

# Understanding Passenger Pirating Activities among Inter-City Commercial Transport Service Providers in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the characteristics, prospects and risks associated with the operation of the passenger-piracy among inter-city transport service operators in Lokoja, Nigeria. Using purposive sampling technique, 170 operators were surveyed across the three main inter-city transport routes leading into and out of the city. The findings revealed that more than 70% of the pirate transport vehicles were low occupancy types. Approximately 40.1% of the operators claimed that they engaged in passenger-piracy in order to avoid unnecessary queue at the terminals. Constraints such as fierce competition among transport operators; extortion from touts; and intimidation from the transport union officials were identified as limiting factors to the operations of inter-city transport service operators. Significant correlation were found between the practice of passengers piracy and Complete loading at terminal ( $r=.481$ ); possession of manifest ( $r=.735$ ); charging lower fare as compared to what was obtainable at the terminal ( $r=.216$ ) and being a member of Union of transport services providers ( $r=.240$ ). The study recommended that the operation of the pirate transport services should be reviewed and incorporated into the formal public transport services.

**KEYWORDS:** Transport Services, passenger Piracy, Safety, inter-city

## Introduction

More than 90% of households in the developing countries especially in Sub-Saharan Africa do not own or have access to a private automobile for their journey purposes. Thus, they rely mostly on public transport services for their trips to markets, visiting relatives, recreation and other destinations either within their cities or to neighbouring communities (Cervero, 2000). Inability of the public transport service to meet travel demand for the fast growing population in the developing countries has led to the proliferation of all forms of informal transport services in all nook and cranny of towns and cities as well as intra-city routes in both

developed and developing countries (Cervero, 2000). According to Sooner (2011), the number of transport workers in the Philippines grew from 1 million (1988) to 2 million (2002) and this was considered to be above the overall employment growth rate of 2-3% per annum in the country (Pascual, 2006 as cited in Sooner, 2011).

The situation in Nigeria is much more complex where different forms of inter and intra-city informal transport services are provided by different types of vehicles (Sooner, 2011). The increase in the number of registered intra-city transport service providers in many cities in Nigeria has resulted in strife competition for

passengers among providers. A common practice among providers is to ply inter-city routes scouting for passengers instead waiting longer hours to take turn for passengers at the inter-city motor parks where they are registered. In this study, such activity is referred to as “passenger-pirate activity”.

Similarly pirate transport service is used to refer to collective public road transport services provision with little or no control of its operation by an overall regulatory authority or no respect for routes and no published or fixed fare structure (International Association of Public Transport (UITP), 2010). The uses of pirate or informal transport services for inter-city movement in many African cities arose from the unavailability of other modes of transport services particularly air and railways in different parts of the continent (Kassa, 2013).

In some developing countries such as the Philippines, Benin, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nigeria in particular, informal transport sector is a major source of employment for the people who come from the poorest segment of the society (Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993; Sooner, 2011). In an assessment of the characteristics of informal transport services, Cervero (2000) affirmed that bus services can be found along inter-city routes in parts of South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia, while low occupancy vehicles such as station wagons, private cars and many others operate illegally on intra-city routes to convey passengers to different locations. Some of the operators hang around supermarkets, petrol stations and shopping centres, providing door-to-door services to areas where many legal taxi operators refuse to go to (Cervero, 2000). The services of these illegal transport operators are generally more accessible, faster and cheaper than formal transport because they do not wait until their vehicles are fully loaded before they commence their journey (Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). In terms of geographical coverage of pirate transport services, trip distance increase with vehicle size. Smaller vehicles travel short distances but large occupancy vehicles such as buses mostly operate on intra-city roads.

A careful search of literature on the operation of pirate transport services providers in some of the developing countries of the world indicates that

their activities are booming as they are providing travel demand for the fast growing population. However, their operations are confronted with myriads of problems which include but not limited to intimidation from the formal transport industry, traffic congestion, road traffic crashes, excessive competition, air pollution, health challenges and many others. A detailed study of the operation of informal or pirate transport services providers in urban centres in developing countries are overwhelming in literature. In spite of this, few studies have been carried out on the characteristics, prospects and problems associated with passenger-pirate activities among intra-city transport service providers in North Central, Nigeria. It is on this background that this study examines the characteristics, prospects and challenges encountered by pirate commercial transport operators in Lokoja metropolis.

