

# Unrestrained incursions into dangerous terrains



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The first railroad in Nigeria was constructed by the British colonial government in the year 1898. Shortly after that, the Nigeria Railway Corporation (NRC) entered a long period of decline, inept management and, eventually, a complete lack of maintenance of rail and locomotive assets.

In 1970, a passenger train carrying large number of people derailed, crashed and fell into a canyon at Langa Langa, Benue, killing between 80 and 300 people, according to various reports. Langa Langa has a difficult terrain, so when the coaches rammed into one another, rescue was really hard.

To compound matters, the trailer carrying the wounded to the hospital also crashed killing the remaining survivors.

On May 8, 2016, NRC said that four people died in the train accident that occurred in Jebba the previous day. On November 15, 2017, seven persons were confirmed dead in the train that derailed in the morning of that day, at the Abbatoir area of Agege, the outskirts of Lagos. Confirming the incident, the then state's police spokesman, Olarinde Famous-Cole, disclosed that the train rammed into a trailer, injuring many and leaving unconfirmed number of victims feared dead.

Again, at least nine people were killed in a train accident that happened on July 20, 2018 also in the Agege area of Lagos State. A commercial bus popularly called 'danfo' parked close to the rail line was said to have impeded the on-coming train. One account of the rail accident was that "the train was coming on normal speed and the driver began to honk when he sighted a bus, not knowing that the driver was not in it.

The bus destabilized the train. Some of those who hung on it fell off and were killed by the moving train."

Again, on Sunday September 9, 2018, Kaduna State Police Command said no fewer than 52 cattle were crushed to death by a train along Kasarami-Jere axis in Chikkun Local Government Area of the state.

He noted that the cattle were crushed by a train going to Abuja from Rigasa Railway Station. We note that in Lagos, for instance, it has now become a norm for market to spring up on rail lines as this is the case in places like Yaba, Oshodi, Ikeja and Agege, to mention but a few. We believe that security of lives and property is one of the cardinal responsibilities of government, but we make bold to say that Nigeria governments over the years have failed in securing the rail tracks.

Meanwhile, as far back as April 2013, Lagos State government and the NRC had forged a security alliance on the railway corridor. Then transport commissioner, Kayode Opeifa, after the alliance meeting, “frowned at traders and drivers who were still illegally occupying the railway line” saying the act “was unbecoming and should stop henceforth.

In the golden era of NRC, it was commonplace at railway crossing to see barrier gates being manned by personnel who closes the gate to traffic at least five minutes before the arrival of locomotive. Today, all those barrier gates are gone and nobody controls movement across the rail tracks. As it is with the rail tracks, so also is the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lanes in Lagos metropolis. On June 1, 2015, a male banker, attached to a new generation bank, was crushed to death on the BRT lane around the Palmgrove area of Lagos State.

The deceased, Segun Ajisebutu, was killed as he raced to cross the lane at about 7a.m. On March 5, 2018, a BRT bus, along the Idi-Iroko/Ogolonto area of Ikorodu, crushed a primary school pupil, Ezekiel Daniel. The pupil was said to have attempted to cross the road to enter the C&S School when the BRT, plying its lane, hit and ran over him.

We believe that lasting solution should be provided to curb incessant BRT killings in the area by erecting a bridge to save pedestrians crossing that road.

Again, on July 23, 2018, an unidentified woman strayed unto the BRT lane and was knocked down, again, at the Palmgrove end of Ikorodu Road. Meanwhile, it has also been observed that whenever there is traffic snarl, it is now ‘normal’ for private vehicle owners to take advantage of the BRT lane, especially at night, since no government

agency is assigned to monitor the lane at night. But in an attempt to swiftly exit the lane, many car drivers climb the median on the lane, most of the times, locking down the entire lane.

Also, okada, which was banned from plying some routes in the metropolis during the Babatunde Fashola administration, are fully back, especially on the BRT lane, competing for space with the legitimate users. We say this is unacceptable and should be stopped forthwith. Sentimental consideration in a matter like this is tantamount to placing no value on human life. We insist that safety of lives should be given priority.

We advocate the restoration of barrier gates at every railway crossing across the country to be manned by personnel of NRC, possibly in conjunction with police personnel for security, especially at nights. Also, in other areas, iron barricades should be erected to prevent human, vehicular or livestock straying unto rail tracks and the BRT lanes. We do not want to believe that this seeming neglect by successive Nigerian leaders is due to their non-patronage of such lowly means of transportation. Enough of the carnage.