

Background to the Construction of the Bornu Railway Extension in Nigeria, 1954-1964

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Abstract
Beginning from the nineteenth century, several European imperial powers started building many socio-economic infrastructures in Africa for its effective exploitation. From the 1860s to the 1950s, all aspects of the development and management of railways in Africa were totally in the hands of European colonial officials. However, from the 1940s onwards, when African nationalists started to participate in the running of colonial governments and policy making and implementation, they became actively involved in deciding the nature, financing, location, and construction of infrastructure during the crucial decolonisation period. One of the railways constructed in Africa during this period was the Bornu Railway Extension in Nigeria (BRE). This study argues that the BRE was the child of politics rather than sound economic consideration. It arose from the self-serving synergy between the northern faction of the Nigerian political class and the British government, which belatedly supported the BRE for geopolitical and strategic reasons. It aligned with the weakest segment of the Nigerian bourgeoisie in the belief that through such alliance it would be able to continue to exercise hegemony over Nigeria and Africa after independence. The BRE was eventually constructed at a cost of twenty million pounds sterling and opened in 1964.
Keywords: colonialism, decolonialisation imperialism, infrastructure, railway, Bornu, World Bank

1. Introduction

Following the decision of fourteen major European imperial powers in the late nineteenth century to share out the continent of Africa among them, they decided to construct socio-economic infrastructures in the continent - for the purpose of exploiting its vast mineral and agricultural resources. From that time and up to the 1940s, all aspects of the construction, development, and management of the railway industry in Africa were firmly in the hands of European and colonial officials. This situation would change in the late 1940s onwards; at the onset of the decolonisation process and era.

This was the period when African nationalists and progressives started to question the stranglehold and hegemony of foreign imperial and colonial authorities in Africa over key socio-economic pillars of the continent's economies. Thus, as soon as the nationalists started became part and parcel of colonial governments, they began to influence the nature and purpose of new infrastructures on the continent. A good example of such interventions was in relation to the construction or development of new railways during the decolonisation period in Africa.

Using the construction of the Bornu Railway Extension as a case study, this essay argues that the decision to build multi-million dollars railways in Africa was motivated more by political, ethnic and geo-political calculations than the economics of those projects. In essence, this study seeks to examine the background to the development of one of the African "decolonisation railways."