## Study Area

Lokoja metropolis is the study area. The city is located close to the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue on latitudes  $7^{\circ} 45' 27.56''$  to  $7^{\circ} 51' 04.34''$  North of the Equator and longitudes  $6^{\circ} 41' 55.64''$  to  $6^{\circ} 45' 36.58''$  East of the Greenwich Meridian (Adeoye, 2012). The city is strategically located in the North Central part of Nigeria which serves as a gateway to Abuja (Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria) for commuters that travel from the South-western, South-eastern regions of the country. Given its geographical location in Nigeria, Lokoja has witnessed large volume of inter-city vehicular movements on daily basis. Lokoja has a population of 195,261 (National Population Census, 2006). Shortly after Lokoja became the capital of Kogi State in 1991, the city witnessed influx of migrant labourers from the neighbouring communities and other states of the federation. Some of these migrant labourers are mostly unskilled and do not possess the required qualifications to qualify them to be gainfully employed in the formal sector in the city. Majority of them therefore take commercial transport service as employment opportunity to earn their livelihood (Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993). Kogi State Government provides formal public transport service popularly called Confluence Mass Transit / Kogi Travellers that conveys passengers to Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, Jos and Lagos metropolis only. Also, individuals that are members of the road transport union also

provide transport services to travellers to various destinations. However, many commuters travelling to other towns and villages in Kogi State also rely on pirate transport services

provided by members of national union of road transport workers (NURTW) and others for their day to day transactions especially when in haste.

