

## 'This bridge is saving our lives'



***31-years after the Ogun State House of Assembly passed a resolution calling for the construction of a flyover across the Sagamu-Benin Expressway at Mobalufon junction in Ijebu-Ode, the bridge has finally been built — to the relief of motorists and pedestrians. ERNEST NWOKOLO reports.***

Princess Titilayo, daughter of the reigning monarch of Igbekebo in Ese – Odo Local Government Area of Ondo State, His Royal Highness, Oba Emmanuel Egbukuyomi, heaved a sigh of relief and joy recently when told by a friend that a fly – over bridge now runs across the Sagamu – Ore Expressway at the chaotic and treacherous Mabolufon junction in Ijebu Ode, Ogun State

Titilayo who is married with a kid, said the building of the bridge was a long overdue life – saving intervention for cyclists, pedestrians, motorists, commuters and street traders. She said: "that is nice. Whoever conceived the idea and executed it must be lauded for his concern for the safety of road users and smooth traffic flow that would now be engendered by it.

"People coming from Ijebu -Ode town and going to either Ondo or Eastern part of the country or Ikorodu in

Lagos State, would not have to cross that expressway again directly at a grave risk to their lives. Also, those coming from either Ondo, Ikorodu or in the direction of Sagamu would not have to cross it before veering into the Ijebu – Ode town.

“The flyover would have come handy to save travellers’ lives, that of the pedestrian and street traders. Many travellers, street traders and cyclists have died there while some survivors are living with one form of impairment or the other.”

Titilayo, an English teacher at a public Secondary school in Lagos state, is neither an Ogun state indigene nor does she live in Ijebu – Ode but it is understandable why she is enthusiastic about the flyover.

Barely out of the secondary school about 12 years ago, providence saved her from losing her life in a fatal accident at the Mabolufon junction but she bears scars that served as constant reminder of that dreadful experience.

“It was an incident I can’t forget. It was a trailer that collided with my bike, far back in 2002 at Ijebu – Ode Expressway (Mabolufon junction),” she had told The Nation.

It happened that Princess had paid a visit to her sister who is married to a lecturer at the state – owned Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Ago – Iwoye, and after spending some days, decided on November 2nd, 2002, to return to her Igbekebo home town in Ondo.

On arriving at the Lagos Garage, Ijebu – Ode from Ijebu – Igbo, she boarded a commercial motorcycle to Mabolufon junction where she would take a bus for the onward journey to the Sunshine state and while the cyclist tarried at the junction to enable speeding vehicles going in the direction of Lagos from the East pass before crossing the expressway, a lurching danger turned up around 1:30pm: a truck that lost control roared from the rear and swept her and the cyclist away as well as others equally waiting to cross the highway.

When the dust finally settled, about a dozen of persons, including postgraduate students of OOU, were crushed to death when the truck fell on them but Princess and a few others survived.

Narrating it, she said: “When I returned to the scene to see if I could see some of my items, I discovered that the truck had pulverised the bike, I saw on the ground, particles of brains from crushed skulls and I don’t know if the bike man that carried me made it as ten dead bodies were removed from the spot.”

Experiences like the one above had happened before 2002 and had also continued to occur ever after, even on a more scaring scale at the Mabolufon junction, prompting many to wonder whether there were vampire spirits inducing accidents for the purpose of collecting victims’ blood.

A teacher and trade unionist living in Ijebu-Ode, Comrade Badejo Abosede, who described the junction as a “death trap for years,” said residents and travellers had always looked in expectations for respite.

There is no readily available official data on the number of lives that have been lost at that spot within a given period but a resident of Mabolufon area of Ijebu – Ode told The Nation that over 75 persons might have lost their lives there in the last couple of years and scores of others maimed while the monetary cost and attendant challenges was put at about N25million.

That the Mabolufon junction was such an Achilles heels of travellers first came to the attention of the Ogun State government in the second republic during the administration of the first civilian governor, Chief Olabisi Onabanjo.

The Nation learnt that the then Ogun State House of Assembly which was worried and saddened by frequent loss of lives at that location, did pass a resolution recommending that a bridge be constructed to run overhead across the expressway at Mabolufon to check such reckless loss of lives there.

Perhaps, Onabanjo might have built that fly – over provided for in the House's resolution but the lifespan of his government was cut short by the December 31, 1983 Buhari – Idiagbon military coup.

While the resolution remained largely advisory and perhaps ignored by successive governments in the state, 31 years after it was first conceived, lives kept getting wasted there needlessly with each passing year.

Former Speaker of the state Assembly(1999 – 2003), Hon. Muyiwa Oladipo, said a resolution of the House is merely advisory, and is not binding on the executive to act upon if there was a resolution in the past recommending a fly – over across that junction.

Oladipo who is the current Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, noted that Onabanjo was a forward looking and progressive leader, and would probably have constructed the fly – over as at the 80s but financial constraints and his short-lived administration didn't help the situation.

