

Moving Lagos: The Blue Line and the Future of Mass Transit



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2. Executive summary

The first phase of the Lagos Blue Line Rail (“the Blue Line”) from Marina to Mile 12 was opened to the public in September 2003 amid fanfare by the state government and observers, after two decades of planning and construction. The 14-kilometre line is vaunted by the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA), the government’s implementing agency, as having the potential to drive economic growth along the Marina – Mile 12 corridor and beyond and vault Lagos to “megacity” status.

The Blue Line – along with five other lines expected to make up a citywide metro rail network – is so pivotal to the government’s Strategic Transport Masterplan that it reportedly invested USD 1.2 billion in building the first phase of the Blue Line alone, with more spending planned for the other lines in the network. This political focus on expensive, time-consuming rail projects amid an urgent need to meet the city’s ever-growing demand for transport warrants scrutiny of the benefits and costs to citizens, especially in the context of scarce public and private resources.

This report details the findings from such an inquiry, guided by questions on six key dimensions of the Blue Line: **operations** (the efficiency of the service on the line); **maintenance** (the upkeep of the infrastructure over the medium to long term); **safety** (the efficacy of measures put in place to protect lives and property); **sustainability** (the impact of the technological choices made on the environment); **affordability** (the pricing regime and the ability/willingness of commuters to pay for the service); and **inclusiveness** (the diversity of commuter segments that the line caters to). These questions were addressed using a combination of document review, field observation, rapid survey and in-depth interviewing techniques.

The key findings – outlined in the table below – indicate that the Blue Line has generally fared well on the indices of operation, maintenance and safety so far; however, progress has been more mixed on the measures of sustainability, affordability and inclusiveness.

Area of inquiry	Key findings
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The trains run on a reliable schedule as advertised – for a total of 72 trips every weekday.• Progressive increases in the frequency of the service still leave a lot of time between trains (up to 30 minutes) and do not compensate for the low capacity of individual trains (a maximum of 400 passengers in four carriages) especially during the morning and evening peaks.• Technology has enhanced commuter experience in some respects (notably, the use of the Cowry card, which runs on a well-integrated and increasingly decentralised tap-and-pay system), but gaps in efficiency remain that necessitate the intervention of station staff in easily automated processes.
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notwithstanding the periodic breakdown of fittings such as air conditioners and elevators in some stations, the trains and the associated infrastructure have been largely well-maintained to date, reflecting LAMATA’s stated commitment to keep standards up.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● However, LAMATA continues to rely on foreign expertise to operate and maintain the trains, and the degree to which local technical and managerial skills are being built for long-term operations is unclear.
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Owing to a raft of security measures integrated into operations, the majority of commuters interviewed for this study reported feeling safe around the line – although the absence of streetlighting around the stations increases the risks for women and vulnerable groups after dark. ● Safety incidents on the line have been few and far between – but the tendency for government narratives to minimise the impacts of those incidents highlights the need for citizens to insist on transparency.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The trains on the line run on electricity, which can potentially offset carbon emissions from car trips that might otherwise have been undertaken by commuters, especially if the displacement of cars occurs on a large scale. ● Nonetheless, the electricity used is supplied by diesel- and gas-fired plants rather than by renewable sources, limiting the positive environmental impacts of the technology choice. Moreover, electricity generated at such expense could arguably find alternative use in the multitude of energy-poor households and businesses along the corridor and elsewhere.
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long-running government subsidies have made the line attractive and accessible to many commuters, especially in light of recent increases in road transport fares which, in turn, have been driven by dramatic increases in the price of petrol. ● A lack of transparency around the true costs of the line to the state makes it difficult for citizens to assess the viability of the subsidy regime and the value proposition of the whole venture to them.
Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The service on the line lends itself most readily to professionals (in both the public and private sectors) and business people with some education who prioritise efficiency and speed in getting around. ● Design features as well as entrenched social divisions restrict the utility of the line for vulnerable groups and poorer people with little to no education (such as petty traders) who constitute the mass of the commuting public.

The implications of these findings for transport policy relate mainly to the need for more inclusive governance of the sector, as a counterweight to the government’s unrelenting pursuit of its modernist vision for the state. Greater transparency and accountability regarding the allocation of public resources to rail infrastructure are required, especially in light of the enormous costs involved and the forgone alternatives implied in the process. Relatedly, the government needs to

look beyond rail as a marker of modernity and invest commensurably in other low-hanging options, including non-motorised and last-mile transport infrastructure. This diversified strategy would have the effect of not only catering to poorer commuter segments for whom road transport will likely always be more accessible, but it would also create incentives for more commuters in the middle- and high-income segments to switch from single-car use to the public transit system. It is only when this is done that the goal of building a city transport system that works for all can be achieved.

I. The Blue Line: Background

The Lagos Blue Line Rail (the “Blue Line”) is finally here, but it has been a long time coming. By the time the train made its inaugural commercial trip in September 2023, planning for it had been in the works for 40 years.¹ The idea for a city metro line was floated as far back as 1983 by the Lateef Jakande administration,² which is well-known for its socialist orientation and pro-poor achievements in urban infrastructure, however modest.³ The idea was derailed by a military coup before it could take off, and it wasn’t picked up again until twenty years later – in 2003 – by the Bola Tinubu administration, which became invested in the development of a Lagos Rail Mass Transit plan.



Figure 1. A conspicuously placed signboard at the Marina station takes the narrative of the Blue Line all the way back to 1999, in a barely veiled attempt to frame ongoing developments as a legacy of the political party that has been in power since then. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

¹ Bolaji, S. (2023). 40 years after Buhari’s suspension, Lagos light rail begins operations. Punch Newspapers, September 5. Available at: https://punchng.com/40-years-after-buharis-suspension-lagos-light-rail-begins-operations/#google_vignette

² The rationale behind the planning for a metro line in the 1980s – when Lagos was not nearly as congested as it is today – as well as the spatial dimensions of the original plan, are unclear.

³ For example, Governor Jakande was the architect of the largest “low-income” housing scheme in the history of the state, implemented through the Lagos State Development and Property Corporation. The impacts of the scheme have however eroded over time, in the absence of commensurate state investments in affordable housing.

In 2009, during Babatunde Fashola’s tenure as governor, work on the Blue Line finally started, with the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) as the contractor. Construction proceeded in two phases: the first phase, about half of the total length of the line at 14 kilometres, is the portion that was launched in 2023, while the second phase is yet to be completed. Even in its incomplete state, the Blue Line is a significant piece of infrastructure in Lagos, running as it does from Mile 2 deep in the mainland to Marina in the heart of Lagos Island. Upon completion, the Blue Line is expected to span 27.5 kilometres, from Okokomaiko to Marina, with several stops along the way (see schematic in figure 2 below).

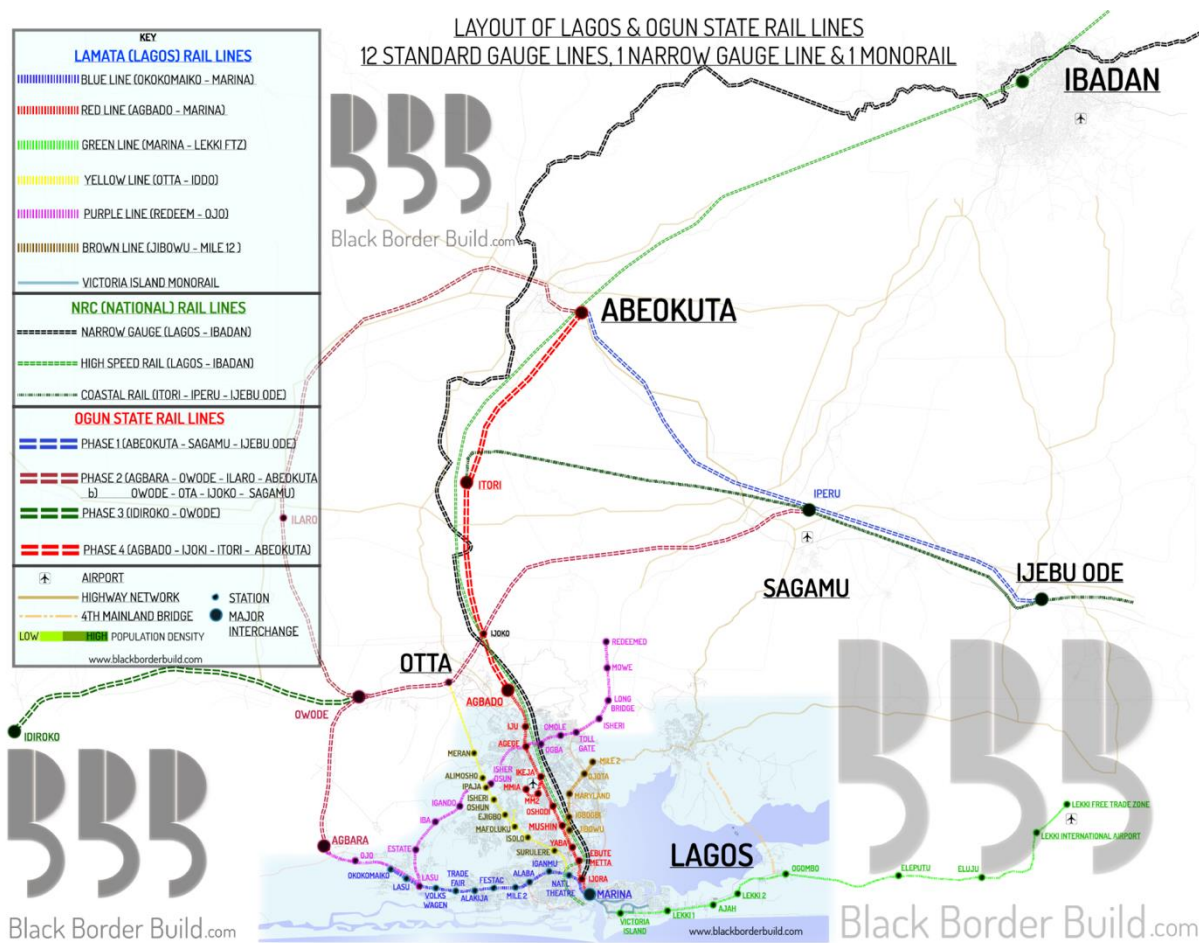


Figure 2. Schematic diagram showing the position of the Blue Line within the broader rail network planned for Lagos and environs. Source: <https://blackborderbuild.weebly.com/railway/lagos-ogun-state-rail-lines-update-map>

The task of delivering the Blue Line, as well as wider metro rail network, falls to the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority (LAMATA). Birthed in 2002 after a decade of laying the groundwork for its operations,⁴ LAMATA has the distinct responsibility of modernising the

⁴ LAMATA website: <https://www.lamata-ng.com/company-overview/company-history/>

city's transport system as encoded in the Lagos Strategic Transport Master Plan (STMP),⁵ beginning most notably with the World Bank-supported Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system.