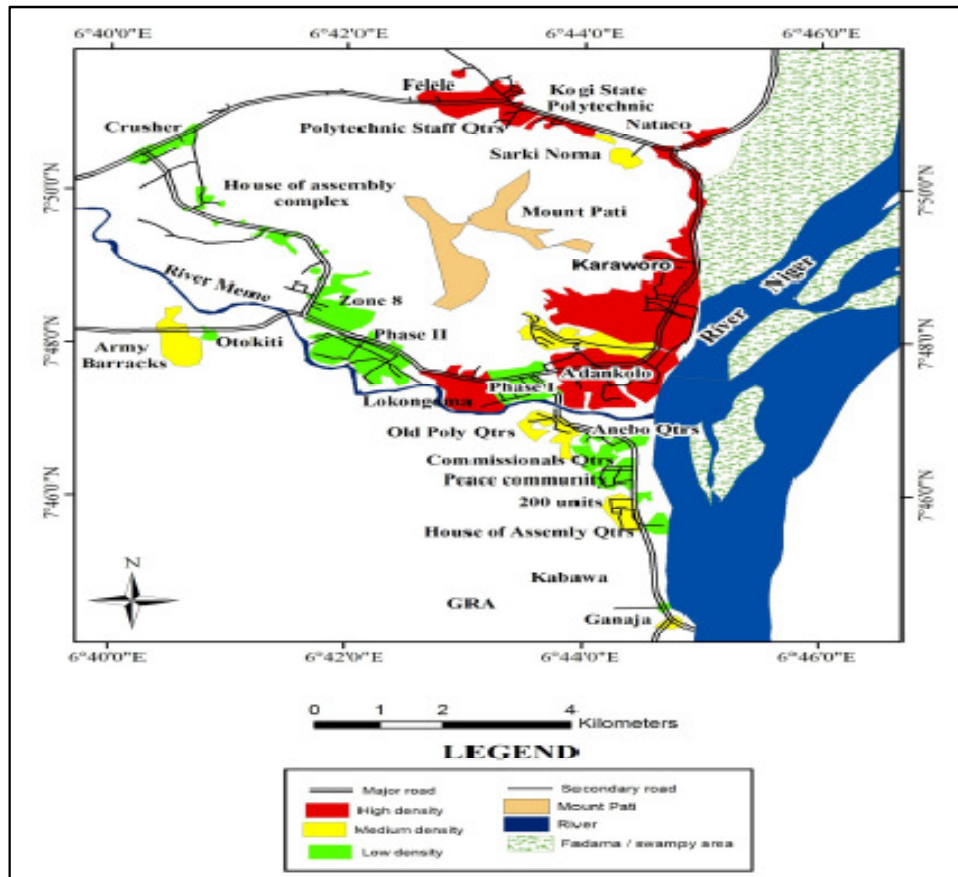


Figure 1. Map of Lokoja, Kogi State  
Source M.A. Adetunji 2014

## Materials and Methods

### Materials

Primary data were used in this study. The data used in this study includes information on the operational characteristics of pirated transport services in Lokoja environs. The information required includes vehicle types, where passengers are carried, transport fare to various destinations, area coverage, vehicle ownership, reasons for operating as informal transport service, category of people involved, waiting period before take-off, and challenges encountered during transit. These data were

generated from questionnaire survey of intra city transport services providers.

### Methods

In the informal transport service, operators are constantly on the move to carry passengers. Therefore, it is difficult to pin them down, and hence, purposive sampling technique was used to select an average of sixty pirate transport service operators of different categories along the three major routes that connect Lokoja metropolis with other neighbouring communities. A structured questionnaire was administered to willing operators of pirate

transport services at approved locations along the selected routes. The interview was face to face and each lasted for about 15 minutes. In all, a total of 170 operators were interviewed

### Data analysis

Simple statistical frequency analysis was used in this study. Data was edited, coded and captured using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency table and graphs were used to present the operational characteristics of pirate transport services that include vehicle types, transport fare to various destinations, vehicle ownership, reasons for operating as informal transport service, category of people involved, waiting period before take –off and challenges encountered during transit. Data obtained were interpreted using statistical tests of association such as correlation.

## Results and Discussion

### Operating Characteristics of Pirate Transport Service Providers

About 60% of sampled transport services were owned and operated by drivers, even though some of their vehicles are bought on hire purchase from motor dealers (see Table 1).

Additional 27.6% of the operators of the service drivers claimed that they rented the vehicles from the owners in order to earn their livelihood. Approximately 19% of the vehicles used by the pirate transport service operators are owned by companies and are used without the consent of owners. Also, Table 1 revealed that as high as 75.3% of the vehicles used as commercial transport are low occupancy types that convey between 4 and 6 passengers. Further analysis reveal that 17.1% of the pirate transport services are carried out by private car owners who are looking for means to supplement their income because of the poor economic situation in the country. Only 0.6% of the pirate transport services are 18 sitter buses that travel long distances to other states of the federation. Further analysis reveal that 35% and 28% of the pirate transport services conveyed passengers to different communities in the state. Less than 40% of pirated transport services travelled to other states of the federation particularly in Northern and South Western Nigeria. This implies that the longer the distance travelled by the travellers, the lesser the number of pirate transport services available for such destination. More than 70% of the low occupancy vehicles commuted short distances in the study area while only 15% of large occupancy vehicles travelled long distances.

Table 1: Operating Characteristics of Pirate Transport Services in Lokoja

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Vehicle Owner	Personal Vehicle	103	60.3
	Employer Owned Vehicle	47	27.6
	Company Vehicle	19	11.2
	Government Vehicle	1	0.6
Vehicle Type	Small Vehicle (4 Passengers)	128	75.3
	Ten (10) Seats Buses	11	6.5
	Eighteen (18) Seats Buses	1	0.6
	Private Vehicle	30	17.6
Location of boarding	Petrol Stations	4	2.4
	Along the Roads	137	80.6
	Hiding Places	29	17.1
	Total	170	100
Geographical Coverage	Other States of Nigeria	63	37.1
	Kogi State-Okun Land	60	35. 3
	Kogi State- Igala Land	47	27.6

