

Motorcycle taxi ban brings Lagos to a halt

February 9 2020, by Celia Lebur



A mother and her baby try to get a ride from a motorbike taxi parked on a street in Lagos

Even before a sudden controversial ban on motorcycle taxis and tricycles in Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, crippling traffic jams were a daily ordeal for its more than 20 million inhabitants.

Now just a week on, getting around the city has become even more difficult.

There are endless queues at [bus stops](#) and crowds of tired and exasperated pedestrians, assaulted by acrid exhaust fumes and the cacophony of drivers stuck in [traffic jams](#) honking their car horns.

"Monday, when the ban started, I spent seven hours on the road. Tuesday I spent almost nine hours in traffic jams," says Ayobayo Babade, a real estate agent.

He tries to remain upbeat. "Now I bring my laptop and I work in the taxi," he smiles.

"Nigerians are the most resilient people in the world!" declares 30-year-old Olaniwi Odina. "Put a policy in place, Nigerians will adapt, no matter how stupid it is, we are very patient!"

Recently elected governor of Lagos, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, banned motorbike-taxis known as "okadas" and three-wheeled "kekes" saying they caused [road accidents](#) and were out of place in a modern city.

Okadas in particular are infamous in Lagos for their anarchic approach to traffic laws but are often vital on its poorly connected, pot-hole ridden roads.

But they do come at a cost—between 2016 and 2019, there were more than 10,000 [traffic accidents](#) and 600 deaths recorded, just at the General Hospital in Lagos.



A lady rides on the back of a motorbike taxi in Lagos despite a ban on their use

Buses unsuitable for Lagos

To mitigate the effects of the ban, the government announced there would be 65 additional buses—in a rapidly growing megacity of more than 20 million people.

Critics say buses are in any case unsuitable for Lagos' narrow, damaged roads, where okadas and kekes are crucial for both transport and jobs.

Commuters who would normally leave their cars at home to avoid sitting in traffic, now have little choice but to drive, clogging up the roads even

more.

Thousands of workers who do not drive and were reliant on okadas and kekes, have been forced to trek or take the despised buses, now charging higher fares.

"Before I used to pay 50 to 100 naira (28 cents US) for a journey, now you can go for 200 or even 300," Goodluck, 34, said.

The business community too has attacked the ban, saying it is catastrophic for Lagos.

"It is not a good policy and it is not a sustainable policy," the president of the Lagos chamber of commerce, Muda Yusuf, told AFP.

The ban makes Lagos less attractive to private investors and makes logistics more difficult in an already overcrowded city, he said.

"This policy needs to be urgently reviewed, at least for tricycles to be re-introduced," he said.



Passengers queue to board a bus provided by the government to offset the impact of the okada and keke ban. Passengers say fares have increased

'All we want is work'

Entrepreneurs who have invested several million dollars in developing Uber-style motorbike-hailing services over the past two years have also hit out at the ban, shocked that they had no prior warning.

Many are trying to win exemptions from the government but their drivers, many now unemployed, have been hit hard.

Videos condemning the government have gone viral on social media in recent days.

Twice this week, young motor-riders tried to demonstrate against the ban, burning tyres on the road and throwing stones at the police, who immediately dispersed them with tear gas.

In the Ilupeju district, around 30 men continue to ride their okadas, in defiance of the ban.

"All we want is work!" yells Johnson Oseni.

"The government doesn't help us, it is the opposite, we pay taxes, we feed our families, our children, we work hard, leave us (alone)," he pleads.

Another driver, Aminu Jibril, 20, fled the northeastern state of Borno, where jihadist insurgency is rife to come to Lagos to study and he drives to help pay his fees.

"Once I'm a graduate I was hoping to get a real job," he says, lamenting the ban which has dented his plans.

"The government doesn't care about poor people."

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