

REVITALIZING THE NIGERIAN RAILWAY THROUGH TOURISM

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Abstract

Tourism has attracted much interest amongst the multidisciplinary field of studies that have shown interest in the subject matter. This is partly because the activity has grown to provide about the highest number of employment, in addition to the increasing contribution of the industry to the national economies of many nations, developing and developed alike. Burkast and Medlik (1981) actually described tourism as the 'world's largest and fastest growing economic activity'. The railway is credited to have significantly and profoundly-shaped the development and growth of tourism through the stimulation of travels. For instance, in 1881 railways-were reported to have carried 623 million passengers in the United Kingdom. As a matter of fact, the railways enjoyed the monopoly over the carriage of freight and passengers for over a century between 1830s and 1930's before the outbreak of the Second World War, and accounting for two - thirds of holiday's means of transport in the 1950s. Thus, in this paper, attempt is made to demonstrate the potentialities of tourism for the revitalization of the Nigerian Railway.

Introduction

The emergence of railway as a means of transport dated back to the 17th century, primarily due to the inadequacies and the high cost, which are associated with the existing system of transportation; and has its origin in Britain. According to Duncan (1984) 'a two-mule, wooden track way existed at Wellston, near Nottingham, constructed by Huntington Beaumont between 1603-1604'. However, between the 1650s and 1830s, various developments were associated with the railway system, both in the engine (vehicle) and the track which resulted in increased speed, comfort and efficiency in operation.

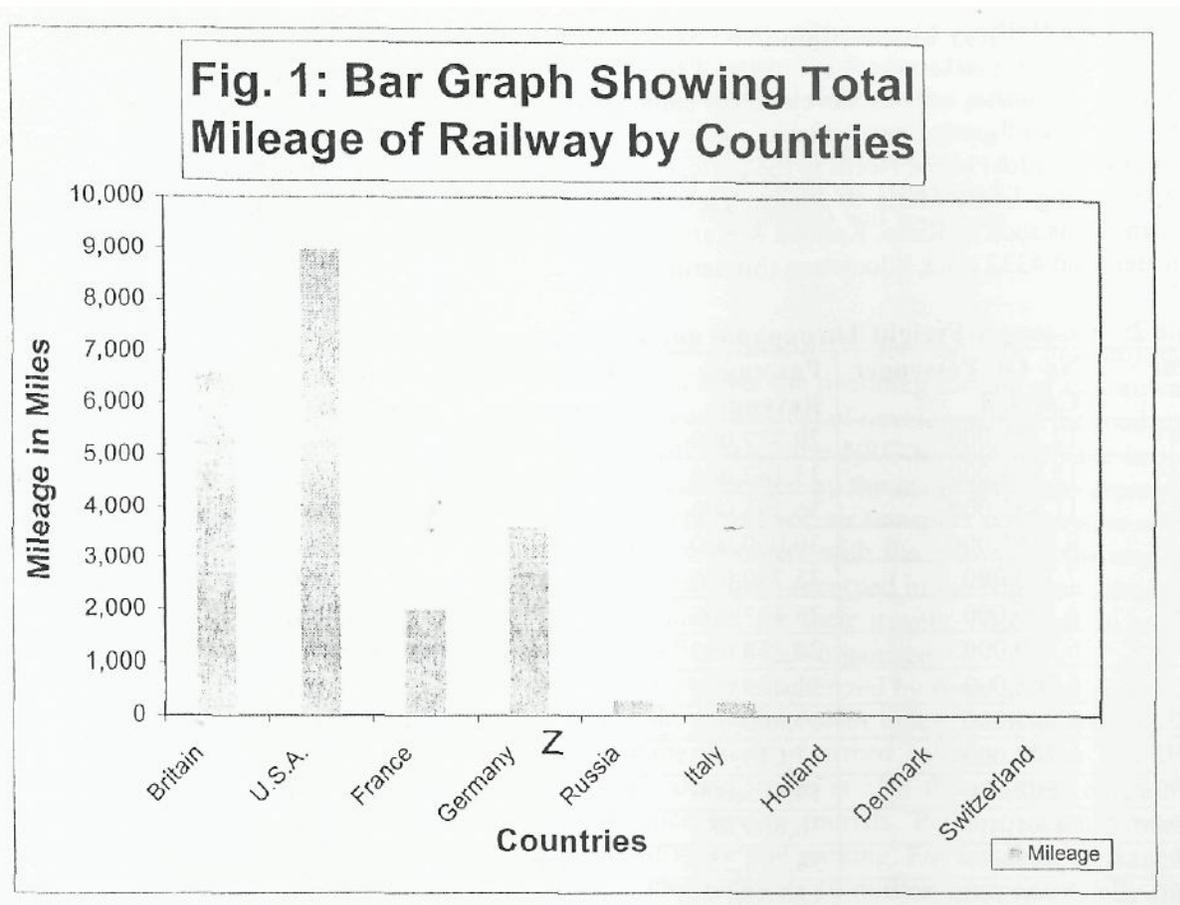
As a matter of fact, the period between 1836 and 1847 witnessed a massive development and construction of long distance railway by many countries, particularly in Europe, as shown in Table 1, depicting the total mileage constructed by each country as at 1850.