It is interesting to note that pirate transport services are constantly on the move. They convey passengers along the roads. As evident from Table 1, 80.6% of the operators indicated that they carry their passengers on the roads whenever they are available. About 17.1% of the operators claimed that they hide in market places or close to terminals to pick their passengers and only 2.4% of the operators hide in petrol stations to carry passengers. The operation of pirate transport services is regarded as illegal in most countries of the world because they do not follow due process before carrying passengers on highways (Cervero, 2000; Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

### Practices and Prospects of pirate transport services Operators

Apparently, passenger piracy activities of inter-city transport operators involved some practices

and also play a major role in determining the financial wellbeing of the operators. Consequently, a number of practices of the service operators were examined, with a view to aiding our understanding of their activities and prospect. These are membership of NURTW, charging below union fare, ownership of manifest; complete loading at terminal, waiting time for loading of passenger and frequency of trips per week.

Figure 2 shows that majority (87.1%) of the operators sampled belong to transport union and also charged (88.8%) below what is obtainable at the union park as transport fare for similar destinations. In terms of having a manifest for their trips 55.9% said yes while 61.8% wait till their vehicle are fully loaded before commencing on their journey (Figure 2).

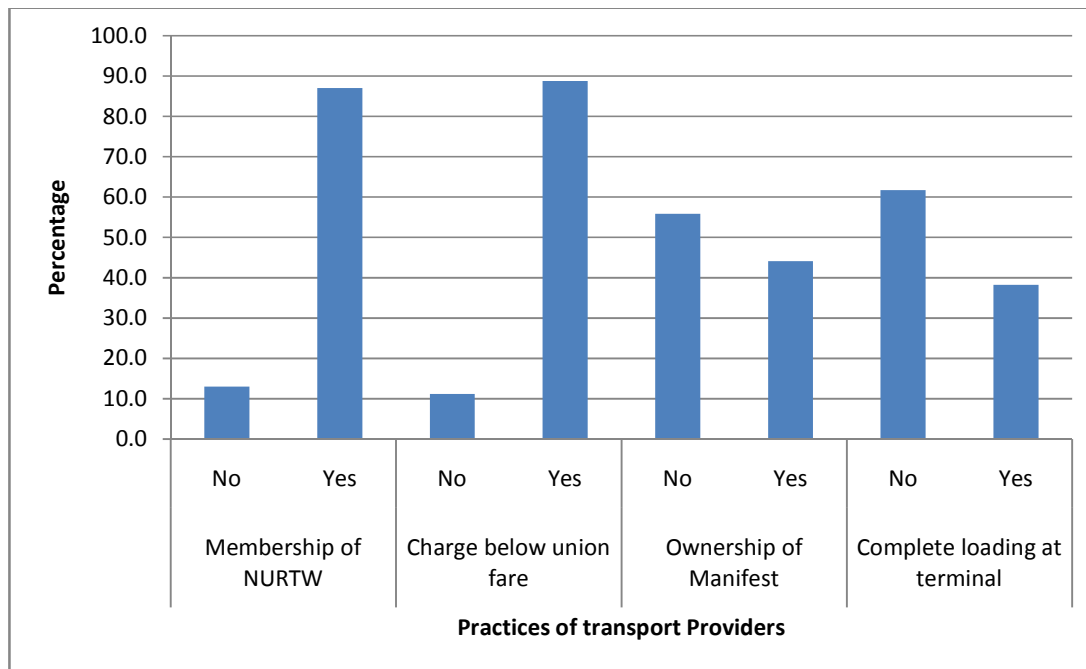


Figure 2: Practices of transport Providers

In terms of waiting time, Figure 3 shows that 61.8% of the operators do not wait for their vehicles to be fully loaded before commencing their journey, while only 38.2% of operators indicated that they wait for some few minutes to fully load their vehicles before they take off.

An important variable used to determine the prospect of their operation is the frequency of trips made per week. Figure 4 revealed that 40% of operators claimed that they conveyed

passengers to different destinations for more than 5 times in a week. Another 37.6% of the operators indicated that they travelled between 2 and 3 times per week. About 18.9% of the operators revealed that they load passengers between 4 and 5 times per week. It is obvious that virtually all pirate transport operators have opportunities to convey travellers from Lokoja to other communities either within the state or to other states of the federation.