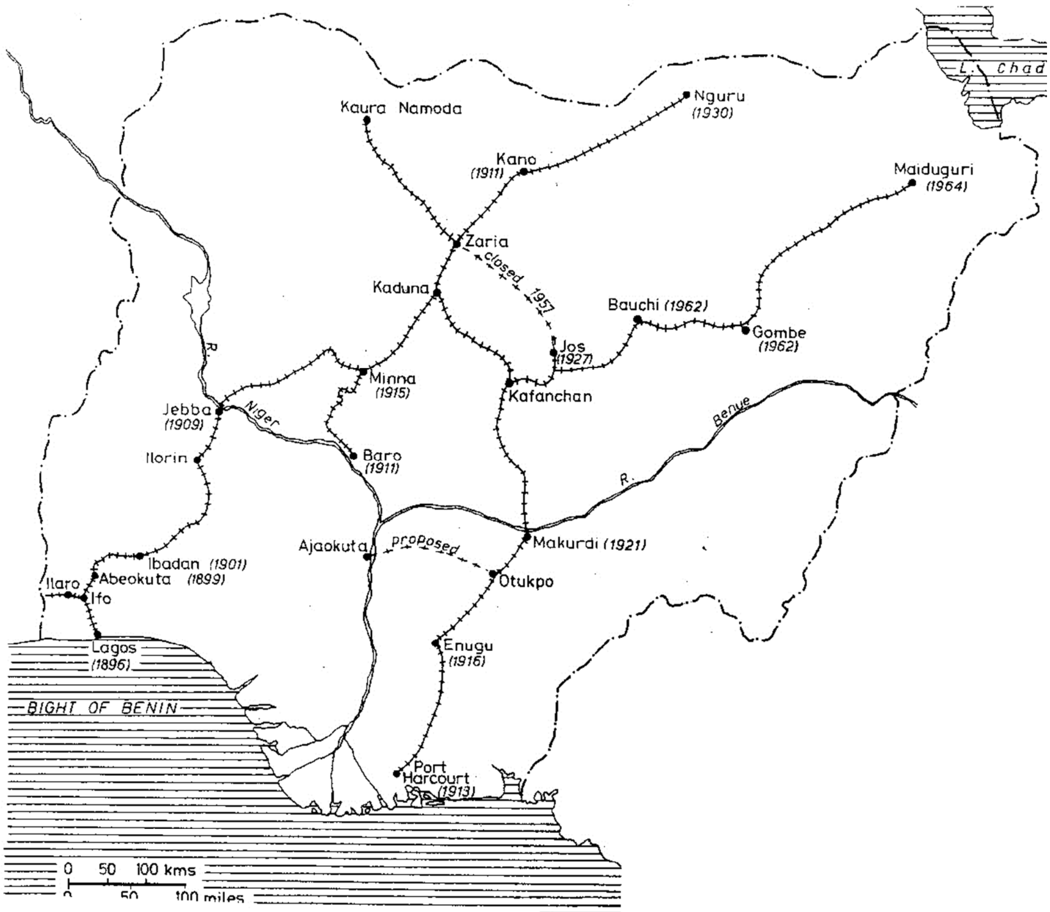

Figure 1: Map of Nigerian Railway Network

Source:

See T. A. Ayoola, 'Political Economy of Rail Transport in Nigeria, 1945-1985' Ph. D. Thesis, University of Manchester, 2004, 56.

2. Origins of the BRE

The first idea for the construction of a railway line to the northeastern part of Nigeria around the Lake Chad area was made by Messrs. Shelford and Sons, consulting engineers to the Crown Agents – principal agents to colonial governments on the construction of railway lines in British West African colonies.[1] The proposal received the strong backing of the Governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, Sir William Macgregor, and the High Commissioners of the Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria, Sir Ralph Moor and Sir Fredrick Lugard respectively.[2] These officials seem to have been endorsed the proposal on the understanding that with the development of a railway line to the edge of Lake Chad, Nigeria would be able to secure the northeastern territorial boundaries of Nigeria from possible encroachments from the French, who were alleged to be planning to construct a railway line from Algeria to Lake Chad.[3] Indeed if it were true that the French were planning such a railway project in the area, it would have undermined British economic interests in the Bornu area. This was just as the Germans in the neighbouring Cameroons were also planning to construct a railway line to the Chad area from Duala [4] - to undercut the British in the eastern flank of Nigeria. It was as a result of these competing "railway imperialism" that Lugard, whose protectorate was more threatened than the southern protectorate, articulated a broad British vision of British railway imperialism in Nigeria, a colony that was rich in mineral and agricultural resources. He wrote:

> … The railway from Lagos should… be extended to Kano and ultimately to Katsena (sic), while a railway from Old Calabar should develop the more eastern territories, crossing the Benue [River] between Ibi and Yola, and making its objective the north end of Lake Chad. Strategically these two railways would protect our two frontiers. I venture to think that this matter is of sufficient Imperial concern to warrant assistance from Imperial treasury.[5]

Notwithstanding the pressures exerted by Nigerian colonial officials on Whitehall to provide the necessary capital for the construction of a railway line into the Lake Chad area, no finance was forthcoming from London.

This was probably as a result of the poor perception of the officials London of the economic potential of the Bornu/Chad area. Subsequently, in 1907, Percy Girouard, Lugard's successor, argued that the Bornu area was so important to the economy of Northern Nigeria that it must be taken into consideration in any key decision on further railway development in Nigeria. He wrote:

> Any railway line from the Niger to Kano must pass through Nupe and Zaria to the heart of Kano. It will bring a large part of Bornu within one month of the Niger and Bauchi within ten days.[6]

Continuing further, Girouard stated that

> To the East of Kano lies the province of Bornu, which I have been as yet unable to visit. The largest of the Protectorate containing a population of half a million, it is today almost cut off from communication with the Central Government. A visit to its capital only, entailing a journey (from Zungeru) by land of some 2 ½ months.[7]