The initial plan was for LAMATA to kick off the metro rail project with the Red Line, which was considered low-hanging fruit given that there were existing train tracks along the proposed route (Alagbado in the north to Marina in the south) that had previously been laid by the federal government. Technically, the proposal involved a straightforward upgrade of the existing narrow-gauge tracks on the route to standard gauge. Politically, however, it was a fraught proposition: in requesting right of way, LAMATA met with federal resistance, with the result that the launch of the Red Line was delayed for at least 13 years.⁶ Faced with this setback, the state government, keen to demonstrate proof of concept, moved the timeline for the construction of the Blue Line up – so that it became the first of six planned routes to become at least partly operational.⁷

The rest of this report discusses the Blue Line in detail: its execution, current operations and value proposition for commuters (those who use the Blue Line) and non-commuters (those who may not take the train but use the adjoining pedestrian bridges and bus services) on the route, as well as residents of the city at large.

II. The Blue Line: Infrastructure

The completed section of the Blue Line starts at Marina station and ends at Mile 2 station. There are three intermediate stations: National Theatre (NT) station (after Marina station), Iganmu station and Alaba station, in that order.

Marina station is situated on a raised platform, requiring commuters to go up a flight of stairs to gain entry. At the entry points, there are a number of security scanner doors supervised by officers of the Lagos Neighborhood Safety Corps (LNSC). These doors are used for metal detection and prevention of the entry of weapons and other contraband. Once inside the train station, commuters can access other infrastructure, including male and female convenience rooms and a food kiosk with light refreshments such as soft drinks and sandwiches. At the time of writing, there are some as-yet unoccupied store fronts at the station which, judging from their interior décor, are likely to be used for pharmacies and other retail activities.

⁵ LAMATA views itself as an exemplar of the kind of technical know-how that is required to respond to the transportation challenges faced by cities across Nigeria and Africa. This view appears to be shared by the World Bank, which concluded that LAMATA had “demonstrated competence” in implementing the BRT project in the fiscal year ending December 2015 (https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ppar_nigeria_0716.pdf).

⁶ Construction of the Blue Line took 13 years, from its inception to its official launch. The Red Line only began operations a year after the Blue Line started running. (<https://northcourtrealestate.com/download/Lagos%20Blue%20Rail%20Report.pdf>)

⁷ The Red Line finally began operations in October 2024, more than one year after the launch of the Blue Line. Plans are underway for the construction of the Green Line, with a memorandum of understanding already signed between the Lagos state government and another Chinese firm. Plans for the other three lines in the network – Purple, Yellow and Orange – are yet to be made public.

Relying solely on the Cowry card – same as the one used for payments on the BRT system – a commuter can utilise the self-service machines at any of the train stations or meet an officer in any of several ticketing booths to verify how much is left on their tap-and-pay card.



Figure 3. Marina station is on a raised platform, requiring commuters to go up a flight of stairs from street level and cross a footbridge to access the trains. Mini-buses stationed under the platform shuttle commuters to and from destinations within Lagos Island and neighbouring Victoria Island. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

For commuters with access to smartphones, this can be done by launching the Cowry app from their phones.⁸ In addition to verifying card and wallet balance, the app allows users to carry out a

⁸ The Cowry app is available for download on Google Playstore for Android phones and Apple Store for iPhones.

number of functions, including transferring balances from their wallet to their card; topping up their wallet from their bank account; and buying airtime for their phones.

The Cowry card itself costs NGN 600. First-time purchases can only be made at a ticketing booth anywhere on the line, or at any BRT bus stop. At the time of writing, the private company providing the IT infrastructure for the Cowry card – Touch and Pay Technologies Limited (“TAP”) – has completed plans to decentralise the card system by licensing some point-of-sale operators and stores outside the formal ticketing points to sell new Cowry cards and top up credit on existing cards.

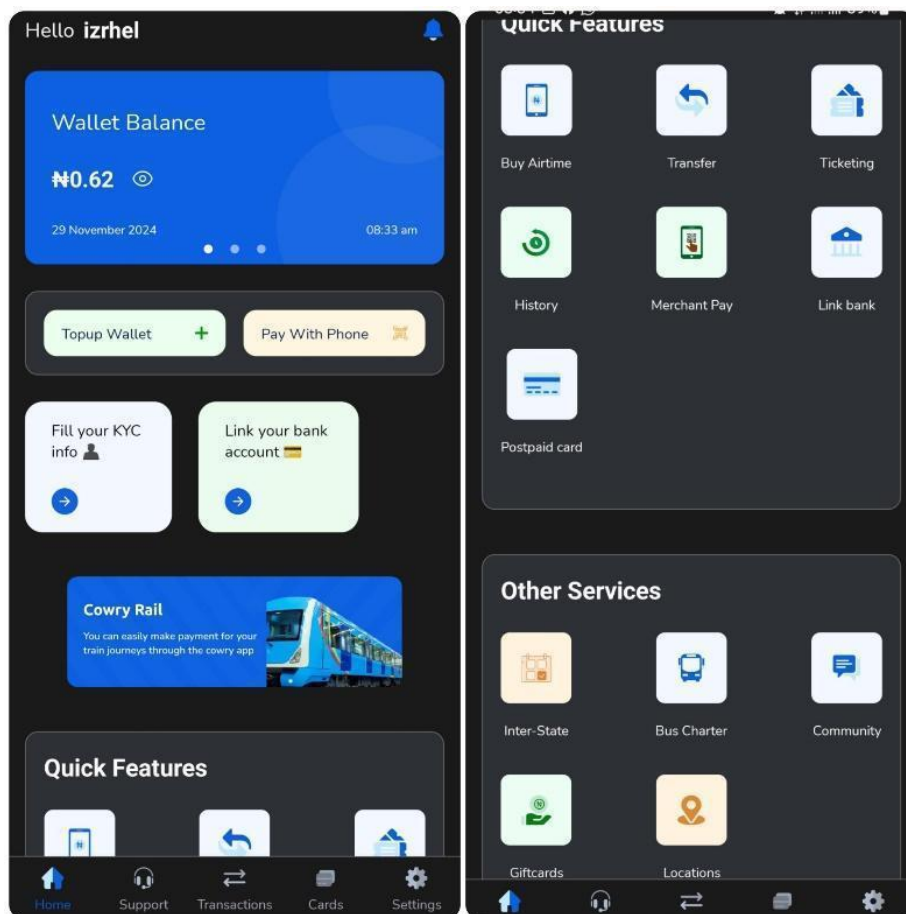


Figure 4. The Cowry app user interface for Android and Apple operating systems. Image credit: Israel Faleye.

Additionally, a sum of NGN 100 is charged for users looking to have their names embossed on their card.⁹ Commuters, usually found waiting for the next train by standing and/or leaning on nearby walls or rails at the stations due to limited seating in the platform areas, are notified by

⁹ This feature seems to be useful only for identification purposes, as having a particular name on a card does not prevent another commuter from travelling with it – with or without the owner’s permission – or even topping up the credit on it.

LAMATA staff (customer service representatives and/or passenger operators) when it is time to touch and pay for the next train. The staff currently do this manually, relying on the volume of their voices to share key information, including the time of arrival of the next train, the length of time until departure, and the call for commuters to tap into the platform area with their cards.



Figure 5. Commuters must touch their Cowry card on the card reader to board the trains and to exit at their destination. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

This last function has come to be even though the trains run regularly on an advertised schedule,¹⁰ as many commuters inevitably arrive at the station with a lot of time to spare given the length of time between trains (up to 30 minutes), and station staff are apparently keen to avoid crowding the platforms in advance.

Other transport services currently integrated with the Blue Line can be found at the car park underneath Marina station. Here, mini-buses or shuttles can be accessed by commuters departing the station for other areas of Lagos Island, including CMS, the markets on Lagos Island and Victoria Island. The shuttle, which is only available at Marina station, charges a flat rate of NGN 300. The mini-buses, embedded with the same tap-and-pay technology used on the BRT and the Blue Line, are designed to be primarily accessible by the Cowry card; however, operators of these buses often allow cash payments as well. To gain access to the shuttle buses, commuters alighting from the trains descend from the elevated rail track using the stairs or the escalator to get into the station lobby, before further descending from another set of stairs and/or an elevator to get to the car park below the train station.



Figure 6. A train waiting on the platform at Mile 2 station. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

¹⁰ The schedule displayed on LAMATA's website (https://www.lamata-ng.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Train_Station_Notice_board.pdf) and on overhead screens at each station is not easy to decipher for commuters. During our fieldwork, the research team observed that many commuters came away from reading the display confused, and often resorted to asking station staff and/or other commuters for the next departure time. Simplifying the display would make it more user-friendly for a wide range of commuters.

The next section summarises publicly available information on the Blue Line and situates the project within the state government's plans for improved transportation in particular and economic growth more broadly. It then proceeds to raise a series of questions that are pertinent in light of the onus on the government to prioritise the realities of the mass of the people in its pursuit of grand development visions.

III. The Blue Line in the context of broader state policy

The Lagos state government (LASG) released the first-ever state transport policy document in Nigeria in May 2024, after years of being guided by several policy instruments such as the STMP and the Lagos State Development Plan (LSDP). In so doing, the government has put a framework in place to operationalise its emphasis on transport as a major pillar of economic development in the state. Alongside other strategies for motorised and non-motorised transportation modes, the Lagos State Transport Policy provides a roadmap for implementing the government's vision of providing reliable and equitable access for citizens in an environmentally sustainable, economically cost-effective and socially inclusive manner.¹¹

Within this overarching vision for the state's transport sector, the government has articulated a set of implementation goals. These include:

- **Integration:** Establishing a multimodal system for seamless travel within the state, leveraging a single payment system.
- **Safety:** Ensuring a safe experience for users and their property, as well as service providers.
- **Adequacy:** Improving the level of service provided to users to meet their mobility needs.
- **Reliability:** Guaranteeing that services offered to users are delivered as advertised, and are operated and completed within the indicated time.
- **Comfort and convenience:** Offering services and facilities that enhance users' comfort, travel experience and accessibility. Further, ensuring the provision of clean and safe vehicles to users, as well as proximity to transport facilities.
- **Affordability:** Providing transport services that are accessible by all income segments through competitively-priced fares that enable cost recovery. This includes the provision of targeted and measurable transport subsidies within set budget limits where applicable.
- **Environmental friendliness:** Ensuring minimum adverse environmental impacts resulting from the operation and provision of transport infrastructure and services.