The former Speaker who recalled that between 36 and 50 persons died on a particular day at that junction not long ago, said the state can't continue to allow precious lives to be lost there unnecessarily hence the current measure in place.

Governor Ibikunle Amosun, last year, awarded the contracts for the construction that stretches into the Ijebu – Ode – Ikorodu road.

Many said what propelled the Governor to embark upon the billion naira project was the gory incident of Tuesday September 18, 2013.

In the morning on that particular day, no fewer than 37 people lost their lives at the said junction in an accident involving a truck, two commercial buses and several motorcycles.

The truck which was carrying fertilizer lost control due to over speeding while trying to avoid collision with another truck that dashed into the expressway way headlong from the Ijebu – Ode - Ikorodu road.

Coincidentally, Lagos State – bound passenger bus that took off from Ondo State had just pulled – up at the time to drop a passengers at the junction, when the truck crashed into it, killing those inside, some that had already disembarked, hawkers and some cyclists that had rushed out in a scramble for the passengers.

The driver of the passenger bus had taken – off in the morning at the Ajebandele park, Ondo State, and had stopped at the junction to drop one Mrs. Adebawale Ayomide, a nurse and an employee of the Ondo State government.

The nurse was waiting to collect the balance from the N1, 000 she gave to the driver, who also came down to split the N1, 000 note around the Mabolufon junction and while waiting, the killer-truck rammed into them.

Though the driver and Mrs. Adebawale survived the accident, but not without severe injuries that sent both into coma following severe fracture while the driver also had his leg chopped off from above the knee region by the truck.

And because of the gravity of the accident and numbers of people affected, the Secretary to the Ogun State Government (SSG), Mr. Taiwo Adeoluwa, visited the victims at the State Hospital, Ijebu – Ode, and also

personally donated N200, 000 for their treatment.

The hospital's Chief Medical Director (CMD), at the time, Dr. Wellington Ogunsanya, told The Nation that victims who suffered from "severe fracture, head injury, lung – limb fractures were referred to bigger trauma centres at the Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital (OOUTH), Sagamu and the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan for special care.

Today, Mobalufon bridge is completed and already in use with residents of Ijebu – Ode and motorists not only lauding the project, but also saying it is saving their lives and time from a location hitherto notorious for fatal and ghastly accidents as well as routine gridlock.

Mr Gbenga Aroyewun, the Publisher and Editor -In- Chief of the Obanta NewsDay, a grassroot magazine published in Ijebu – Ode, told The Nation that the Mabolufon fly -over was a plus to the state government as it has put a halt to the accidents on the expressway that occur often when vehicles moving to Ijebu-Ode from the Itoikin-Ikorodu road or Lagos end attempt to cross the highway.

Aroyewun said such vehicles now safely use the flyover instead of risking head-on collision with those coming from the Benin-Ore end of the expressway as were hitherto the case.

According to him, aside serving as life saver, it is also bringing succour to motorists who had to contend with the chaotic traffic gridlock there in the past as there were neither traffic light nor presence of the officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the state's traffic agency – TRACE and the Traffic Wardens to control vehicular and pedestrian movement.

Also, Comrade Badejo Abosede, a public school teacher and trade unionist, said it was a long overdue rescue effort that came at last from the present state government.

Lauding Senator Ibikunle Amosun for the initiative, Abosede who is of the Academic Staff Union of Secondary Schools of Nigeria, Ogun State chapter, noted that the junction until now "was a death trap for years" but said it gladdens the heart that sanity has returned to the location.

For an Ijebu – Ode based legal practitioner, Mr Olajide Banjo, the fly -over is saving the lives of cyclists, pedestrians, motorists, Ijebu people and others travelling to the eastern part of the country from Lagos end and also those coming from the Benin – Ore direction of the highway.

The state's traffic agency, Traffic Enforcement and Compliance Agency (TRACE) said since road users started using the bridge following its completion four months ago, respite has returned to the junction as no case of accident whether major, minor or a narrow escape of it has been recorded.

The Zonal Commander, Ijebu – Ode TRACE Corps, Cmdr Tommy Hamzat, said the fly – over has reduced accident at the spot by 99.9 percent.

Hamzat said:"it is really helping to save lives and accident by 99.9 percent. We have not recorded any accident again at the junction since motorists and cyclists do not cross the expressway directly."

Hamzat however rued that despite this provision, some motorists in a bid to save time, occasionally avoid the bridge and attempt to cross the Highway directly at a great risk to their lives, that of the passengers and other road users.

According to him, the agency would be monitoring the spot to check such reckless drivers who would want to dash into the expressway headlong instead of using the fly – over.

Also, an Ijebu – Ode based transporter and member of the National Union of Road Transport Workers(NURTW), who identified himself as Segun, said it was a huge relief to everybody particularly the commercial transport operators who bear the brunt of such crashes.

Segun said in every case of accident, aside the passengers who equally suffer and perhaps lose their lives, the transporters suffered double tragedies. Where the owner is the driver, he could be killed or maimed in an accident and his accidented vehicle too, may turn out to be a write – off in severe cases.