



It's barely three months, when a policeman in Lagos reportedly knocked down a woman and her baby while driving against the traffic on the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway.

The woman, Taskirat Anjolaia, was said to have sustained a brain injury, pelvic fracture, and facial bruises, while her baby girl, Ammarah, who was strapped to her back at the time, suffered a broken

jaw and deep facial cuts. Neither of them eventually made it. They both died.

Eyewitnesses revealed that the policeman named "Friday," was driving against traffic on the expressway when he knocked down the victims, who were alighting from a commercial bus and hadn't noticed the police patrol van approaching from the wrong direction.

Spokesperson for the state's police command, Ngozi Braide, reportedly confirmed the incident.

Describing the incident as "really pathetic," Braide had also indicated that the officer in question (including any other found culpable) would be brought to book.

The death of Taskirat and her baby is far from being the first on the ever busy expressway, and which has been largely attributed to victims getting knocked down by either commercial buses or motorcycles coming from the wrong direction, that is driving on 'one-way.'

Saturday Tribune recalls that over three years ago, a young woman who was working for a media house was knocked down by a fast-moving motorcycle coming from a wrong direction at Berger Yard area of the road. The poor lady was said to have died on the spot.

An average Lagosian is believed to be in a hurry always; he always seems to be rushing somewhere, a situation that has made the state to be branded a "land of hustling."

Perhaps this is what has encouraged many motorists plying the Oshodi-Apapa Expressway, which has somehow become notorious for infuriating traffic holdups, gridlocks and logjams, to have devised an audacious, but very risky means of beating such gridlocks. This is by driving against traffic, otherwise known as 'one-way driving.'

Though traffic situation on the Apapa-Oshodi-Mile 2 expressway, widely regarded as one of the busiest and economically vital expressways in the country, may have improved markedly in recent times, its highly unpredictable

nature ensures that residents and motorists often look for alternative ways to get to their destinations on time.

This includes residents taking a ride on okadas (commercial motorcycles) which have always been operating on the road, even in the face of existing traffic laws in the state. But the okadas are now fully back in droves, ever since the state government seemingly relaxed its ban on okadas in various parts of the state, including major roads such as the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway.

As already established, in the past few years, gridlocks on the road have left residents groaning, a problem that has been aggravated by the ongoing road work by construction giant, Julius Berger.

One look at the logjam which, depending on certain factors, could also extend from Ijesha area of the road to Mile 2 and sometimes beyond would discourage an average road user.

As earlier mentioned, some months ago, it was not uncommon to find motorists, especially commercial ones, driving against traffic (one-way) especially when gridlocks extend for miles and as such, could take a motorist hours to scale through.

The desperation of commercial motorists to make as much as they could in the little time available to them has been identified as one of the major factors responsible for drivers embarking on such dangerous missions.

Needless to say, however, travelling to Oshodi on the reverse route, that is, driving on one-way, is full of risks and danger, because many of the drivers, more often than not, come face to face with oncoming vehicles including articulated vehicles and other big buses. It was therefore in a bid to stop possible road accidents that made the state government to go all out to put a stop to this growing trend, which at the time was fast becoming a norm among motorists.

But same cannot be said of the activities of okada riders who have returned in their hundreds to the route. Saturday Tribune which monitored traffic situation on the expressway midweek spotted hundreds of okadas on different sections of the road, most of which were being driven on one-way.

Thus, it has been revealed that pedestrians trying to cross the road face more danger with the recklessness of the ubiquitous commercial motorcycles, who have apparently turned one way-driving into a normal daily occurrence irrespective of traffic situation on the other side.

One of the most dangerous routes for pedestrians or passengers who are just coming out from the vehicles they've boarded is the Otto Whorf/ Berger/ Sunrise axis of the expressway. There have been many reported cases of accidents caused by okadas on that section of the road, a situation usually aggravated by the reckless and mindless manner with which okada riders traverse the route in all directions.



Narrating his ordeal to Saturday Tribune, a resident of Sunrise, Mr Mat Edom, disclosed that many drivers and okada riders who engaged in such an act had become daring over the years, especially given the off and on approach of the government in tackling the issue.

“I have escaped being hit by okadas on several occasions by whiskers, but

I can assure you there are people who have not been that lucky. At times, as one is alighting from a bus, if care is not taken, one could end up doing so in the mouth of an oncoming okada or vehicle. The situation is really bad,” Mr Edom lamented.

“Most times, especially in the evenings, the whole place becomes so rowdy and disorganised that one has to be extremely careful and watchful before crossing over to the other side. This is because you will see motorcycles coming from different directions at breath-taking speeds, including those who are driving against traffic,” he added.

Sharing a similar view, another resident of the community, Mrs Regina Igwe, said, “If one is not familiar with this route or with the reckless way people drive here, such an individual stands a high risk of being hit by one of such bikes,” said Mrs Beatrice Asuquo, a resident of Apapa- Ajegunle area of the state.

When Saturday Tribune spoke with one of the riders, who could be simply identified as Dennis, he claimed that they were also aware of the dangers involved in riding against traffic, and as such, they were usually more vigilant when doing so. But he also insisted that he could not afford wasting all his time or burning all his fuel in traffic holdups which, he claimed, were often endless.

“If we don’t ride one-way, then we may not be able to go for more than a few trips before we close for the day, and this would surely affect the profit made. Movement in traffic holdups also leads to a situation whereby one consumes a high quantity of fuel, which is of course very expensive to buy. Therefore, except those constructing the road finish it on time and the road becomes usable, one-way driving may still persist for now, otherwise, someone like me might change my route all together,” Dennis disclosed.

For about two years, after the promulgation of the state’s traffic law, followed by massive clamping down on okada riders deemed to be doing business in wrong places by the police, okada activities reached their lowest ebb in Lagos.

But in the past few weeks, there seems to have been a remarkable turn of events, as okadas are gradually inching their

way back on major highways in the state, including the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway.

Saturday Tribune recalls that the state government had on August, 2012 signed the Lagos State Traffic bill into law. The objective of the legislation was to provide for road traffic administration.

It also seeks, among others, to restore sanity in the state transportation system. The okada riders were restricted from operating on 406 out of 10,000 roads in the state, including all bridges.

But the restriction order on the activities of commercial motorcyclists has always remained controversial even from the outset of the law until now.

First, the state government was accused of 'using and dumping' okada riders, who were given crash helmets as the 2011 general elections approached. The second controversy, according to public opinion, is the purported plan to review the traffic law which is largely viewed as being anti-okada, to subsequently and to a large extent be in favour of okada operators now that another round of general elections are approaching.

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