Ardent as Girouard was, there was no further development on the matter of railway development in the northeast of Nigeria until after the First World War, when Sir Lugard, the Governor-General of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, proposed many railway extensions to the existing network. Among the six extensions proposed, one was to run northeastward into Bornu and Lake Chad from either Kano, in the north central region, or Bukuru in the south central area of Nigeria, or Afikpo, near Udi coalfields (in the southeast), and passing through Yola, in the middle-belt area of Nigeria. Lugard justified the railway line on two grounds; and they were contrary to his earlier explanations on the same issue, in 1901. First, the line would secure the trade in the Chad Basin as far as the 'Egyptian Sudan' and discourage the construction of the French railway line into Duala. Second, it would open up the vast plains of Bornu, whose soil was as good as that of the 'Egyptian Sudan,' for cotton cultivation.[8]

Whereas some of the railway lines proposed by Lugard were constructed, the Bornu line was not. This was probably because of inadequate finance for the project.[9] However, in 1928 Graeme Thomson, the Governor of Nigeria, while informing the Secretary of State for Colonies of Nigeria's government's decision to temporarily close down further railway constructions as a result of the severe financial crisis in the colony, nonetheless promised that the proposed Lafia (north of Markudi) - Maiduguri-Lake Chad line "will run."[10] Later on, in what could be seen as the first concrete step to be taken to construct the north-east rail route, and in keeping with his earlier promise that the route would eventually be built, the Governor asked the General Manager of the NR to carry out preliminary and location surveys of the proposed route at a cost of £40,000.[11] Even with this major decision by the Governor Thomson, he was nevertheless aware that this was only a first step in a potentially long and arduous journey. The surveys were completed in 1931.[12] The colonial government did not, however, immediately proceed to the next stage in the project; that of finding the necessary capital and then constructing the line.

This delay proved to be costly. As a result of the worldwide economic depression of 1929-33, the financial resources at the disposal of the Nigerian government became limited. In addition, throughout the 1930s, it was impossible to raise loans in the London money markets. This was as a result of the negative effects of the Great Depression and preparations for the Second World War. Third, and perhaps more crucially, because of the estimated cost of constructing the line and the less than promising revenue expected from it, the proposed extension was perceived as not been economically viable and therefore the project was abandoned.[13] However, the 144-mile Kano-Nguru line, in the north-central part of Nigeria, was completed in October 1930.[14] In 1937, interest was again shown in the Nguru-Geidam-Maiduguri and Rahama-Missau lines by the NR, which estimated that the new railway lines and rolling stock would cost £3.25 million.[15] On the other hand, within the NR itself, there was no unanimity of opinions on these proposals. In 1938, two different chief executives of the Department argued against the construction these lines.

For J. H. McEwen, the NR General Manager from 1936 to 1942, any attempt to open up a very remote area must first begin with the development of efficient road services. Thereafter, if the area developed rapidly and its economy became buoyant enough to bear the cost of railway services, the construction of the railways could then be considered.[16] In his blueprint, "Development of the Bornu Province by Railway Extension and/or Road Feeder Service," a one-time Acting General Manager of the NR, Mr. C. E. Rooke, supported McEwen's position and argued that only through the construction of a good network of roads could the Northeast be best served.[17] With these recommendations by the NR's technical experts, one would have expected that further consideration of a rail line to Bornu should have been suspended for a while. But this was not the case. Following the visit to Nigeria by, and the recommendations of the West Africa Oilseeds Mission in 1947, the British and Nigerian governments returned to the matter of the Bornu railway extension one more time.[18] Their renewed interest could have been as a result of the post-Second World War economic crisis in Britain which necessitated an all-out drive to get all available minerals and agricultural resources (including cotton and peanuts from Bornu Provinces) from colonies under her control, for exportation abroad to earn much needed dollars.

