns and goods transportation routes in the country.

The first section of the Coastal road, 47 km according to the Honourable Minister, would cost 1.06 trillion Naira, about 15% of the 2024 capital vote. Considering the high cost and the impact of such expenditure, I ask:

1. Where is the independent expert opinion on the viability and economic benefits of the road?
2. What is the capacity of the existing road from Lagos to Calabar? At the current traffic level are the existing roads at full carrying capacity?
3. What is the travel pattern between Lagos and Calabar? The trip origin and destination study is critical to understanding where current traffic terminates?
4. In connecting coastal cities what do we hope to achieve? Passenger or goods transport?
5. Why is the design, cost and economic value of the road not in the public domain?
6. A search on the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission and Bureau for Public Procurement websites did not reveal any information about the project. Why the secrecy surrounding the nature and procurement method of the project?
7. Why were there no public hearings and stakeholder engagement meetings before FEC approval?



Alternative Visions for Sustainable Development

I understand the need for speed in a government with 4 years tenure yet it must be balanced with our statutory and moral duty of citizen participation and rational spending. In the past 50 years, the federal government had not been able to complete the dualisation of the existing national highways. Only 5,000km of the 36,000km trunk A roads are dualised.

If the aim of the project is to give the President a legacy project or deliver economic benefits then there are less expensive and more significant alternatives. I will use this medium to suggest two options to the President on how to immortalise himself and unlock the Nigerian economy.

The first option is the completion of the dualisation of the Federal highways. The current national highway system needs urgent revamp, redesign and completion of the dualisation. The highway connects the critical economic nodes, the food production centres to the consumption areas and our maritime assets to the hinterland. The redesign should connect our aviation nodes to the highway system because most of our new airports came after the original highway design.

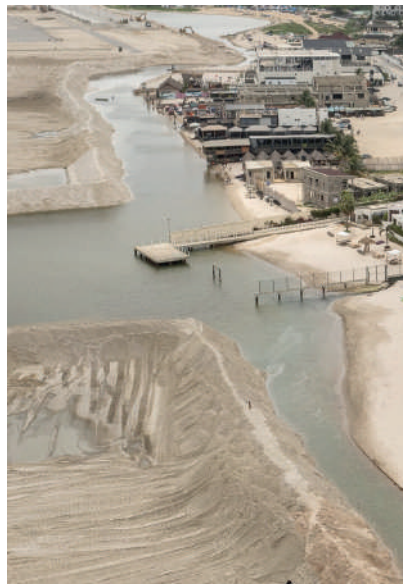
The opportunity for President Tinubu to become to Nigeria what President Eisenhower is to the United States of America is a low hanging fruit. President Eisenhower joined the pantheon of America's renowned Presidents signing the Federal Aid Highway Act that established the Inter-state Highway and initiating the construction. The opportunity for such landmark legacy is available for President Tinubu.

The President Tinubu administration should focus on the redesign, expansion and reconstruction of the current national highway system. The redesigned national highway with truck parks, rest areas and solar lighting would remain a legacy of immense proportions connecting communities, promoting national integration and lowering transport costs for businesses.

Revisiting The Masterplan For Integrated Transport

I urge the government to revisit the Masterplan for Integrated Transportation (MITI) Plan prepared by Nigeria Institute of Transport Technology, Albert Speer + Partners and Julius Berger.

MITI was initiated by Chief Ojo Maduekwe as Transport Minister in 2022 and was adopted by the Federal Executive Council under President Olusegun Obasanjo. The plan gave birth to the idea of a Ministry of Transportation bringing together roads, rail, aviation and maritime under a single Ministry to promote inter-modal or multi-modal transportation. The absence of coordinated transport planning is glaring in the effort to connect coastal cities by road instead of creating new small ports to promote local shipping and revive our inland waterways transport.



Relocate the Ports To Regenerate Apapa

A second and very vital project that will benefit Nigeria, Lagos State and gift the President a legacy project is the relocation of Lagos Port Complex from Apapa. The relocation would provide a unique opportunity for the reconstruction and renewal of Apapa - the economic nerve centre of Nigeria and major revenue earner.

The Lagos Port Complex destroyed Apapa as a residential and livable city. Apapa was home to Nigeria's elites led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo until the 1990s. Today, Apapa is an urban blight rendered unlivable by a marked lack of investment, poor regulation of zoning codes, and uncontrollable traffic congestion. The situation of Apapa is a national scandal for an area that is the single largest geographical source of national internally generated revenue.

The relocation of a port may sound revolutionary but it is a common phenomena globally. Singapore, despite the successes of its city terminals, is set to close down the Tanjong Pagar, keppel and Brani terminals and move their operations to Pasir Pangyang port by 2027 and move Pasir Pangyang port to their new port at Tuas by 2040.



The 80ha port land at Tanjong Pagar will be released to the Urban Redevelopment Authority for the planned Greater Southern Waterfront project a sprawling new city representing changing trends in land use and creating space for new mixed-use urban redevelopment project set to change Singapore's skyline and renew the urban life.

Apapa port complex should be relocated to the Lekki or Badagry corridor. Imagine a new city in Apapa rivalling Ikoyi and reducing the scramble for the limited spaces in Banana Island and old Ikoyi. Relocating the Apapa terminals would change the dynamics of the city and unlock prime valuable waterfront land worth its weight in gold.

A new automated port in the Lekki corridor alongside the new Lekki port would deliver immediate and long-term value to the Nigerian economy.

Connecting the new port to the existing national highway from Lekki to Ijebu Ode would impact Lagos tremendously. A shift from Apapa would improve the air quality in Lagos, reduce travel time, promote livability and economic output.

Expanding the current Lekki - Epe Road to Ijebu Ode - a less than 100km road - to connect the Shagamu - Benin expressway would divert traffic from Lagos and deliver tremendous value at lower cost. At the planned cost of 4 billion Naira per kilometer for the Coastal highway the Lekki - Ijebu Ode expansion would cost between **350 to 400 billion Naira**.

Funding for the relocated terminals can be provided by the current port concessionaires at Apapa with increased duration of concession period port. Alternative private sector-driven funding can also be procured as seaports are usually

bankable on a non-recourse basis.

The new automated relocated terminals can reduce container handling time by over 70% from landing to exit from the port gate providing immense direct economic benefits to the business community and Nigerians at large. An efficient port system will transform Nigeria's logistics sector and make the new terminals the port of choice in the sub region.

This is doable and a win-win situation. Hitech as the contractors on the Lekki-Epe road can be contracted to build the new relocated Lekki port complex, expand Lekki to Ijebu Ode road and build the new mixed development city at the site of the former Apapa port. The President can achieve the twin objectives of patronage while achieving rational national goals.

Conclusion



**Let's
champion a
future where
every voice is
heard.**

The two projects, completing the dualisation of the national highway system and the relocation of the Apapa ports will transform Nigeria's economy more than the coastal highway. However, we need further analysis, stakeholder engagement, and expert opinion to arrive to an evidence-based decision.

Let's champion a future where every voice is heard. Join me in advocating for transparency and democratic involvement in projects like the Lagos-Calabar Highway. We can align our national

infrastructure needs with democratic values.

Together, we can ensure that our roads pave the way not just to our destinations but to a more democratic and prosperous Nigeria as espoused by President Tinubu in 2020.

I have elected to stop glorifying problems; I offer solutions.



**Osita Chidoka
Chancellor
Athena Centre for Policy and
Leadership
06 May 2024**