The state government views the Blue Line, and the metro rail project as a whole, as being critical to the achievement of its overall vision. At the time of release of the LSDP in 2014, LAMATA had already been mobilised with a sum of NGN 3.4 billion for the design phase of the rail project, starting with the Blue and Red lines. While this marks only about 2% of the NGN 170 billion announced by the state for both the design and construction of the rail project in 2010,¹² it is equivalent to 65% of the NGN 5.224 billion deployed for other projects in the transport sector at

¹¹ Lagos Transport Policy (2024). Available at: <https://lagosstate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/EPDREVIEWEDFINALLAGOSSTATEWATERMARK.pdf>

¹² The Tide News Online (2010). Lagos Begins N170bn Rail Project. January 22. Available at: <http://www.thetidenewsonline.com/2010/01/22/lagos-begins-n170bn-rail-project/>

that time.¹³ These include a traffic improvement scheme (NGN 555 million), provision of traffic infrastructure (NGN 107 million), a public road safety programme (NGN 609 million), road channelisation (NGN1.5 billion), construction and rehabilitation of jetties (NGN 1.469 billion), clearing of waterways/dredging (NGN 89 million) and the Lagos State Traffic management Authority (LASTMA) setup project (NGN 895 million).¹⁴

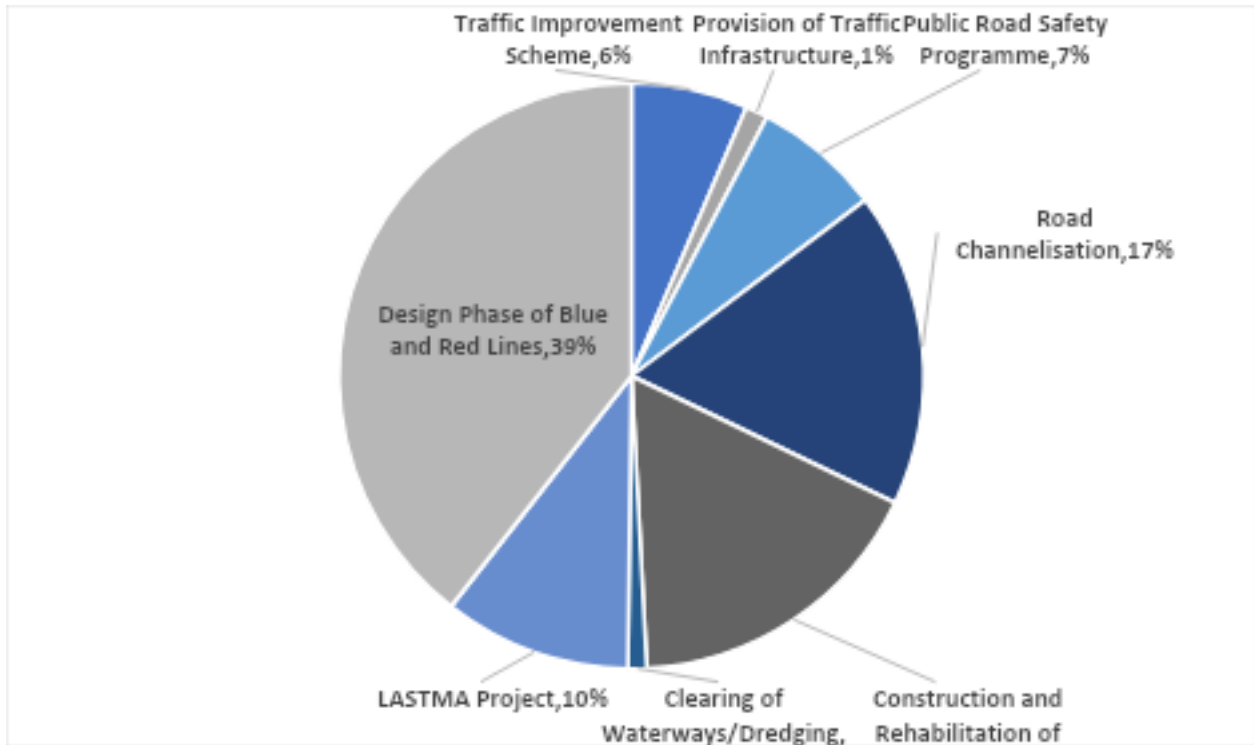


Figure 7. The design phase of the Blue and Red lines alone cost NGN 3.4 billion – 65% of the NGN5.224bn spent on other areas of the transport sector in 2011. This also amounts to 40% of the total money (NGN 8.624 billion) spent on transport projects within that same year. Source: Authors’ compilation from the Lagos State Development Plan (2012-2025) by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget. September 2013. pg. 74.

These figures signalled very early the high levels of investment that would be required for the Lagos metro rail project. It was therefore perhaps unsurprising that the government ultimately put the total expenditure for the first phase of the Blue Line rail at USD 1.2 billion. The state claimed at some point that the funds spent on the line were entirely drawn from its internally-generated

¹³ Compiled by the research team from the Lagos State Development Plan (2012-2025) by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget. September 2013 (pg. 74). Available at: <https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/LAGOS-STATE-DEVELOPMENT-PLAN.pdf>

¹⁴ The LASTMA project was to equip the agency with the necessary tools for the effective discharge of its mandate. The setup project included the acquisition of communication gadgets, patrol vehicles, road traffic control equipment, office accommodation, and purchase of motor bicycles and tow trucks for the purpose of rescue and efficient management of road traffic incidents.

revenue¹⁵ - though, instructively, these official pronouncements have proved difficult to verify independently. The related issues of cost and funding source(s) have been a sticking point for many observers. Concerns have been raised in public discourse by civil society actors such as BudgIT,¹⁶ industry experts and opposing political parties¹⁷ in the state especially following the publication of a final price tag of USD 182 million by the China Railway Construction Corporation (the parent company of the CCECC), instead of the USD 1.2 billion figure communicated by the state government. In response, the government has clarified the miscommunication, confirming that the reported USD 182 million was only for a part of the project, and not the total cost of the project.

What is clear that the scale of these investments aligns with the state government's vision over the last decade to become Africa's model "megacity,"¹⁸ and a global, economic and financial hub that is safe, secure, functional and productive by the year 2052.¹⁹ Indeed, the official government narrative surrounding the advent of the Blue Line is one of a Lagos that is "rising".²⁰ Media reports about the line emphasise the potential that the line has to improve several aspects of business and commuting in the city. These include substantial reductions to journey times and easing of traffic; increased efficiency through scheduled services that run on time; the integration of smart and green technologies into transportation and payment systems; improved connectivity with other modes of transport, including roads and waterways; greater access and affordability for public transport users; and increased ease of doing business by citizens and foreign investors alike.

Against this background, it is imperative to compare the functioning of the Lagos Blue Line since its launch over a year ago with the government's high expectations of it. This is especially important given that public funds – whether in the form of debt or equity – continue to be committed towards future phases of metro rail plan. In this vein, dominant narratives around the Blue Line need to be interrogated, with a view to identifying the nature and extent of benefits and risks accruing to residents from the functioning of the line. This is what the present study set out to do, asking the following questions:

¹⁵ Ojelabi, K. (2019). Lagos blue line rail project – Setting the record straight. Business Day, October 10. Available at: <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/lagos-blue-line-rail-project-setting-the-record-straight/>

¹⁶ BudgIT is a civic organisation that uses technology tools to simplify public budgets and matters of public spending for citizens, with the primary aim of raising the standard of transparency and accountability in government. BudgIT's official request for clarity on the project cost of the Blue Line and concerns raised by some industry experts are available at: <https://hallmarknews.com/controversy-trails-blue-line-over-cost-of-project/>

¹⁷ Funso Doherty, Lagos State 2023 governorship candidate of the Action Democratic Congress, queried the supposed award of N2.1 billion to a consultant for the engagement of a loan facilitator and an adviser on the Blue Line. Available at: <https://thewhistler.ng/blue-line-rail-adcs-funso-doherty-queries-sanwo-olus-n2-1bn-contract-award-to-consultant-for-loan-facilitation/>

¹⁸ The megacity narrative is typically used by the state government to justify the implementation of "modern" infrastructural projects like this one, often with little attention paid to the actual impacts on different groups of citizens, especially the poor.

¹⁹ Lagos State Development Plan 2052. Available at: https://api.lagosmepb.org/lscp-resources/LSDP_2052_Quick_Read.pdf

²⁰ Ogunbiyi, T. (2023). Blue Line Rail and the Rising Greater Lagos. Lagos State Government Official Website, September 8. Available at: <https://lagosstate.gov.ng/blue-line-rail-and-the-rising-greater-lagos-tayo-ogunbiyi/>

1. **Operations:** How does the actual running of line compare with the advertised schedule? Which (public/private) entities are in charge of ensuring smooth day-to-day operations, and how capable are they from an institutional perspective?
2. **Maintenance:** How responsive are the (public/private) entities in charge of keeping the line and the associated infrastructure (including stations and pedestrian bridges) technically sound?
3. **Safety:** What are passengers' perceptions of safety and wellbeing on all components of the line (trains, stations and pedestrian bridges), especially for women, children and the elderly? To what extent are these perceptions borne out by actual experiences? What, if any, measures are needed to optimise user safety on the line?
4. **Sustainability:** What technologies power the line's operations, and how environmentally sustainable are they? How does the line compare with other modes of public transport in this regard?
5. **Affordability:** What is the pricing regime on the line, and how do the fares compare with alternative modes of transport? What is the average expenditure on the line as a share of individual/household transportation costs, and as a share of individual/household incomes?
6. **Inclusiveness:** What segment(s) of the population does the line serve? What segment(s) does it leave out? What concessionary measures may be required to increase access for excluded/vulnerable groups, and how should those concessions be financed?

The next section describes the approach taken to asking and answering these questions, with the aim of providing citizens with insights into the opportunities and risks presented by the state's ongoing investment in the Blue Line.