Table 1: Total Mileage of Railway Constructed by Countries as at 1850.

S/No	Countries	Mileage in Miles
1	Britain	6,600
2	U.S.A.	9,000
3	France	2,000
4	Germany	3,600
5	Russia	300
6	Italy	270
7	Holland	100
8	Denmark	20
9	Switzerland	16
Total		21,906

Source: SHOLARIN, A.M. (2000)

Figure 1 below shows the graphical variation amongst the countries that have constructed some mileage of railway by 1850.



Railway and Tourism

Tourism has been defined in various ways; a consequence of the multidisciplinary and multi-dimensional nature of tourism. However, tourism may be thought of as the relationships and phenomena arising out of the journeys and temporary stays of people traveling primarily for leisure or recreational purposes. In other words, the overriding purpose for such journey must be non-monetary. It is for this reason that tourism has been broadened to include business and vocational travels. The argument in favour of this is that as long as such travels do not lead to permanent residence or to employment remunerated from within the destination visited, their economic significance is the same - the traveler is a pure consumer (Pearce, 1981).

The importance of railway to tourism growth and development cannot be overemphasized. For instance, "in 1881, the railways carried 623 million passengers". The railways in essence stimulated travels. However, it must be noted that travel was further enhanced and promoted by the increased urbanization which took place in the 19th century. Urbanization at this time was associated with a rapid expansion of the middle - class workers; that are literate and relatively wealthy enough to spare part of their income on travels.

Indeed, tourism has been described as the world's largest and fastest growing economic activity; though more prominent in the developed world of America and the United Kingdom. However, unlike in the past when it was associated with the wealthy members of the society (even in the developed world), this situation had by 1970 changed and tourism had become no longer the exclusive preserve of the wealthy and the leisured but rather a mass market¹ (Burkast & Medlik, 1981). As such, mass travel had become a way of life and therefore seen as one facet of the good life that must be desired just as one would desire a car or a refrigerator.

So, the railway and the steamship provided the transportation for this new way of life. For instance, Burkast and Medlik (1981) discovered that for holiday purpose, the railway was displaced by the car as late as the 1960s. Whereas, in the 1950s two - thirds of holidays used the railway as the means of transport, this had fallen to only one - seventh by 1970.

The Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC)

It was not until towards the close of the 19th century that railway development was extended to Nigeria. Of course, railway development came into being, to serve the urgent need of the colonial masters' motive of getting agricultural products (cotton and groundnut) and mineral products (Tin and Columbite from Jos) in the North to the ports, enroute shipment to Europe. The 193 or 195km rail line in 1898 linking Ebute-Metta to Ibadan grew to about 1,652km in 1927 with the finking of many northern towns such as Kano, Kaduna & Kafanchan. By 1964, Nigeria had developed 3505 total route kilometers and 4332 track kilometers (Sholarin, 2000).

