

# Review of Experiences and Transportation Strategies for the Urban Poor in Nairobi, Kenya

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the importance of adopting urban mobility policies and strategies with particular needs of the urban poor in the capital city of Kenya, Nairobi. Sixty (60) % of the city's population (about 3.8 million) live in over 100 informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure services. The paper examines the key development challenges in the transportation sector in terms of rapid urbanization amidst dwindling resources, inadequate basic infrastructure services, poor or no maintenance of existing network and other development bottlenecks. .

The paper also discusses the effectiveness of the strategies used in reaching the majority poor in Nairobi in terms of poverty reduction and improved standards of living. The key factors considered here include; land-use planning, access to employment, education and health services. Some questions arising are: What cost – reductions are entailed by the poor in time and money spent on journey – to – work, reaching out – put markets, health services and other amenities? Are the infrastructure services adequate, efficiently provided or sustainable? The experiences of Nairobi City Council, a local authority in the implementation of three World Bank – Kenya Government Funded Projects, namely; Kenya Urban Transportation and Infrastructure Project 1994 – 1999 and El Nino Rehabilitation Project 1999 to 2002 and DFID funded Nairobi Urban Poverty Partnership Project 2002 – 2004 are outlined. The lessons learnt are particularly interesting in terms of urban mobility and urban management policies.

In addition, the major bottlenecks hindering efficient provision of infrastructure services are outlined. The key ones, among others are; mismanagement, non maintenance of existing services, lack of integration and minimum participation by the community especially informal sector in the formulation and implementation of urban mobility policies and projects.

In conclusion, recommendations to resolve contemporary transportation problems are highlighted as well as the necessary reforms in priority areas. The ultimate goal being good governance namely; efficiency, transparency, competitive markets and sustainance of transportation sector in the urban fabric for the benefit of all.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In many countries, experience has shown that efficient urban transport services and infrastructure provision are critical factors in urban development and change. Both are essential for efficient movement of goods, information and ideas, access to markets, employment, people and other land uses. In addition, they maintain urban growth as well as

regional and national competitiveness. Indeed, sustainable urban development is dependent among others, on viable transport policy, efficient urban management and sound planning techniques. Unhappily, in many cities in developing countries the level of urban transport services and infrastructure are in a deplorable state and decaying transportation network. Nairobi City, the capital, is no exception. The city is riddled with poorly managed and insufficient funds, inadequate provision of basic services, and lack of political will

and other factors. Consequently, she is neither capable of accommodating the increasing levels of motorization on her roads nor the proliferating urban growth. Out of the estimated 3.8 million people in the city whose 60% live and struggle in urban poverty, delivery of services is unheard of to many even those living within the city boundaries.

The situation of transportation network in the country since the early 80's has not been rosy. Non-maintenance, absence of policy guidelines and insufficient investment rendered 90% of all urban road networks in the country unusable. As expected, the urban transport process in the city has tended to favour efficient transport operations of motor transport. Actually, the provision of Non – Motor Transport (NMT), and the mobility aspects in the informal sector, community development and the disadvantaged poor had been almost totally ignored until the late 90's. For instance, most of the major roads in Nairobi City, bicycle paths are non – existent and where they exist, the motorists use them for overtaking, illegal traffic lanes or “racing tracks” for the notorious mini buses (matatus). This constitutes potential threat to the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable groups (young, aged and handicapped). Thus, the advent of the World Bank funded Kenya Urban Transportation and Infrastructure Project and the Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Program – Urban Transport Component (SSATP) of the early 90's as well as the inclusion of Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) component were major breakthrough in addressing urban transport problems in Kenya's major urban areas.

## 2.0 KEY CHALLENGES IN TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

The major challenges facing Nairobi City in urban transportation sector include the following:

### (i) Poor institutional and Weak Urban Management Capacities.

The institutions (public and local authorities) providing urban transport guidance, supervision and management are poorly staffed, inadequately equipped and financially handicapped. They cannot handle the demanded urban management tasks at city, municipal and town levels. Existing centralized system and slow devolution in planning and transportation responsibilities further reduce the anticipated efficiency, cost reduction and benefits in the provision of these services. Existing legislation on transport and urban planning covers only

statutory areas and is not comprehensive. This renders implementation of projects inefficient, uncoordinated and poor enforcement which culminates in planning lagging behind developments.