IV. Methodology

Primary data collection began with a half-day reconnaissance visit to the Blue Line infrastructure by the research team in October 2024. The visit yielded an overview of the experiences and travel patterns of commuters on the line, leading the team to clarify previously held assumptions about the availability of commuters for in-depth interviews while in transit. The visit also revealed challenges that the team was likely to encounter in the data collection process. These included the following:

- a. The haste of targeted respondents, who were typically commuters with little time to spare for interviews of any length;
- b. Skepticism from some commuters and non-commuters around having their interviews audio-recorded, despite promises to keep all responses confidential and anonymous;
- c. The availability of only a handful of commuters during off-peak periods – especially at the intermediate stations on the line (i.e., National Theatre, Iganmu and Alaba), which engendered a focus on the much busier Mile 2 and Marina stations;
- d. the reluctance of onsite staff to take interviews or permit interviews with commuters – both inside the trains and at the train stations – in the absence of written approval from LAMATA.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the team was able to implement the following data collection activities over three weeks in October and November of 2024:

- **Observation:** This was carried out both independently and in conjunction with other methods. A standardised protocol (see annex 1) guided the data collector's observations in relation to the research questions, while leaving room for other information that might be relevant to the study.
- **Rapid survey:** Using Google Forms, short questionnaires were deployed to Blue Line commuters and non-commuters. The data captured on those forms included gender, age, marital status, employment status and education level of respondents. The survey was also useful for triangulating interview responses to questions around the operation, maintenance, sustainability, affordability, inclusiveness and safety of the line. In total, the team gathered survey data from a total of 61 commuters and non-commuters, with more than half of those (32) being commuters, and non-commuters amounting to 29.
- **Commuter and non-commuter interviews:** Leveraging insights from the reconnaissance visit, the team designed tools to capture commuter experiences in an open-ended interview format, allowing respondents to express their opinions about the Blue Line. With the informed consent of respondents, 47 audio-recorded interviews spanning a little over three hours were carried out over the data collection period.
- **Key informant interviews:** Using a snowball sampling approach, the team conducted an interview with two senior LAMATA officials, an informal conversation with another senior LAMATA official and two separate interviews with independent observers – a journalist with relevant publications on the Blue Line and an international consultant with extensive knowledge of the Lagos and Nigerian transport system. Additionally, the team participated in a public online conversation hosted by LAMATA on X (formerly Twitter) Spaces. These interviews gave the team unique insights into the state government's plans and expectations for the transport sector in general and the Blue Line in particular.

The next section reports the findings from these engagements and discusses key insights emerging from them with respect to the research questions outlined in section III above.

V. Findings

a. Operations

The Blue Line currently makes 72 trips every weekday, running from 6am to 9pm each day. This is up from 12 trips a day at the start of operations in 2023, and then 54 trips up until August 2024, following which the frequency of the service was again increased to better accommodate commuter traffic on the route. The schedule is much lighter on Sundays: it operates from 6am to 9am in the morning, and then from 6pm to 9pm in the evening. The line operates for nearly 140 hours in a typical week, conveying between 8,000 to 10,000 commuters daily (an average of

50,000+ commuters weekly) from Mile 2 to Marina (as well as intermediate stops) and back.²¹ It takes approximately 18 minutes for the train to travel from Marina to Mile 2, and vice-versa.

Similar to Marina station, Mile 2, NT, Iganmu and Alaba stations also have seats for commuters (albeit also limited in number), conveniences, ticketing booths and self-service machines. However, there is no retail activity as is the case in Marina, reflecting the low volume of commuter traffic at these intermediate stations. The stations are also staffed by LAMATA operatives (ticketing officers, passenger operators and customer representatives) and security personnel. The staff on hand can be helpful, although responses from commuters interviewed indicate that levels of courteousness and professionalism are not uniform across the board.

The train itself has only four carriages, with the number and capacity remaining constant regardless of volume of traffic and time of day. This inevitably leads to extremes in which the train is overcrowded at peak periods and underutilised during off-peak hours. Passengers sit facing each other inside the carriage, with the aisles and poles providing additional standing room for those unable to find seats. Similar to the BRT, standing passengers can hold on to straps suspended from the ceiling of the train for added support. While the seats are designed for about 40 commuters per carriage (i.e., a total of 160 commuters at full seating capacity), the standing room in the train allows for that capacity to extend to as many as 400 commuters at once.²²

While overcrowding during peak hours is a common feature of metro lines globally, the capacity of the Blue Line is very low, to begin with. Combined with a reluctance on the part of many commuters to stand through the 18-minute journey from one end to the other, the shortage of space often leads to jostling among commuters – ensuring that only the fittest are able to get on board. On the other hand, increasing the number of carriages to cater to rush-hour traffic would invariably leave even more of the train's capacity unused during off-peak hours, unless ways can be found to direct more traffic to the train during those hours. The onus is on LAMATA to strike a balance these two extremes of demand so that the investment delivers maximum benefit to the state and citizens alike. We will return to this theme of value for money in the concluding section.

Lastly, by the admission of LAMATA staff, the full benefit of the Blue Line will only be realised when operations extend all the way up to Okokomaiko as originally planned. It is the ability to cover this distance in one go and cut off the associated traffic that would be of most value to commuters along that axis. LAMATA recently announced in a promotional television segment that the second phase of the line will be delivered in 2026,²³ though details regarding sources of financing for the project are not clear.

²¹ These estimates resulted from the observation conducted by the research team during fieldwork.

²² As above, these estimates are based on the observations conducted during the fieldwork period.

²³ Channels Television news, 2 December 2024. Available at:
<https://youtu.be/EG42iEdPObM?si=vT0EZ9jsobVEDftn>



Figure 8. Commuters disembarking from the train at Marina station. The bottleneck created at the exit is typical of busy periods. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

According to the LAMATA staff interviewed for this report in late 2024, the agency is still on the lookout for private-sector concessionaires to finance the remaining construction, indicating that public funding for the venture is limited. This points to the need for the state to weigh the cost of expensive infrastructure projects such as this one against possible alternatives before embarking on a course of action. Indeed, the decision to pivot from the Red Line to the Blue Line despite the huge cost involved raises questions about the degree to which political expediency, rather than technical merit or financial readiness, may have influenced this outcome. A change in the direction of transparency and accountability is needed in this regard.

b. Maintenance

Maintenance refers to the ability to operate the trains and the associated infrastructure over time to the same standard as was established at the start. Given the level of sophistication of the Blue Line, especially relative to other transport infrastructure in the state, a significant degree of maintenance is required to keep it functioning. LAMATA is emphatic about its readiness to keep up standards on the line beyond the levels that typically obtain locally:

“What we have so far is... an approved maintenance threshold or maintenance regime, which looks okay, when, how you maintain the track and the rolling stock. And that is what we are working towards. So, we have the normal daily maintenance, we have the weekly, we have the heavy maintenance, all those things are in place because we have what we call a maintenance strategy and maintenance plan, which we have to check and work accordingly. So, I can guarantee you that both the Blue and the Red that have been implemented now will be maintained in accordance with international best practice.” – LAMATA Key Informant

Evidence from our fieldwork appears to support this assertion. At National Theatre station, for example, the research team observed maintenance checks and repairs being carried out by staff. In addition, workers were seen regularly cleaning the train carriages, leaving them looking clean and comfortable for commuters.



Figure 9. Ongoing maintenance at Mile 2 station. Photo credit: Israel Faleye.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this maintenance regime over time remains to be seen. This cautious stance is substantiated by the observation that, in just over a year of operation, wear and tear have started to set in for some of the equipment at the train stations. For example, there are stations (such as Mile 2) in which air conditioners have stopped working. In other places, the functionality of self-service machines and touch-and-pay devices has begun to decline.



Figure 10. Train carriages are kept clean and comfortable for commuters. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

In addition, the free WiFi service advertised inside the trains simply does not work. Issues of maintenance have led several stakeholders to propose private-sector management as an antidote

to decline on the line. While there are merits to private sector participation, public investment will likely still be required to promote affordability and inclusion across commuter segments. LAMATA can draw on some of the lessons learned in this regard from its experience running public-private partnerships on the BRT scheme.²⁴

Another important consideration with regard to maintenance relates to human capital development. CCECC, the Chinese company that built the Blue Line, has been in charge of running the trains and maintaining the infrastructure since it began operations in 2023. This is expected to continue for the next two to four years, according to the terms of the agreement the company signed with the Lagos state government. The expectation is that, during this time, the company will transfer its operations and maintenance know-how to staff hired locally by LAMATA into management, technical and commuter-facing roles. This task is arguably not made easier by indications that some hiring is done on the basis of personal connections rather than merit, leading commuters dissatisfied with the level of service provided in some instances:

"Especially these rude attendants, they are not trained for the job. That is where they need a major improvement... Look at that lady now. Sitting there, she has a multitude of people to attend to, but you feel relaxed going through your book or whatever you are doing. That's not what you're employed to do. You're employed to communicate with customers. People need to approach you before they get whatever information."
– Commuter, Mile 2 station

Some commuter responses also point toward malpractice by station staff, though the prevalence of this in everyday interactions is not clear:

"The staff are okay; just that some people say that most times, most of the staff – I don't know – they said they engage in criminal acts by shortchanging commuters through the ticketing. Someone complained about it the last time I came. It has never happened to me before. I suggested that they should be giving them 1,000 [naira] at a time rather than loading much at a go. The last time I was here, a woman was shouting and the man acted innocent. They have to look into it." – Commuter, Mile 2 station

The bottom line is that customer experience may be just as important as the functionality of the service in determining the value proposition of the line to the commuting public and, by extension, its long-term viability. As such, LAMATA needs to pay attention to developing both the "soft" and "hard" skills needed to create the world-class experience it has promised to local commuters.

c. Safety

There are several safety features built into the Blue Line infrastructure to guard against vandalism (historically a major threat to rail infrastructure in the country) and protect commuters. One of these is a motion detector system that alerts the control centre for the whole line whenever anyone moves close to the tracks and tries to inflict damage.

²⁴ <https://www.lamata-ng.com/services/brt/#1452765443215-63a10c55-a5ef>

Safety cameras are ubiquitous inside the train carriages and around the stations, transmitting live video feeds from these points to the control center. In the event of any disruptive activity, members of the Lagos Neighbourhood Security Corp are deployed to the scene as first responders. Additionally, there are reportedly dedicated teams of security personnel in mufti parading in and around the stations. The job of these undercover officers is to neutralise threats to commuters and staff and stymie potential terrorist attacks.



Figure 11. Commuters and non-commuters reported feeling overwhelmingly safe around the Blue Line infrastructure, at least in the daytime. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

These measures demonstrate an awareness on the part of the state of the need to safeguard lives and public property. The cadre of officers in LAMATA appears to have the credentials to implement this mandate. One of the top officials, for example, has considerable experience in rail operations safety and regulation within and outside Nigeria. This official has been able to parlay

international experience into local application by designing the safety and technical specifications of the first Electric Multiple Unit²⁵ installed for the state.