Table 2: Passenger/Freight Throughput and Revenue between 1983 - 1998

Year	No Of Passenger Carried	Passenger Revenue	Freight Tonnage_	Freight Revenue	Total
17983	12,145,000	29,877,000	1,619,000	36,199,000	66,376,000
1984	15,553,000	33,147,000	1,458,000	33,335,000	66,402,000
1985	11,432,000	36,295,000	1,182,000	34,247,000	70,452,000
1986	9,8181,000	39,059,000	825,000	36,336,000	^ 5 ^ 5 , 0 0 0
1987	7,363,000	35,750,000	353,000	15,632,000	51,382,000
1988	4,196,000	25,117,000	294,000	13,200,000	38,317,000
1989	6,520,000	24,318,000	270,000	18,155,000	42,473,000
1990	6,345,000	3 1,403 ,000	374,000	35,911,000	67,314,000
1991	3,443,000	19,300,000	330,000	64,460,000	83,760,000
1992	1,747,000	17,013,000	204,000	499,731,000"	66,760,000
1 993	1,502,000	14,625,000	106,000	25,841,000	40,468,000
1994	784,491	36,809,884	106,000	121,911,000	158,791,999
1995	2,889,977	56,114,354	107,000	133,9111,902	190,056,256
1 996	2,946,1940	126,456,928	533,150	219,175,125	345,632,053
1998	1,070,424	74,457,194	5,333,150	438,779,607	513,236801
Total	90,381,858	712,650,188	9,4 1 2,766	1,438,175,332	2,151,057,733

Source: *Nigerian Railway Corporation, 2000 (After Sholarin, 2000).*

The Nigerian Railway contributed immensely to the socio - economic and political development of the country; through the promotion of agricultural and industrial development, provision of employment, carriage of passengers and freights, development and growth of towns, to mention a few. For instance, as shown on Table 2 the Nigerian railway is still relevant in passenger and freight carnage.

However, the significance of the Nigerian Railway has been beset with an avalanche of problems; which have been well documented in many works that have been written on the problems of the Nigerian Railways. But some of these problems worth mentioning here, include: the narrow (rack; old and declining rolling stock (locos), coaches and wagons; outdated signaling devices; poor services; disenchanting and ill-motivated staff; declining revenue; unattractive stations and terminals; increased competition from the private car and passenger airlines; to mention but few.

On the problem confronting NRC, Abubakar (2002:1-2) puts it succinctly this way: The Colonial Railway Managers, who constructed the railway track between 1898 and 1927, did not intend the speed of trains to exceed 65km/hr on the best portion of the tracks. The track has many rising and falling gradients as well as sharp curves. These impede train speed. Added to these impediments are (lie condition of the track and the signaling system. As a result of the age of the track and the wear and tear, many speed restrictions have been imposed. The defective and near obsolete signaling system still in place causes delay to trains. The resultant effect of all these impediments brings down the average train speed to about 35km per hour. This cannot attract patronage for our goods train services. The average speed of the Express Passenger Train is not more than 45km per hour and this cannot also attract enough workers and businessmen on week-ends travels. Apart from the problems of the track, the condition of the locomotives and the rolling stock do not help matters. Out of 117 locomotives, only 20-25 can be made available daily for train services throughout the system. Again, out of over 3000 goods wagons, only 700 of them can be utilized right now to give freight services. With the above number of wagons, the Corporation, can, at best, load only 700 wagons in a month. This can fetch only N31 "million in a month. If, however,

the defective locomotives and goods are refurbished, the capacity of the operating facilities (locos and wagons) will appreciate reasonably and can make a lot of difference.

Potentials of the Nigerian Railways

Though, the increasing prominence of private car (particularly for domestic tourism) and passenger airlines (for international tourism) have brought about the declining fortune of the railway in the developed world of Europe and America, the state and the level of development in the road and air transportation modes generally in Nigeria would still enable the NRC to take its place in the carriage of tourists in Nigeria. This argument is further encouraged by the many problems presently confronting the other modes of transportation in Nigeria. For instance, air transport, compared to other modes is more expensive and as such may not be able to compete with the railway in the area of pricing and fare. In addition, the many air disasters that have been recorded in the Nigerian airspace, have encouraged some passengers to look unto other modes for their travels. NRC has as much chance to compete with the road for this category of travellers if well-organized.