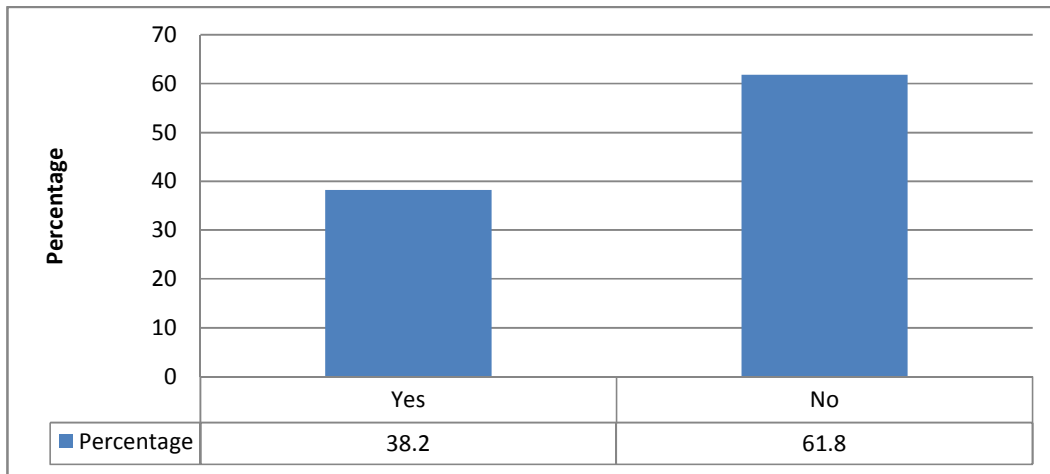


Figure 3: Waiting period at source locations

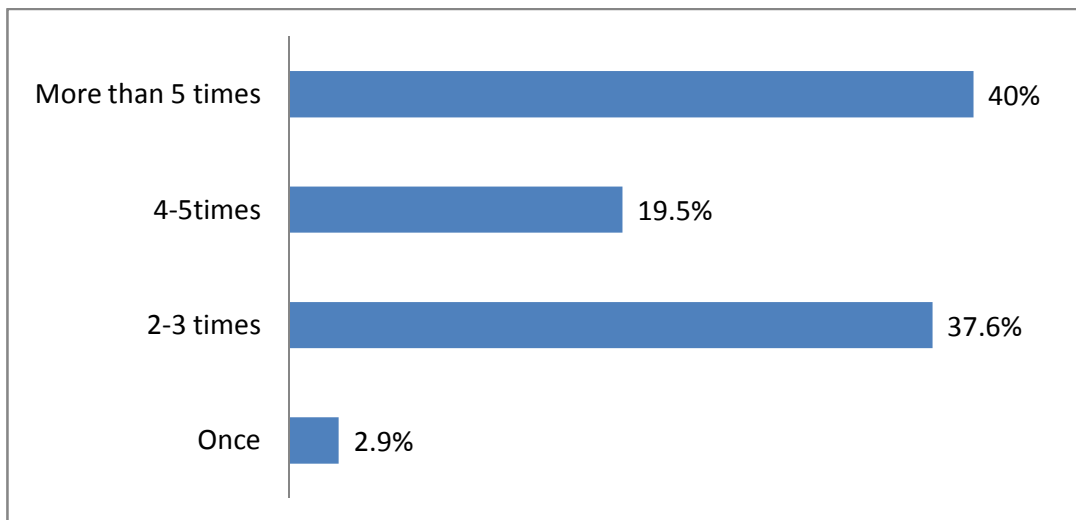


Figure 4: Frequency of trips per week

### Reasons for engaging in passenger pirate activities

According to the operators who participated in the survey, several factors account for their decision to scout passengers on their way to their destination rather than use load passengers at the terminals. As high as 43.5% of the operators' claimed that they were are looking for money to supplement their income (Table 2). This finding is similar to those of other studies carried out on informal public transport services in some developing countries (Cervero, 2000; Ogunsanya and Galtima, 1993). According to these studies, informal transport operators are majorly dominated by low income earners from the

formal sectors or unemployed people in the society. Another 40.6% of the operators of claimed that they engage in passenger piracy in order to avoid unnecessary queue at the terminals. Operators indicated that they were financially handicapped to be fully registered with the road transport union to qualify them to operate legally on the inter-city roads accounted for 5.9% of the samples. Only 2.9% of the operators claimed that priority given to union executives to load passengers at terminals on daily basis before other members of the union is the reason that forced them to participate in passenger piracy. Another 2.9% attributed their action to other reasons.

