



Killings, maiming at foot of collapsed bridge

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WHAT is the cost of fixing a damaged pedestrian bridge that serves thousands of people everyday? Must it take the sacrifice of human lives before a collapsed bridge should be rehabilitated? These are some of the questions the people of Ilasamaja in Lagos are asking as they watch helplessly the deaths and maiming of their relations, friends and other persons in daily accidents as they cross the Apapa-Oshodi Expressway near the collapsed Ilasa Bridge.

At least 40 people have died from accidents on the bridge since November 09, 2007 when a truck carrying a load higher than the height of the bridge rammed into it, collapsing the upper layer and making it impassable.

Last Friday, many people who arrived Ilasa Bus Stop as early as 5.30am were treated to an unusual spectacle. An old woman, who should be in her late 60s, lay on the roadside of the service lane lifeless. She was crushed beyond recognition. Pieces of her body parts were seen on the fast lane of the expressway. She was said to have been hit by a fast moving vehicle while trying to cross the road along with some other persons. She could not run as fast as others so the vehicle caught up with her. Some other vehicles must have run over her before her dismembered body was dragged to the service lane.

A week after the bridge collapsed, a middle-aged woman almost went berserk when a car on the expressway knocked down



•Death trap at the collapsed overhead bridge at Ilasa Bus Stop, Lagos. Photo: Success Nwogu.

her four children. She was taking the children to school. Two of the kids reportedly died later in the hospital due to head injury.

There was another lady who had waited at the Sadiku end of the road for about 20 minutes. The person that saw her there said about eight different sets of people must have crossed while she was waiting but was too scared to join any of them.

Eventually, she decided to cross when it was considered safe and the road was relatively free but her leg tripped, she fell and lay flat in the middle of the road.

Everybody screamed. But nobody could summon courage to rush to rescue her. It all happened in a flash. Less than 20 metres away, a car was racing in that direction. She was so terrified that she could not get up. It was a miracle how the driver of the car avoided running over her. But her legs could not be spared. They were crushed and she momentarily passed out as the driver maneuvered the car before crashing into the road median.

Apart from the loss of lives, the accidents, which were often multiple because of the

sudden stop of vehicles, caused major damage to vehicles.

The casualties could have been more but for some members of the youth wing of the Action Congress in the area, who volunteer as traffic wardens to guide people to cross the road during the rush hours in the morning and evening.

Some stubborn motorists ignore their stop-signals, except, when the traffic police and members of the Nigeria Civil Defence who sometimes join them, are around.

According to the leader of the group, Mr. Femi Sowunmi, "In the course of the exercise, we discovered that some of the people crossing the expressway were blind."

He estimated that over 10,000 pupils between the ages of eight and 12 cross the bridge everyday.

The Federal Controller of Works in Lagos, Mr. Tunde Ekunsumi, said that the owner of the truck, which damaged the bridge, had been ordered to repair it.

He also said that it took 28 days to deliver the required materials for the repairs to the company, adding that time was needed for the casting.

When told that the bridge was damaged four months ago and people were dying everyday in accidents there, Ekunsumi said he would write a reminder letter to the company and hold it responsible for any subsequent accidents and deaths.

How soon the bridge will be put back to use, nobody knows. And whether the repair work will be thorough is another issue entirely.