The same economic factors, however, that pressured the government into reviving interest in the Bornu railway extension also made it impossible for her to proceed beyond just dreaming about the project, as there was no finance for the project at this time. But in order not to completely lose the economic benefits of the Bornu area, the Central Government in Lagos decided to embark on a programme of road development in the area, which it reasoned would be cheaper.[19] But if Lagos thought that officials of the Northern Provinces would applaud her for new transport policy for the Bornu area, it was seriously mistaken. In August 1947, the officials rejected the new transport policy and came up with their own programme.[20]

Under this, rather than the Central Nigerian government constructing roads in Bornu Province, it would be best to construct a railway line from Rahama to Maiduguri through Potiskum and Darazo. Furthermore, the existing Bauchi Light Railway, opened in 1912 and linking Zaria to Bukuru on a 2 -feet 6-inches-gauge, should be converted to 3 feet 6 inches gauge line. The officials also suggested that another railway line should be constructed from Nguru, in the north-central region, through Geidam to Maiduguri.[21] Of these two lines, however, the officials preferred the Rahama-Maiduguri line; whose estimated cost was £5,349,900 and the annual recurrent charges was estimated to be £453,284.[22] But in opposition to the latter choice or preference was the traditional ruler of Bornu, the Shehu. In contrast, he preferred and advocated for the Nguru-Geidam-Damaturu-Maiduguri route. Thus there was an impasse, which was not broken until August 1949, when the NR's General Manager, D.C. Woodward, who shortly after visiting Bornu, where he met with the Governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, and the Shehu of Bornu, decided it was time a firm decision was taken on the proposed on the Bornu railway. Subsequently, the General Manager sent a memorandum to Lagos and in it, he recommended that the only railway line that should be constructed in Northern Nigeria at this the time should be the Nguru-Maiduguri route.[23]

The government seems to have been impressed by Woodward's expert advice, as that same year the Legislative Council in Lagos approved £10,000 for the survey of the recommended route. By this intervention, it would appear Lagos had sided with the Shehu and thus leaving the Northern Nigeria's officials empty-handed with their proposed Rahama-Darazo-Potiskum route. Meanwhile, as all these maneuverings were going on in Nigeria, in 1949 French officials in Chad were making demands on the Nigerian Government for improved communications in the Bornu area, to solve the problem of transporting their imports across Nigeria into their territory. To solve this problem, a conference was held in Dschang, in the French Cameroon, in 1950.

Attended by representatives from the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Belgian Congo and the French Union, the meeting called on the Nigerian Government to improve communication facilities in the Lake Chad area by either constructing a railway line or roads that would lead directly into the French Equatorial Africa. Also, the governments of UK and France were asked to approach the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) (USA), for assistance to carry out a comprehensive survey of the area. This was to determine which best alternative between road and railway should be constructed from Maiduguri into Fort Lamy (in Chad), or any other suitable town. The surveys of the Bornu area were completed in the first half of 1950.[24] After the exercises and luckily for the French and Nigerian governments, the ECA was very eager to participate in the development of communication facilities in the Bornu and Lake Chad areas. However this positive response from the ECA would sound the death-knell of the proposed Nguru-Maiduguri rail line.

At the conference set up to examine the nature of the ECA's involvement, its transport expert, Mr. Clement, was of the opinion that the best solution to the transportation problem in the northeastern parts of Nigeria was not the building of a railway into the area, but instead improvements should be made to roads from Kano to Maiduguri and that from the latter, a new road should be constructed through Bama to the borders of French Chad.[25] This ECA's position put the Nigerian government in a quagmire. And this raised a number of questions. Was it to continue with the proposed railway extension, or accept the Commission's recommendation? Or better still should it prosecute the two projects together, simultaneously? The second option would not only have the meant duplication of efforts, but would have been a costly choice. The government would have to provide more than £2 million pounds on the railway line and £325,000 being its own share in the road development schemes.[26]

Therefore in order to free itself from the dilemma it found itself in, the Nigerian government turned to Gilbert Walker, Professor of Commerce at the University of Birmingham, for expert advice. Walker, who came to Nigeria at the invitation of the Colonial Office and the Nigerian Government and was charged with the responsibility of critically examining Nigeria's transportation system, endorsed the ECA recommendation.[27] The Government accepted his submission. Its acceptance must have also been informed by the deepening economic crisis of the NR, which would have contributed handsomely to the pot of investments needed for a new railway extension to Bornu.[28]