It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that many commuters and non-commuters who interface regularly with the train and the stations report feeling very safe in and around the infrastructure. About eight out of every 10 commuters and non-commuters surveyed for this study reported feeling safe, with little to no anxiety over their own safety or that of others.

Nonetheless, the government's record of limited transparency in making information available to the public, and a historical lack of continuity in the Nigerian political system, have made some observers skeptical about the future safety of the Blue Line. For instance, while LAMATA was largely commended for its response to a fire incident that recently occurred on a section of the line,²⁶ the government's earlier statement about zero occurrence of any accident or near-miss in more than a year of operating the line were quickly tempered by reports in the mainstream media pointing out that it was indeed the second instance of a safety incident that had been recorded on the line.²⁷ While this latest incident was swiftly addressed by LAMATA, with the line back up and running less than 24 hours later, the state's tendency toward optimism indicates that vigilance is required on the part of citizens to promote transparency in the reporting of the line's operations by the government.

Furthermore, interviews with commuters revealed that there had been occurrences of power outage on the line, an especially significant issue given the centrality of electricity to the line's operations. In Marina and Mile 2, commuters reported the lack of streetlighting around the stations, making it unsafe for commuters and non-commuters – especially women, children and the elderly – to be in those areas at night:

“Some of the people have entered it. They're satisfied with the train, you know, so that all of us will be... The problem we have now, the street light beside the train station is not working. The street light is not working. Even at night now, there is no light on it. You can witness it by yourself.” – Non-commuter, Mile 2 station

Given that LAMATA claims to be generating more than enough power from a dedicated plant to power the line, user experiences of power outage and unlit spaces seem out of place. The role of maintenance highlighted above also comes into focus here: beyond providing infrastructure for lighting, continuous attention to its functioning is required for it to operate maximally and yield substantive benefits to users.

²⁵ An Electric Multiple Unit is a composition of one or more carriages which, if joined with other multiple units, can be driven by a single driver – with electricity as the motive power.

²⁶ Around 4pm on a Saturday in October 2024, a small section of the Lagos Blue Line track (near Eko bridge in the Apongbon area) caught fire. The state acknowledged the incident on social media but assured the public that there were no casualties, and that there was no train in operation at the time of the incident (<https://punchng.com/breaking-fire-guts-lagos-blue-line-track/>).

²⁷ Multiple reports dating as far back as March 2023 cite a fire incident on the Blue Line track at Marina, two months after its official inauguration in January 2023 – but well before it began commercial operations in September 2023. According to the state police, the fire started from a generator that had been installed to power the line. (<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/03/01/fire-guts-newly-inaugurated-lagos-blue-rail-line/>)

d. Sustainability

As part of the World Bank-approved Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) of the Lagos Urban Transport Project 2 that was launched in August 2010, LAMATA stated its plans to build environmental sustainability into its operations. Further, mandated by the Federal Ministry of Environment under the Environmental Impact Assessment Act No. 82 of 1992, the agency reportedly conducted environmental and social impact assessments before construction started on the Blue Line.²⁸ An ESIA certificate was issued to LAMATA, signalling to the public that the state would prioritise the impacts on people and the environment in its pursuit of its transportation objectives on the corridor.

The ESMF identifies five major building blocks of the environmental and social impact plan of the Blue Line (as well as the other lines planned for the metro rail network). These are: the need for the **infrastructure** to be easily accessible for both daily use and maintenance; the integration of **signalling and communication** technology to coordinate the movement of trains; the need to procure appropriate **rolling stock** (i.e., trains) that can be properly operated and adequately maintained; the need to secure the commitment of **maintenance** contractors to avoid service breakdowns; and the integration of the rail network into **future projections** for multimodal transport within the state.

There is evidence to suggest that, even in its half-finished state, the Blue Line has incorporated several aspects of the ESMF in its operations. Importantly, the state went beyond its original commitment to acquire diesel-powered trains in the framework to procuring trains that run on electricity, an achievement it has subsequently touted as an unqualified win for sustainability:

“What we’ve done so far is for us to develop an independent power plant that powers the Blue Line. And the beauty of it is that this thing is being done by local engineers. It’s the young engineers from Nigeria; they did it and it’s been successful. We have not had any issue since we commenced using the electricity to power our rail track.”
– LAMATA Key Informant

The Blue Line was powered by diesel generators for about four weeks when it started operations, but a longer-term shift to electricity has since been made. However, the independent power plant referenced in the quote above is a diesel-powered system designed to serve as backup for the main supply of electricity from the grid, which itself is mainly powered by gas.²⁹ It is unclear the extent to which LAMATA has factored in the economic and political risks associated with both diesel and gas in the line’s operations, and whether there are any plans in the near future to transition to truly sustainable sources of electricity.

²⁸ According to LAMATA key informants, environmental and social impact assessments were conducted before the commencement of the Blue Line; however, any official ESIA reports or certificates that might have been issued are not available in the public domain.

²⁹ Ojelabi, K. (2024). Blue Line receives sustainability boost with test of Independent Power Plant. Available at: <https://www.lamata-ng.com/blue-line-receives-sustainability-boost-with-test-of-independent-power-plant/>



Figure 12. A power generation room for the Blue Line as seen from the pedestrian footbridge adjoining Mile 2 station. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

Another important question relates to whether the electricity generated by the independent power plant could be put to alternative uses given the prevailing energy poverty in the surrounding areas and the city as a whole:

“And your point about diesel versus electric is also really interesting, because they have made a kind of a big thing of that... They didn't need to, because even if they're running on diesel, like, the efficiency of a train compared to the number of people that would have undertaken the journey on danfos... it would easily be more environmentally friendly. But they have gone down that route, so therefore, they need to kind of be held to account on it. But even if they are being powered by electricity, where is that coming from? And what does that mean for electricity? That's kind of not going into the wider system because... it takes a high level of electricity to power a train. And so, is that the best use of limited electricity capacity in Lagos state? – Independent transport consultant

These are valid points that deserve to be taken seriously. They highlight the need to look more closely into optimistic narratives which, although not altogether untrue, can obscure a lot of difficult questions that still need to be addressed if the state is going to achieve the most sustainable and inclusive outcomes for its citizens.

e. Affordability

Commuters on the Blue Line are currently charged a government-subsidised fare of NGN 750 for the entire length of the line from Marina to Mile 2. The fare is reduced for intermediate stations, with the lowest being NGN 148 for the Marina–Iganmu stretch at off-peak hours.

Trip	Fare (peak hours)	Fare (off-peak hours)
Marina – Mile 2	NGN 750	NGN 562
Marina – Iganmu	NGN 562	NGN 422
Marina – National Theatre	NGN 500	NGN 375
Mile 2 – National Theatre	NGN 500	NGN 375
Mile 2 – Iganmu	NGN 400	NGN 300
Mile 2 – Alaba	NGN 200	NGN 150

Table 1. Fares charged for selected trips during peak (6–10 am and 4–9 pm) and off-peak hours (10am – 4 pm). Off-peak fares are 75% of the full fare for respective trips (<https://www.lamata-ng.com/blue-line-upscale-to-72-trips-per-day-introduces-25-fare-discount-for-off-peak-travels/>).

Fares on the line were subsidised from the beginning, although the level of subsidy has reduced over time – a development which appears to have resulted in the exit of some erstwhile commuters:

“Before, we were paying 3-something [naira] and they removed the subsidy, and we started paying 5-something [naira]... If they change the price, it does not affect [us], because Nigeria, here we have different people. If they put the price at 2,000 [naira], some people will still be able to afford it. Just that the capacity the train normally carries will reduce. I can remember that when the price moved from 3-something to 4-something, the capacity is reduced.” – Commuter, Mile 2 station

By keeping a level of subsidy in place, the government seems to be aware of the price sensitivity of some commuter segments. However, there are commuters who have been consistent in using the line since its inception, and some in this group report a noticeable increase in the volume of traffic in recent times, especially during the morning and evening peaks. They attribute this to the dramatic increases in the price of petrol following the removal of government subsidies in early 2023, which, in turn, has led to much higher road transport fares across the country:

“Before, when CMS-Mile 2 was still boarded at the rate of 500 and 400 [naira], when fuel price was not as high, at least it was not as choking as this. But when they started charging 700, 1000 [naira]... I think the fuel price went up last month or in the upper month. It was not like this before last month. It was when the price went up... It was always choking also, but not as choking as this. Right now, it is now like 3 times the traffic [on the train].” – Commuter, Marina station

For this segment of commuters, the convenience of using the train far outweighs the current cost to them.³⁰ Indeed, this group sees the pressure on the train infrastructure during rush hour as a direct consequence of the still-reasonable pricing enabled by the ongoing subsidy. For many travelling along the Marina-Mile 2 route, the cost of a round trip during peak hours comes to at least 500 naira cheaper than going by road.³¹ When they factor in the myriad conditions of road travel – traffic jams, bad roads, traffic diversions, poorly maintained buses, improper behaviour by almost all road users, lack of enforcement of the highway code, and extortion by state and non-state actors – they consider train travel a no-brainer and are willing to pay the sticker price.

"With the amount of hold-up, you need to go to CMS and see what's happening there. Lagos Island is jam-packed with hold-up. So, it pays to use train. Under 10 minutes, you're there. It is very plain and safe. When you are there in the evening towards 6:37, the train used to fill up. For now, because there is no rushing, [the buses] can take 400 or 500 [naira], but the hold-up on the road is the problem... [The buses can take] even 1000... Orile here is 2,000 [naira]. Standing alone, everyone wanted to follow the train; it was very safe and faster." – Non-commuter, Alaba station

This enthusiasm for the train exists alongside an abiding affinity for public buses – however chaotic they may seem – among other commuters. For this latter group, it is precisely the chaotic conditions on the road that present opportunities for negotiation and adaptation: a shortcut taken to avoid traffic here, the opportunity to snag a lower fare than usual there:

"To Marina, before the hike in fuel price, it used to be 300, 400, 500 [naira]. They still make it available for 400 and 500 [naira]; you just have to look out for the buses that run on diesel. Their price is a bit reasonable compared to those running on petrol." – Commuter, Mile 2 station

"That's one of the reasons I don't take the train, because the buses are often left with many alternative routes to beat traffic and buses often take us to the very doorstep." – Non-commuter, Mile 2 station

This last quote touches on an important point; that of the need to facilitate end-to-end journeys for commuters in the city, regardless of mode of transport. This means that, along with providing rail and BRT infrastructure along the main transport corridors, last-mile infrastructure also needs to be built – at a commensurate pace. Following the ban of motorcycle taxis or okadas in many areas of the state, the demand for last-mile connectivity has been met mainly by kekes (tricycles) and koropes (8-seater minivans). It is unlikely that the value proposition of the Blue Line and other rail infrastructure will be sufficiently compelling for many commuters until it is appropriately integrated with last-mile infrastructure, including non-motorised transport options.