The road mode, though fast and more flexible, is also characterized by some problems, which the railway can exploit to its advantage. For example, the road, in recent times, has been associated with many cases of accidents, in addition to the many cases of armed robbery attack that the "Luxurious Buses" operation has been recording. Of course, there is also the problem of traffic congestion and delays on our roads; which is a disincentive to tourists. Perhaps, a much more-problematic aspect of road transportation is the issue of space and parking. For instance, Burkast & Medlik (1981) reported that Disneyland in California, which attracts 10 million visitors annually and occupies 83 acres, has car-parking facilities of 110 acres. Of course, the same volume of visitors could be carried by the railway without requiring such a large volume of infrastructure. From here, it is now right to look at how the Nigeria Railway can be revitalized through tourism.

Revitalizing the NRC Through Tourism

Not all resorts in Nigeria are found in settlements that are linked by the Nigerian Railway. So, while some resorts are directly linked, others are indirectly linked while some others are not linked at all. Those that are directly and indirectly linked formed the basis for this proposal.

Some of the resorts that are found in cities connected by rail lines include the Olumo Rock (Abeokuta), the plateau and its scenery (Jos) and the sandy beaches (Lagos). For such resorts, the use of railway can be an important consideration to tourists, if the railway operation is attractive. However, for resorts that are not directly linked by rail lines, as exemplified by the Obudu cattle ranch and the Mainbilla plateau, railway can still have a role to play. All that is needed is an enabling environment and encouragement.

On the basis of the above the following recommendations are made as to how tourism can actually assist in the revitalizing of the NRC.

1. The construction of modern track. There is a need to construct new and modern track that would enable the NRC to provide an acceptable, attractive and competitive average speed by express passenger train. Such tracks should allow for speed well over 100km per hour before it can attract appropriate patronage, considering the vastness of the Nigerian landmass.
2. Modern coaches. This is needed not only for the movement of tourists from their origin to their destination (resorts), but it could serve as an attraction itself. The introduction of fine and modern coaches, with the state of the art and necessary comforts, traversing through the various ecological zones in Nigeria with its attendant beauty can be enough attraction for some tourists. This would also allow for the promotion of packaged tours.
3. Introduction of Bus Inter change. Since most tourist resorts are not directly situated at the rail terminals, it therefore means that the tourist must still need to get to the resorts by other means of transportation. The ease with which this can be achieved would influence tourist mode of transportation decision in favour of rail or otherwise. So, for the popular resorts, comfortable buses of varying capacities, operated and managed by the NRC must be acquired.
4. Building of Guest Chalets / Houses at the selected or identified terminals (tourist terminals) that are used as tourist interchange. The building of such comfortable accommodation of various categories, which would also be managed by NRC, would in a great way take care of one of the basic considerations that would be evaluated by tourists

before embarking on a travel. This is particularly more relevant considering the enormous land resources available to NRC at strategic locations in many urban centres in Nigeria - Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Kano, Zaria, Maiduguri, Enugu, Port Harcourt, etc.

5. Packaged Tours. The Nigerian Railway would also need to create the department of tourism; whose main duties would be in the designing of various packaged tours for various groups and individuals, such as students (primary, secondary & tertiary students) corporate organizations, public servants, government functionaries, politicians, etc, on ad-hoc or permanent basis.
6. Aggressive Marketing. A major aspect of tourism promotion generally has to do with marketing and packaging. This may be undertaken by a unit under the tourism department or under the commercial department of the corporation. This unit would engage in the designing of beautiful and captivating advertorials on handbills, bill boards, and on print and electronic media. Such advertorials would not only focus on the sites (resorts), but also on the comfort of the travels, the accommodation, the benefits of travelling by rail, and the effect of travels/tourism on human health.
7. The charging of economic fare/segregation of fare. This of course, should not be difficult if the services rendered are excellent and attractive.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that the state of transportation development in Nigeria cannot be said to have attained an acceptable level, and the fact that tourism is still at infancy, when compared to the situation in the developed world (and even when compared to some developing countries as Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica, Puerto-Rico or even Kenya), then there is a place for tourism in the revitalization of the Nigerian Railway in the 21st century. Of course, if these recommendations are well implemented, not only would the Nigerian Railway be revitalized, with its associated financial returns to the NRC, but it would also lead to the promotion of tourism generally in Nigeria; lead to the creation of employment; and increase the foreign exchange earnings of the nation.

Though in recent times, privatization and commercialization have been argued as the only options opened to NRC, this paper has focused on the tourism option as the panacea for revitalizing the Nigerian Railway Corporation.

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