In March 1951, the Nigerian Government sought the approval of the Secretary of State for Colonies for its new transport policy for the northeastern provinces. In May 1951 the Secretary of State informed Lagos that the ECA had agreed to grant £240, 000 out of the £480,000 required for the development of Bornu/Lake Chad roads.[29] Furthermore, the Secretary of State wanted to know what would become the fate of the proposed Nguru-Maiduguri railway line. On 10 July 1951, the Nigeria Government informed the Colonial Office it had decided to abandon the railway extension.[30] This rather drastic change of policy did not go down well with the Northern

Nigerian political leaders and their British advisers in the region.[31] As far as they were concerned, the NR was the real obstacle standing between their region and development.

Consequently, their criticisms of the NR became unrelenting. As one Whitehall official put it, "[t]he railway (Nigerian Railway as an institution) is, of course, the major problem. Everyone in the Northern Region seems to give the railway up as hopeless." [32] The hail of condemnation was not limited to the region only; it also continued at the national level. In 1955, during the second reading of the Nigerian Railway Corporation Ordinance bill on the floor of Nigeria's House of Representatives, prominent Northern Nigerian politicians, one after the other, poured scorn on the inefficiency of the NRC.[33]

3. Economic Reasons for the Construction of the Bornu Railway

The Northern Nigerian political leaders did not, however, limit themselves to just criticising the Nigerian Railway establishment, rather they wanted both the Central Nigerian government and the NR to construct more railways in their region. But they needed to rationalise their desire by coming up with specific reasons, particularly economic. But if the Northern Region needed economic justifications to back up its argument for the construction of a railway extension into Bornu Province, it did not have to search far and wide. At the London Constitutional Conference of 1953 the controversial issue of revenue sharing between the levels of government could not be resolved. Sir Louis Chicks, was a former senior British officer in the Sudan's colonial civil service, was therefore appointed to work out the right formula for revenue sharing that should take account of

> the need, on the one hand, to provide the Federal government and Regional governments with adequate measure of fiscal autonomy within their own sphere of government, and on the other, the importance of ensuring that the total revenues available to Nigeria are allocated in such a way that the principle of derivation is followed to the fullest degree compatible with the reasonable needs of the Federal government and the Regional governments. [34]

Several years before the appointment of the Louis Chicks Commission, revenue sharing in Nigeria had been based on the principles of independent revenue, needs, national interests, and special grants to the regions.[35] This seemingly time tested system had ensured stable flows of revenue to all the regions of the federation through predetermined bloc grants. Therefore, constant flow of resources to the regions were largely unaffected by the vagaries of international trade and domestic economic situations.

At the end of his work and to the joy of the British government that appointed him, Chicks recommended that the new revenue formula should be based on the principle of derivation, that is, higher percentages of collected revenue should go back to the region where most were derived from in the first place.[36] The implication of this was that with few exceptions, greater percentages of proceeds from duties, royalties and taxes collected in the federation should be handed back to the regions of origin. Therefore, arising from this recommendation, all federally collected revenues were distributed to the regions as follows: 50 per cent of import and exercise duties on manufactured goods like tobacco and beer. In turn, these duties were distributed among the regions according to consumption. Fifty per cent on all other commodities (distributed in the proportion of 30 per cent to each of Northern and Eastern regions and 40 per cent to the West) and 50 per cent of export duties (distributed among the regions according to derivation). Furthermore, 100 per cent of import duties on motor spirits (according to consumption), income taxes, and mining royalties were "returned" to the regions on the basis of the principle of derivation.[37] The remaining halves of the revenues going to the regions as analysed above were to be appropriated by the Federal government.[38] Parallel to the publication and implementation of the Chick's Report, the central commodity marketing boards were also regionalised and their collective reserves amounting to £74 million were distributed as follows: £15 million to the North, £24 million to the East, and £34 million to the West.[39]