³⁰ The assessment of these commuters does not factor in the cost of shuttles, BRT or any other mode of transport used to connect to the train – or to danfo buses plying the Marina–Mile 2 route.

³¹ The difference in cost is much lower during off-peak hours (roughly 10 am to 4 pm): the train is only around NGN 100-200 cheaper in that window.

Meanwhile, a degree of tension continues to be apparent between the goal of affordability and the viability of the business model for the line. The government appears to be in a catch-22 situation: while the impetus for the emphasis on rail is a seemingly genuine belief that it will spur economic growth in the state, the upfront investment required to get the infrastructure up and running (and the related opportunity cost) is so significant as to prompt scrutiny of the model's appropriateness in the context. On the matter of subsidies, for example, transparency is required around the amounts involved, how they are funded, and how long they can be expected to last. In other words, citizens need to be apprised of the full costs of this venture to the state, so that any immediate and future benefits to the economy can be properly calibrated.

This rigorous accounting is especially appropriate given that metro systems are extremely expensive to build and maintain the world over, and they are even more so for cities of the global south with many needs and limited resources. It is important that local economic realities – i.e., the financial and fiscal capacity of not just individual citizens, but also the state – are factored into the government's decisions regarding the kinds of public infrastructure that would make for sound economic and social investment.

In the meantime, the rising costs of living and worsening poverty nationwide³² will ensure that pricing remains a hot-button issue for commuters in the city. Already, transportation accounts for a significant portion of household expenditure, along with rent and food.³³ Part of the solution lies in expanding functional transport options beyond the current political focus on rail, including finding ways to integrate informal bus operators into the overall city transport plan, given that they still account for the majority of journeys. LAMATA's plans for the Bus Industry Transition Programme constitute a step in this direction; however, care needs to be taken to ensure that it is not driven by a technocratic focus on aesthetics, but that it engages appropriately with the economic and social arrangements that have historically governed those informal spaces.

In the final analysis, it is unlikely that an overwhelming focus on developing rail infrastructure – or any other kind of infrastructure – will resolve those transportation challenges that stem from institutional failure, such as the tendency for law enforcement officials to exacerbate traffic problems through extortionary practices. Attention therefore has to be paid to building the capacity of the institutions in question at the same time that investments in infrastructure are being made.

f. Inclusiveness

By design, the Blue Line is only able to serve commuters who need to travel along the Marina–Mile 12 axis. While the line currently serves a fraction of those commuters (10,000 people per day at the most), the general expectation, as highlighted above, is that it will be used by many more people when phase 2 of the line from Mile 2 to Okokomaiko is completed.

Interviews with LAMATA staff revealed the existence of a dynamic that is common to metro lines in many places: while there is no deliberate attempt to leave out any segment of commuters, the

³² Tunji, S. & Aina, D. (2024). Skyrocketing inflation: Nigerians lament hunger, W'Bank says 129m trapped in poverty. The Punch newspapers, October 18.

³³ National Bureau of Statistics (2019). Consumption Expenditure Pattern in Nigeria. Available at: <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/Consumption%20Expenditure%20Pattern%20in%20Nigeria%202019.pdf>

nature of the infrastructure means that it is likely to have greater appeal for certain kinds of commuter than for others. These tend to be workers and business people travelling alone, with the overriding considerations in their view being efficiency and expediency. During our observations on the line, for example, it was rare to see women travelling with children, or older children travelling on their own, or senior citizens, or pregnant women – even in the daytime.

People with disabilities were also conspicuously absent, even though the stations feature accessibility features such as elevators (in at least one station, these were out of service at the time of fieldwork, indicating a need for better maintenance of the facilities). Even the absence of comparatively minor features such as seats for commuters in the station and platform areas – ostensibly to prevent loitering – can be discouraging to commuters who are infirm or less able-bodied. It should be possible for LAMATA to make much better accommodations for these groups without compromising on the objective of ensuring security for all commuters.

Even in its current iteration, however, more can be done to increase the value proposition of the line for prospective commuters. Adding more carriages to the train, increasing the frequency of journeys, and improving last-mile connectivity: these are all measures that could help to get more commuters off the road and onto the train. The issue of last-mile connectivity especially may account for the low representation of people with disabilities on the line and in public transit across the city more generally.

In the absence of these enabling factors, the line has become a sideshow for some commuter segments and a curiosity for others. During our fieldwork, for instance, it was instructive to observe throngs of commuters walking past clearly marked entrances to the train station and the adjoining BRT stop to the disordered mass of danfo buses waiting at the foot of the pedestrian bridge. Meanwhile, there are other groups – young people, schoolchildren on guided tours, etc. – who primarily visit the line periodically to admire and extol the virtues of this piece of infrastructure that they see as befitting of Lagos in the 21st century, essentially interacting with it as they would a showpiece.³⁴ For groups like these, functionality is still elusive, and more needs to be done if they will eventually come to view the line as something that is actually relevant for their everyday commute rather than it just being an interesting piece of infrastructure to them.

Other factors that limit inclusion on the line include: pricing (as discussed in the section on affordability above); the reliance on technology (the Cowry card and the associated app are a deterrent to less tech-savvy commuters on the route); and the preponderance of English in communication material (all the signs in the stations are displayed only in English, for example).³⁵

Indeed, the results of the rapid survey conducted as part of fieldwork (annex 1) indicate that the train is popular with English speakers who have at least some secondary education, as well as

³⁴ There are a number of admiring citizen posts on social media showcasing the Blue Line as proof of technological advancement in Lagos, some explicitly targeted at fellow Nigerians in the diaspora.

³⁵ Station announcements inside the train are made in both English and Yoruba. This acknowledges the plurality of backgrounds among commuters in the city, but more needs to be done to include more segments of the population.

public/private employees and business people.³⁶ This would exclude a large segment of the city's population – in particular, low-income petty traders, many of them “market women” with little to no education. Our fieldwork revealed that many traders in this category have little use for the Blue Line given that they typically live within the vicinity of their shops/roadside stalls and only travel short distances to get to work. Still, by catering to the professional classes, the Blue Line presents an opportunity to displace private cars on the road and expand the BRT system for mass transit – provided that other conditions (such as the higher train capacity and last-mile connectivity highlighted above) are met.



Figure 13. Signs in and around the Blue Line stations are written in English. Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

This is all the more reason to develop a range of transportation options that can cater to many different segments of the population, as highlighted in the discussion on affordability above. Elite stakeholders (such as LAMATA officials and journalists) are wont to point to a simple lack of awareness as the reason for non-use of the line by many commuters, believing that more people would take the train regularly if only they knew of its many wonderful features. While the line indeed has much going for it, studies of technology adoption in global south contexts like Lagos indicate that it is not always a straightforward case of making more of the technology available or

³⁶ Civil servants feature prominently in the survey data, coming in second after trade/business people (annex 1). It is not clear whether the state government gives any incentives to this group apart from the general subsidies that are in place for the wider public.

“educating” citizens about the putative benefits of using it. Deeper engagement with the travel behaviours of different commuter segments is required, as well as a commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind in the state’s journey toward modernisation. It is only when this is done that the goal of building a city transport system that works for all can be achieved.

VI. Conclusions and implications for policy

This report has traced developments around the Blue Line rail, a linchpin of the Lagos state government’s transport masterplan, from the time it broke ground in 2009 to date. The report has shown how, driven by a partisan political vision that dates back to 1999 and a technocratic approach to infrastructure provision, the line has been established by the government as the first piece in broader network of metro rail services that will ultimately boost economic growth in the state and catapult the city to “megacity” status.

Our research set out to interrogate official and popular narratives surrounding the line, with a view to obtaining a clearer, if nuanced, picture of the costs and contribution of the infrastructure to the life of the city. Our findings indicate that the line has generally fared well on the indices of operations, maintenance and safety so far: the trains that are available run according to schedule; routine technical maintenance is conducted on the line; and the few safety incidents that have occurred to date have been swiftly handled – though it is not clear how much of the latter is owed to the temporary maintenance agreement the government has with CCECC. In any case, there is ample room for improvement even in these respects: train capacity and passenger traffic need to be simultaneously boosted to increase the rate of return on the formidable investment made by the government; the standard of the infrastructure needs to be kept up over time, including by ensuring professionalisation of the government agencies in charge; and more comprehensive safety measures are required to ensure the protection of women and vulnerable groups in particular.

Progress has been more mixed on the measures of sustainability, affordability and inclusiveness. It is significant that the line is powered by electricity, which potentially leaves a lower carbon footprint than the multitude of petrol and diesel-powered vehicles that ply the city’s roads daily. Indeed, if the line succeeded in displacing substantial numbers of those vehicles, it would help reduce the carbon emissions from road travel and would be a win for sustainability. However, the source of the electricity itself (i.e., diesel- and gas-powered plants) is far from sustainable. Moreover, any use of electricity on the line needs to be weighed against the potential gains of distributing that quantum of electricity more widely in a context where a huge energy deficit exists and much of the demand is met by polluting generators.

Further, our findings indicate that affordability and inclusiveness are intertwined, at least up to a point. Government subsidies, while not a universal antidote to the burden of transport costs, have helped keep fares within reach for some commuter segments. In particular, fares on the line increasingly compare favourably with the cost of road travel on particular stretches, especially when other benefits such as reduced travel time are considered. These factors seem to have diverted more traffic to the line, especially following recent dramatic increases in the price of petrol. However, the effect seems to be limited to certain types of commuter – especially office workers and business people with some education. While this is less than ideal, improving the functionality of the service as highlighted above could help absorb more of those commuters for

whom the line is most suited and create ripple effects on others elsewhere in the transport ecosystem. In particular, decongesting the roads may benefit the mass of commuters who do not have the money or inclination to go on the trains – if BRT/bus and last-mile services are improved on those corridors simultaneously.

The questions that remain largely unresolved are the big ones – notably, that of the value for money offered by the Blue Line to the state and citizens. To shed light on this issue, it is necessary to revisit the state government’s megacity narrative – a narrative that has become so entrenched that it has found its way into the popular consciousness, with indications that citizens, irrespective of circumstance, have resorted to taking the government’s word for it.³⁷ Our analysis however indicates that a more cautious, questioning stance is required in engaging with the government’s desire to cast Lagos as a modern state on a par with those in the most advanced economies globally.

