

## BENIN- LAGOS EXPRESSWAY:- AN EXPRESS WAY INDEED.

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## POST VACATION REPORT TO EDO GLOBAL ORGANIZATION.

Dear All,

Express-way indeed! That's how a visitor to Nigeria will sum it up. The appellation express-way to Benin-Lagos road is not only a joke but a source of ridicule to serious minded Nigerians who dare to invite their foreign friends to Nigeria in a bid to improve our tourist trade. It is a misnomer.

The Lagos -Benin expressway was opened with so much fanfare that it was regarded as the best thing that has happened to road transportation in Nigeria since independence. This road is important as it links several Nigerian states to the then federal capital city of Lagos. It is regarded as the gateway to all of the old Mid Western and Eastern Regions and parts of Western and Northern Regions of Nigeria. It is a vital link that deserves regular attention.

The road was so good, so smooth and so straight that drivers used to press so much on the accelerator as to run the Speedo-meter to its' limit. The frequency of ghastly motor accidents then was so much that the Road Safety Corps outfit was introduced under the leadership of Wole Soyinka to stem the death of able bodied Nigerians, a task he performed creditably well as the death due to road traffic accidents (RTA) were reduced on Ibadan and Lagos-Benin expressways. Those were the days. They are gone and may never return.

This time, you will be lucky if you can do an average of 30miles an hour on the road or worse still get home safely. You may either die from RTA, get

killed by armed robbers or drown in one of the gullies on the road. Starting from the Lagos end of this death-trap, you will encounter puddles and burnt motor tyre on the road, dangerously parked trawlers and big buses increasing the hazards on this road.

As you reach Shagamu, you will encounter the first of the numerous toll-gates on this road. You wonder the amount of money being collected on this very busy route runs into millions of naira daily. This huge collection is never ploughed back into the maintenance of this very important link between numerous states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. One wonders where all this money goes to if the road is so un maintained.

To be frank the Lagos State, Ogun State portions of this road is manageable as there is evidence of recent work done, although poorly executed.

As you go into Ondo State portion of the 'express'; hell begins. The puddles deteriorate into trenches and gullies, streams and small rivers cutting across the road especially when it rains

This poor state of affairs extends into Edo State portion of the road creating a very dangerous driving experience even for the experts drivers.

The drivers in an attempt to avoid the gullies now face on-coming vehicles at full speed on the same lane further increasing the hazards on the road. The road is littered with evidence of ghastly motor accidents without survivors. In such accidents, there can never be any ambulance attending thus further reducing the chances of any initial survivor ever making it to the hospital. No fire engines or rescue helicopters or paramedics to help save lives. All the more reason why the road should be impeccably maintained regularly.

When drivers encounter gullies, they slow down and to compound their miseries, the slowing down gives the armed robbers an opportunity to strike. When they strike as they do nearly every day especially on Mondays (all Mondays in July and early August), there is always loss of life from gun shot wounds. The police presence on the road is not arguable but they

almost always arrive soon after the robbers have finished their raid. On the 20th of July, they had to escort all the vehicles through the dangerous portions of the road in Ondo State. My thanks goes to the sergeant on duty that day in the lead police vehicle boldly written

*'operation fire for fire'* for the calm and professional way he conducted himself and the operation of leading all of us out of obvious danger. The police I spoke with and some of the drivers all agreed that the robbers are better equipped than they are. One wonders how the Police Chief will send poorly armed officers to face heavily armed robbers putting them in harm's way unnecessarily.

One may argue that on the other hand, politicians may be colluding with the robbers hence their refusal to do anything whatsoever about the poor state of the road which they are aware of. After all they also use the road on a regular basis. On the other hand they may be colluding with their friends who own the few but poorly maintained airlines to increase their profits as those who can afford it now fly from Benin to Lagos and return.

Our young men and women are dying by their thousands every year on that road and the government seems unperturbed. The other day, a former army general, an ex-governor of Bendel State and an old boy of my alma mater died after a serious road traffic accident (RTA). Death from RTA does not respect anybody. Today the paupers are suffering, tomorrow; it will be the rich as air transportation is almost as disastrous as road transportation. There is no family in any of the states served by this road that has not lost a loved one on this death trap of a road.

This carnage can only stop if we decide to handle the bull by the horns and stop paying lip services to social and essential services in Nigeria as road transportation in Nigeria.

The present Federal Minister for Works and Transport I was reliably informed is an Edo son and one would expect he will do something to alleviate the sufferings of his kit and kin in Edo State but he seems to have turned his back on his people. Chief Tony Anenih please do something about Lagos-Benin 'Expressway'. Please ensure the money collected from drivers at the toll gate is ploughed back into road maintenance.

We are happy about the Bye-pass near Benin to reduce congestion in the city, but we are appalled at the state of the only link we have with the economic nerve centre of Nigeria in Lagos.

I hope those responsible for the upkeep of this vital link to several states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria will wake up to their responsibility and put the situation on the road back to normal.

This is the beginning of a series of my observations in my recent trip to Nigeria and Edo State in particular.

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