Table 2. Reason for engaging in passenger piracy

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Unable to register fully with national road transport union	10	5.9
Too much levy pay to transport labour union	7	4.1
To avoid unnecessarily long queue at the park	69	40.6
Looking for money to supplement their income	74	43.5
Priority given to union executive to load their vehicles	5	2.9
Others (specify)	5	2.9

A spearman correlation analysis was performed to examined the relationship between practice of passenger piracy among operators sand other operators practice characteristics such as are membership of NURTW, charge below union fare, ownership of manifest; and complete loading at terminal, as variables (Table 3).The results indicate considerable significant correlation between practice of passengers piracy and Complete loading at terminal ( $r=.481$ ); possession of manifest( $r=.735$ ); charging lower fare as compared to what is obtainable at the terminal ( $r=.216$ ) and being a member of Union of transport services providers ( $r=.240$ ).

### Challenges of Pirate Transport Services

Despite the significant contribution of pirate transport services in terms of the provision of employment opportunity to the unemployed, cheap and fast means of inter-city transport services to millions of captive riders in urban areas, it is pertinent to note that pirate transport services are faced with myriad of problems. The magnitudes of these problems are as presented in Table 4. About 22.4% of operators claimed that they are usually intimidated by parent transport union officials' atone every trip made. Approximately 30% of the operators indicated that they were extorted by touts before they were allowed to carry passengers along the roads on a

regular basis. This indirectly eroded the income that would have accrued to them. Under loading of vehicles and scouting of passengers while in transit was identified by 16% of them who indicated that they do not wait for their vehicles to be fully loaded before they take off. Another 16.5% of pirate transport services operators claimed that they charged transport fares below

the official rates so as to attract passengers. This led to fierce competition for passengers between formal and pirate transport service operators in Nigeria. Many of the pirate transport operators interacted with claimed that they do not have manifest which invariably put travellers at risk in case of a road traffic crash.

Table 3. Correlations between practice of passengers piracy and other factors

	Practice of passenger piracy	Money delivered per day	Complete loading at terminal	Do you have a manifest	Charge below union fare	Member of NURTW
Practice of passenger piracy	1.000					
Money delivered per day	-.207**	1.000				
Complete loading at terminal	.481**	-.041	1.000			
Do you have a manifest	.735**	-.142	.593**	1.000		
Charge below union fare	.216**	-.062	.164*	.278**	1.000	
Member of NURTW	.240**	-.092	.015	.201**	-.081	1.000

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Challenges of Pirate Transport Services

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Intimidation by formal and informal public transport	38	22.4
Extortion by Touts/ Bus Conductors	39	22.9
Arrest and Severe punishment	38	22.4
Under loading and Passenger scouting	27	15.9
Negotiation for Transport Charged	28	16.5
Total	170	100.0



## Conclusion

This study examined the operational characteristics of pirate transport services in Lokoja and its environs. It also identified factors influencing the practices of passengers piracy among transport services providers and problems associated with the practice. Findings revealed that majority of transport services provider engaged in passenger piracy and that most of them used vehicles that are of low occupancy. Further analysis also identified factors encouraging the practices of passenger piracy among operators to include

in ability to join transport union; avoid unnecessarily long queue at the park and to money to transport services providers' income. While issues such as competition between among transport operators; extortion from touts; and intimidation from transport union officials are the impediments identified as facing pirate transport services in the study area. The study recommends that the operation of pirate transport services should be reviewed and their operators be encouraged to register an association that is legally backed since their services are patronised by many Nigerians

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