(ii) Irregular Maintenance and Sub-Standard Work Lack of regular routine and periodic maintenance and rehabilitation schedules on infrastructure and services are the order of the day rather than exception. The major cause of this is poor or lack of budgetary provision at both local and central government levels. In addition, poor contract administration and uncertainty of the flow of funds reduce motivation and commitment of parties involved. From urban management and good governance points of view inefficient and insufficient supervision, poor contract management and project monitoring have been noted in nearly all urban road projects. The effects of sub-standard work are still visible in the city, particularly those that originated from the El Nino havoc of the late 90's. Notably, during the 1984 – 94 period, non-maintenance and lack of routine maintenance, and rehabilitation in the country's road network caused so much deterioration that 90% was rendered unusable.

(iii) Inadequate Investment This problem is cumulative and arises from such factors as unclear policies, weak implementation capacity of the city and financial and management weaknesses. Although road transport in the country contributes over 50% of total output in the transport sector nationally, there has not been a proportional investment in the sector at national, regional or local levels. This is necessary to maintain and sustain the sector's growth. Unless continuous urban transport programs and projects are pursued, the sector will deteriorate, be counter-productive and negative impacts will seep through to all sectors of the economy. Thus requires urgent financial and administrative reforms.

(iv) Lack of Transportation and Poor Spatial Planning Policies Absence of clear transport policies and uncoordinated land-use planning and poor urban management practices results in negative impacts on social mobility, access to basic services and poverty. Good policies in any sector are based on good governance, commitment and political will. Anything short of this is doomed to fail. Innovative interpretation of policies and effective implementation of transportation projects are hindered by the rigid administrative and legislative system as well as inadequate training at professional level. The current urban mobility policies do not

take into account the role of non-motorized traffic in relation to public transport and other modes. Neither do the spatial planning policies give the weight required in the planning process. Even among the land-uses, transportation is not considered among the main inputs for development. Under provision of land for transportation in the City has resulted in payment of high costs for traffic diversions, land acquisition and compensation. The incoherent land use planning has exacerbated the growth of illegal settlements especially along main transportation routes in the city.

(v) **Insufficient Data and Poor Traffic Management** Inadequate information on both motor and non-motorized traffic movements inhibits well-designed urban mobility projects. Reliable and accessible data is required on traffic capacity, accidents and safety, travel time, pollution levels and others in determining viable and sustainable interventions. These will be useful in the planning management, financing and maintenance of urban infrastructure and service.

### 3.0 POLICY INTERVENTIONS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF URBAN MOBILITY IN NAIROBI

The nature of land uses and the traffic movements vis-à-vis the existing urban transportation network in Nairobi present particular problems in the city. The major ones can be summarized as follows:

- i) Traffic congestion,
- ii) Inadequate parking
- ,iii) Inadequate road sections and inter-sections
- ,iv) Inadequate road linkages to various land uses,
- v) Lack of adequate by pass routes and
- vi) Absence of non-motorized facilities (for pedestrian and cyclists).

In order to address transportation problems in the city, the government and the Nairobi City Council embarked on several projects namely: Kenya Urban Transportation and Infrastructure Project (KUTIP), 1994 and the Sub-Saharan Africa Transportation Project (SSATP) in 1995, El Nino Rehabilitation Project (ENRP) of 1999 and Nairobi Urban Poverty Partnership Project (NUPP) 2000. The policy interventions in the projects are as follows:

a) Kenya Urban Transportation and Infrastructure Project – improvement of road network in 26 main towns in Kenya.

b) Sub-Saharan Africa Transportation Project (SSATP) – implementation of motorized and Non-motorized Traffic Pilot Projects in Nairobi and Eldoret. The SSATP supported Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) policy in three areas:-

- i) Improvement of pedestrian and public transport.
- ii) Integration of NMT and socio-economic activities and because the needs of the bulk of the vulnerable poor were met.
- iii) Improvement for cyclists.