First, big infrastructure like the Blue Line typically requires a lot of money to build and maintain, and it is not at all clear that the benefits and the burdens are equitably distributed, especially with regard to the share of the latter borne by the poorest. As highlighted above, half of the Blue Line alone is reported by the government to have cost USD 1.2 billion. This amount is a fraction of the current administration’s projection of USD 15 billion for revamping the city’s transport network in the short term, i.e., to 2026.³⁸ These are significant sums that warrant public scrutiny in a democracy. Further complications arise with the lack of transparency around funding sources and allocation, and the geopolitical risks that come with depending on foreign interests for the building and maintenance of critical infrastructure.

It is telling that the Blue Line in its present iteration took 13 years to build instead of the 36 months initially projected for it. Issues of funding can be assumed to have played a major role in this delay, since bottlenecks often attributed to a lack of political continuity can be reasonably ruled out in the case of Lagos. This raises practical questions for citizens on the ground – how many other low-hanging interventions could have been done by the state in that time with the funding available, for example? In 2010 alone, 65% of the state’s overall spend on transport was apparently devoted to the Blue Line and other rail infrastructure³⁹ – with relatively little to show for it on the ground. Meanwhile, the city’s population has continued to grow at astronomical rates in the intervening period, exacerbating the challenge of getting public transport infrastructure to keep up with demand.

³⁷ This was apparent in the response from a roadside trader whom we interviewed at a market close to Alaba station. The man and his neighbours suffered years of demolition and disruption to their trade during the construction of the Blue Line, only to realise afterward that the infrastructure has neither increased traffic to his business nor expanded his transport options. Seeking to minimise the impacts of the construction on traders like him, he asserted: “It is not easy, but all for the good of the state... at least, according to [the government], it is a megacity they are trying to build.”

³⁸ Onu, E. (2023). Megalopolis With World’s Worst Traffic Gets Metro After 12-Year Wait. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-05/lagos-nigeria-city-with-world-s-worst-traffic-gets-metro-after-12-year-wait>

³⁹ Lagos State Development Plan (2012-2025) by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget. September 2013 (pg. 74). Available at: <https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/LAGOS-STATE-DEVELOPMENT-PLAN.pdf>

As it stands, the Blue Line has reportedly moved just over 2 million people in roughly one year of operations⁴⁰ – a fraction of the 8 million people who commute *daily* in the city⁴¹ – notwithstanding the highly optimistic picture painted on signboards at the train stations. More is being done by the state: the first half of the Red Line was launched in October 2025; work is underway to complete the second half of the Blue Line in 2026; the state has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with another Chinese company for construction of the Green Line (from Lekki to Marina),⁴² and funding commitments are reportedly being secured for the Purple Line (from Redemption Camp in Ogun state to Ojo in Lagos) already.⁴³

It is reasonable to expect that the impacts of the state’s investment in rail will increase as the network expands. Nonetheless, it is important to raise the types of questions addressed in this report because the Blue Line is a lodestar of sorts in the sector, and the way that citizens engage the state on it can set a precedent for the raft of rail projects coming onstream in the future. Regardless of the state’s intent in rolling out these projects, it will always be important for citizens to keep track of the value they are getting for their money, and to ensure that political considerations don’t trump practical economic and social benefits for the majority.

In conclusion, we offer the following recommendations to policy actors seeking to ensure that the impacts of public investments in transport are distributed more widely:

1. Prioritise a wider range of options – including motorised and non-motorised road transport – alongside the focus on rail.
2. Make commensurate investments in last-mile infrastructure – including those operated by the informal sector, as part of a genuine effort to integrate those options into the city transport plan.
3. Appreciate that bigger infrastructure does not always translate into better service, and invest in smaller-scale transport infrastructure where this may be more appropriate.
4. Learn from the shortcomings of existing infrastructure projects in planning new ones, rather than attempt to sidestep those lessons. Pertinent examples include the BRT scheme and, more recently, the Oshodi Megabus Interchange Terminal.⁴⁴
5. Practice greater transparency and accountability with citizens, especially with regard to the real and opportunity costs of investing heavily in rail transport.

⁴⁰ Punch Newspapers. Lagos Blue Line rail transported two million passengers in one year – LAMATA. Available at: punchng.com/lagos-blue-line-rail-transported-two-million-passengers-in-one-year-lamata/

⁴¹ Danne Institute for Research. “What traffic congestion costs Lagos commuters.” Available at: <https://danneinstitute.org/publications/what-traffic-congestion-costs-lagos-commuters/>

⁴² Arise News (2024). “Lagos state signs MoU with Chinese firm for Green Line rail mass transit project,” September 6. Available at: <https://www.arise.tv/lagos-state-signs-mou-with-chinese-firm-for-green-line-rail-mass-transit-project/>

⁴³ Babajide Sanwo-Olu on X: <https://x.com/jidesanwoolu/status/1864430880426741865>

⁴⁴ Soon after this massive bus terminal was opened in 2021, a critic wrote that “more deliberate studies and interventions are... needed to make the... interchange functional, inclusive and to cater to the diverse needs of the teeming stakeholders” (<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/02/16/the-oshodi-megabus-interchange-scheme/>). Three years later, it does not seem like this piece of advice has been taken: the enormous structure is increasingly falling into disrepair, casting doubt on the government’s ability to maintain the infrastructure over the long term.

6. Reform relevant institutions (e.g., LASTMA, and even LAMATA) along with the improvements being made to transport infrastructure. The former is arguably harder to achieve, but it would lay the foundation for a more functional mass transit system overall.

With the above measures in place, all Lagosians will ultimately have a chance to move ahead – together.

3. Annex 1: Demographic breakdown of commuters surveyed

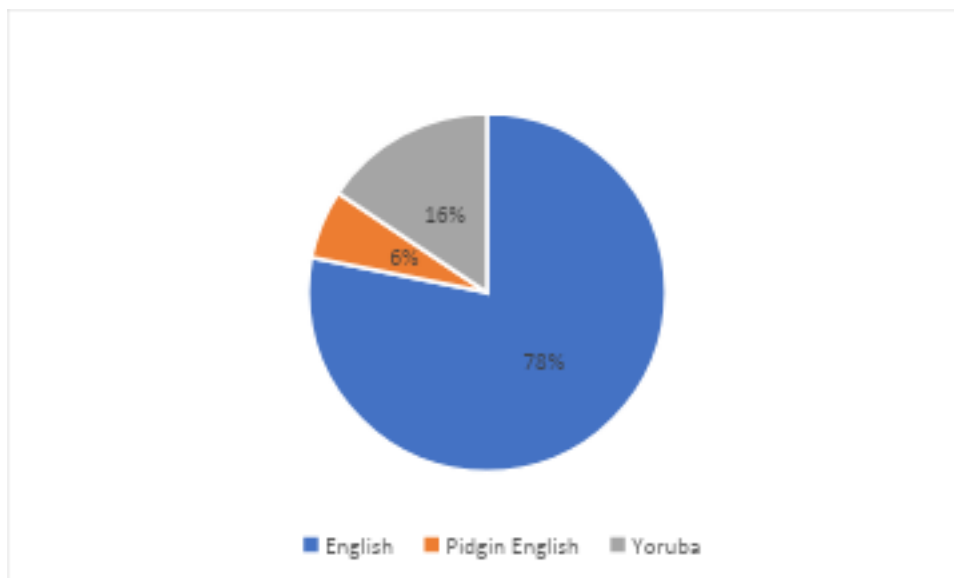


Figure i. Preferred language of communication. Source: Field data.

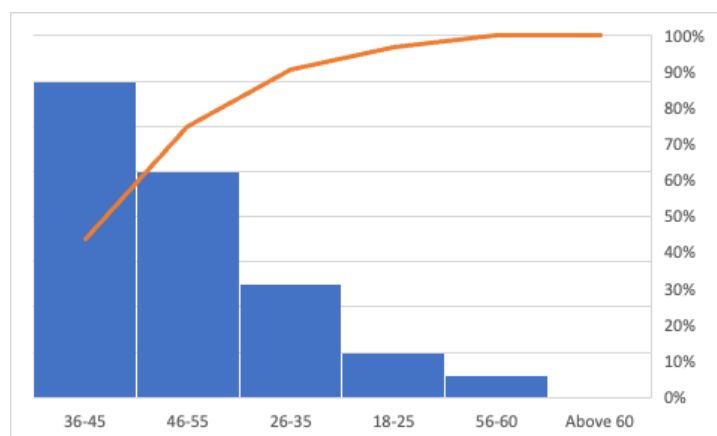


Figure ii. Age distribution of commuters. Source: Field data.

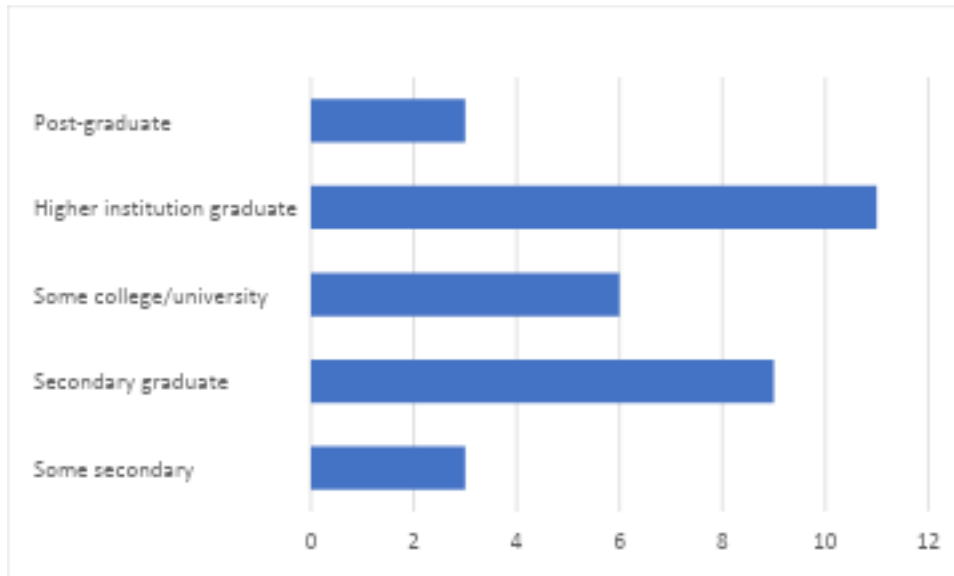


Figure iii. Education level of commuters. Source: Field data.