The design aspects included flexibility, outlook, strength, visibility, low cost, materials and working methods. The acceptance of these urban mobility interventions by Nairobi City Council to benefit the entire urban community was an important policy shift from the previous attention on motorized traffic. According to the pilot project evaluation report in Nairobi, the painted zebra crossing on Jogoo Road in Eastlands had negative results and the benefits amounted to zero. There were no changes in driver behavior, no reducing vehicle speed, no reduction in traffic accidents and no safety effect was achieved. However, the speed limits on Nile road close to Jogoo road, satisfied most of the performance indicators.

c) The El Nino Rehabilitation Project (ENRP) 1999 – 2002 was to re-habilitate the road network devastated by the El Nino floods of 1998. Most of the selected roads have been recarpetted and the destroyed road furniture restored, satisfactorily. But a few sub projects were abandoned due to poor contractual supervision and mismanagement. The greatest drawback of the project is the delay in delivery of the services and cost escalations.

d) Nairobi Urban Poverty Partnership Project (NUPP) 2000 – 2004 contains among others, components of Physical Planning and Infrastructure. This entails improving accesses in illegal settlements in terms of links to employment centres, and other facilities in the city. As most residents of informal settlements walk to and from place of work, this project has already started showing positive results in improved transport services and delivery.

### 4.0 LESSONS LEARNT

The lessons learnt from the above transportation projects are summarized below: -

a) Viable urban transport and non-motorized policy interventions need to be complemented and interlinked with an aggressive urban management policy including service delivery to benefit the entire urban community. The links between NMT and motorized traffic, urban poverty projects in Nairobi are bearing fruits today. This integration and participatory elements by the informal sector will enhance sustainability of urban development.

b) The sustainability of the urban mobility policy plans requires community support and good governance. Without well-intentioned institutional and political support the actions will be counter-productive.

c) Capacity building is a critical factor in efficient urban transportation and traffic management. Almost all local authorities regardless of size have inadequate human resource capacities at senior and middle levels. In as far as urban transportation is concerned the capacity building program is required in road construction, maintenance and financial management. The components of such training will cover the professional and technical personnel, transport, equipment, tools and facilities and computerization and information technology. Preparation of training manuals, modules and short courses proved to be useful in the project towns.

d) Accountability and management of funds will determine the success or failure of urban transportation projects. Mismanagement of funds at either ministry or local authority level will curtail the positive impacts of a policy intervention. Issues like budget approval constant project tracking system and transparency underlie the success of these projects.

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations that can be made on urban mobility plans are as follows:

### 1. Access to inexpensive data

Efficient operations of urban services including urban mobility will benefit immensely from the new technology revolution. Access to geographic information is a development and policy makers cannot ignore. Accessible and inexpensive geographic data will provide important urban land marking. Thus, neighborhoods lacking in amenities can be easily identified and addressed quickly. This is true especially in the service-hungry informal

settlements. Technology transfer is also a major input in the urban transportation sector, as the cities become wise and more urbanized.

The following actions are required;

Strengthening capacity for

- systematic data collection.

Assessment of performance of transport

- system.

Effectiveness of adopted policy measures.

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Provision of

- information base for designing and extending road network for future transport needs.

2. Increased use of public transport  
Increase in supply, quality and efficient use of public transport are necessary on the urban scene. This assumes that the urban mobility will be accessible to the majority of the urban poor at a lower total cost than other alternatives. Where existing transportation network exist, innovative models like Light Rail system can be adopted. Informal sector operators need to be encouraged yet in compliance with good traffic management techniques and good governance.

3. Pilot motorized and NMT interventions  
These act as good indicators of viable urban mobility policies. The pilot project in NMT interventions in Nairobi and Eldoret had high benefit cost ratio than the motorized components provided in the same neighborhoods. For instance, in modification of a road junction in Eldoret, pedestrians forced cyclists to move off a narrow cyclist path and 99.6% of pedestrians used the space and cyclists shifted to their alternative route. Replication on other urban areas is necessary.

4. Other Reforms on Urban Transportation  
Other reforms required in the urban transportation planning revolve around good governance i.e. efficiency, transparency, competition and sustainability.

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