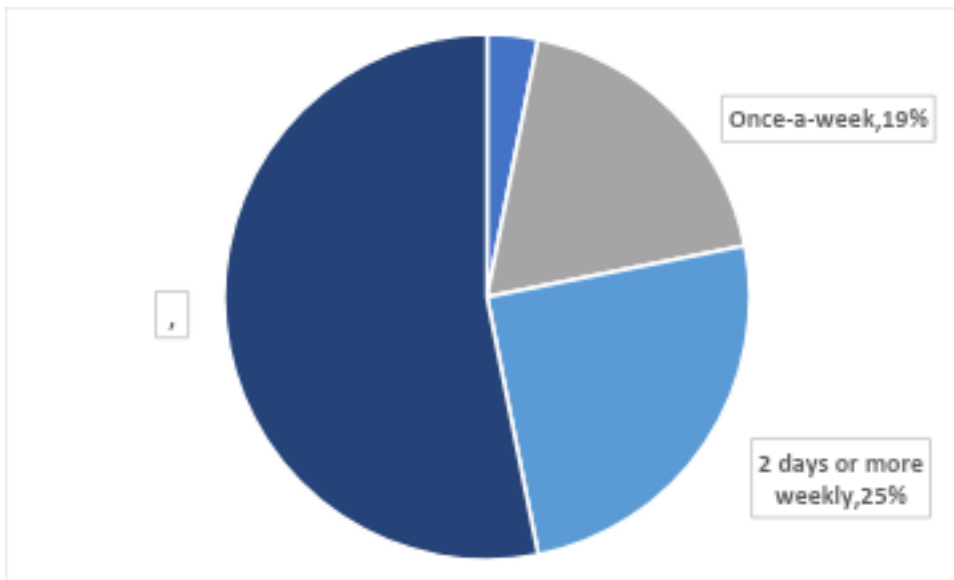


Figure iv. Frequency of usage of the Blue Line. Source: Field data.

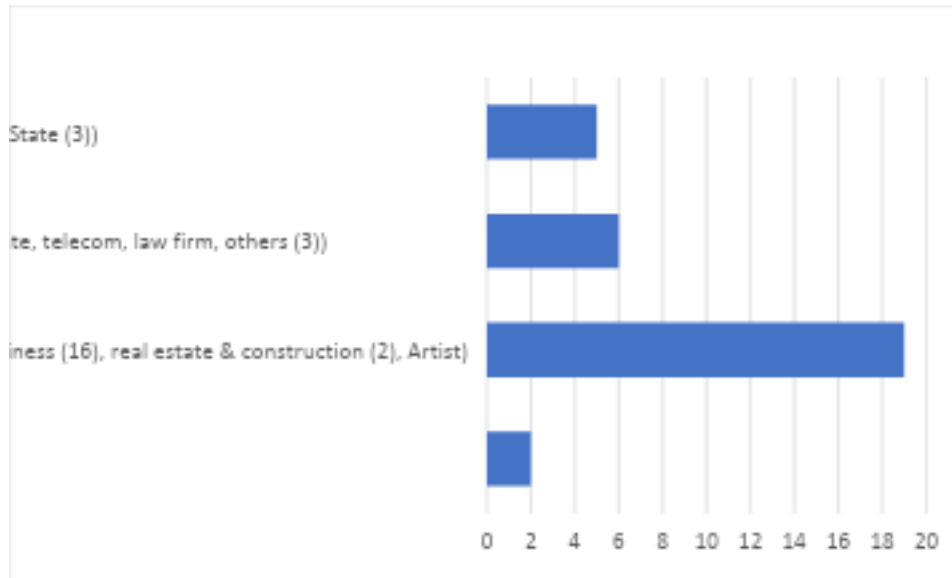


Figure v. Employment status of commuters. Source: Field data.

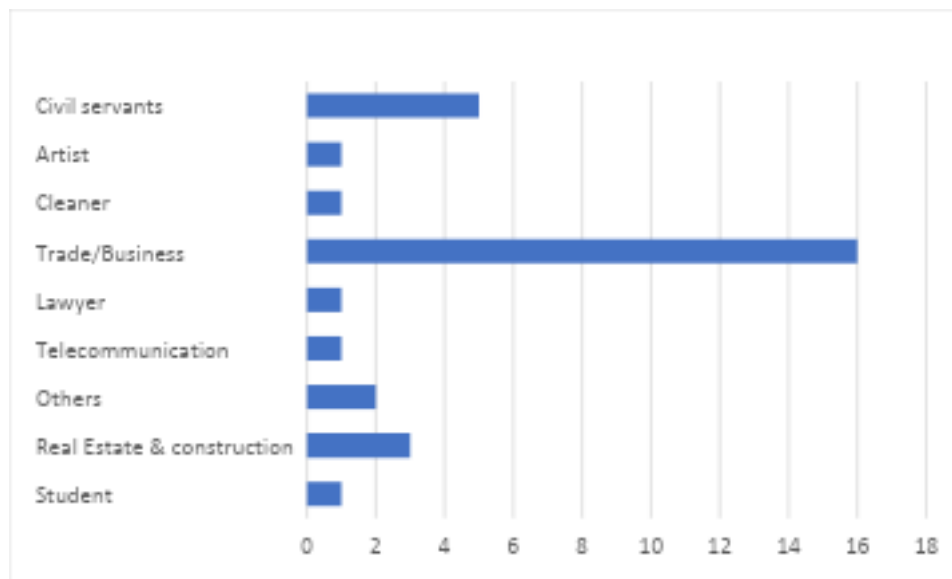


Figure vi. Job types of commuters. Source: Field data.

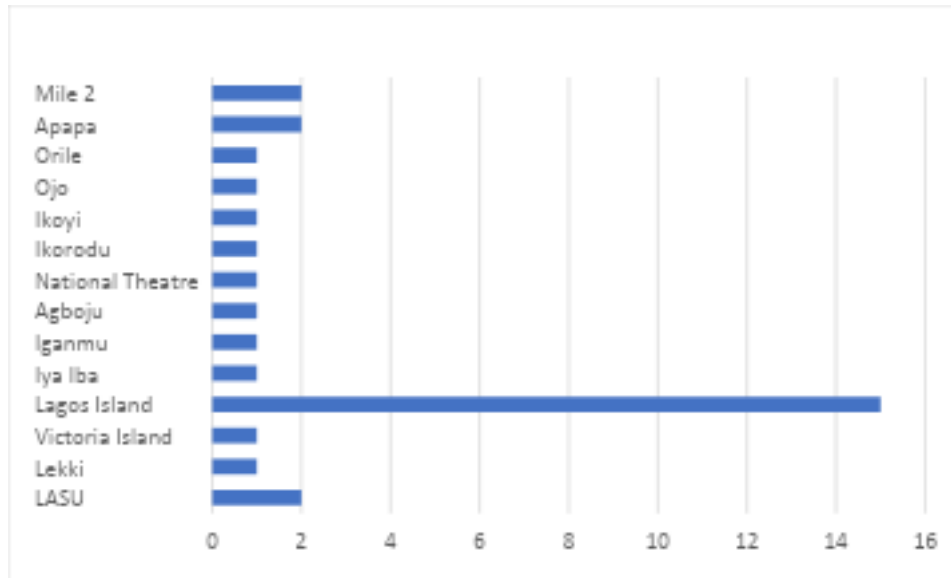


Figure vii. Location of office/place of business of commuters. Source: Field data.

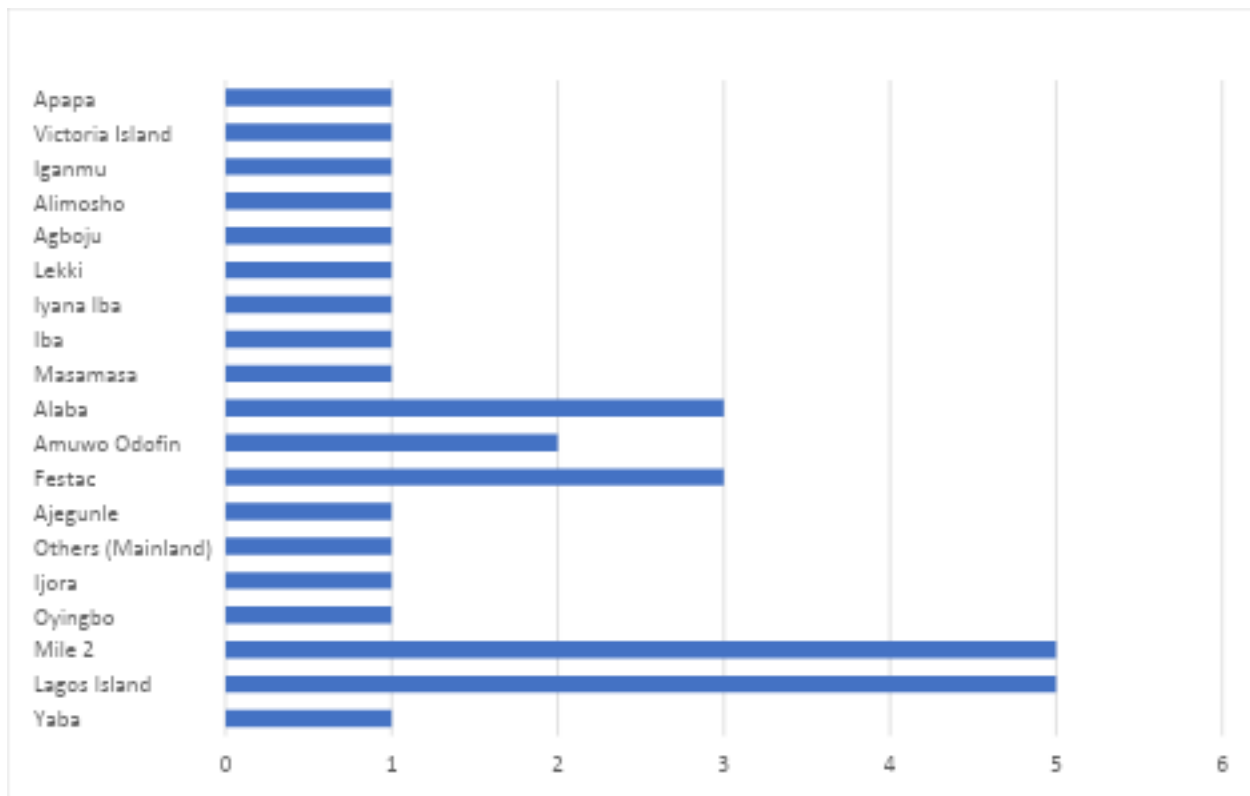


Figure viii. Location of residence of commuters, Source: Field data.