On paper, the new fiscal arrangement seemed attractive to the warring Nigerian political leaders, coming as it did at a period of extraordinary boom in export commodity prices, caused by the Korean War, which was fought from 1950 to1953.[40] In the second instance, their leaders must have been very happy about the political and fiscal autonomy granted their regions.[41] Nevertheless, the new fiscal structure had its unforeseen costs. For instance, it succeeded in creating three economically unequal but virtually autonomous regions. Also, the amount of revenue accruing to the regions would no longer be guaranteed as it was the case before the implementation of the report of the Chicks Commission. Rather, they were now contingent on the prices of export commodities in the international market and the performance of the domestic economy. Under the new arrangement, the Northern Region suddenly became the least favoured region.

Although the Northern Region was endowed with some of the highest revenue yielding agricultural and mineral resources - including cotton, groundnuts, groundnut-oil, hides and skins, tin and columbite (a derivative of tin) - in the 1950s and 1960s, only tin and columbite were yielding abundant revenue to Nigeria from the international market. Starting from the early 1930s, Nigeria became the world's largest producer and supplier of columbite.[42] In the 1954/55 financial year, Nigeria got the highest royalties on columbite to the tune of £1,238,570 and in keeping with the new principle of revenue sharing; the entire amount was paid into the Northern Region's treasury.[43] Moreover, between 1954 and 1959, no less than 63% of all mining royalties and rents in each of these years went to the region as figures below amply demonstrate.

Table 1: Mining Royalties and Rents in Nigeria (North's share in £ and in percentage terms)

1955/56	1956/57	1957/58	1958/59
1,549,266	1,517,960	978,782	577,981
(99.91%)	(92.81%)	(81.05%)	(64.56%)

Source: A. G. Adebayo, *History of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria, 1946-1990* (New York, 1993) Table 4.3: 212.

On the other hand, the Northern Region's share of the export duties in the last five years to independence in 1960 was not less than 30 per cent in each of those years as could be seen below.

Table 2: Export Duties (North's share in £ and in percentage terms)

1955/56	**1956/57**	**1957/58**	**1958/59**
2,158, 828	2,367, 587	1,921, 344	2,303, 334
(33.13%)	(36.46%)	(31.61%)	(28.55%)

Source: Adebayo, *History of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria, 1946-1990…*

However, whatever financial advantages the Northern Region seem to have had post-Chick report and up until the mid-1950s were later severely undermined by a combination of factors. Compared with the two other regions (East and West) from 1954 onwards, it had to meet the needs of a much larger population, especially at a time when revenues started to decrease. According to the 1952/53 census, the north had a population of 16.8 million, while the East and the West had 7.2 million and 6 million respectively.[44] The implication of this heavy population burden was increase in the region's financial expenditure. Just as the regions achieved both political and financial autonomy, the expectation of the ordinary people for social services increased greatly. In meeting these needs, import bills for essential consumers' commodities sky-rocketed in such a manner that regional governments could not cope financially.

Second, was the economic recession in Europe in the 1954/55 financial year that depressed the demands for Nigeria's export commodities.[45] Coupled with this, the world market was flooded with both agricultural products and mineral resources from Malaysia, Burma and others. Some of these territories were either theatres of war during the Second World War or had fallen under the control of the Axis powers.[46] While the war lasted, export commodities from these territories could not be part of the international trade. However, from 1945 onwards, their commodities re-entered the international market. As if this were not enough problems for the primary producers, the Western countries started manufacturing synthetic substitutes of natural products such as cotton, groundnut-oil, rubber, and so on.[47] This act also brought down commodity prices.

As a result of several "falls" in export commodity prices, Northern Region's revenue base started shrinking. In 1956/57, earnings from groundnut fell to 40 per cent of the value of the previous year.[48] The situation in the case of columbite was much worse. In the same period, revenue from the mineral, which had reached a peak of £1,238,570 in 1954/55, fell to about £200,000. For Nigeria as a whole, reduced earnings started to occur a year earlier. Although the volume of exports had increased by about 7,000 tons in 1955, the value in monetary terms fell by as much as £17 million.[49]

In view of the drastic fall in revenue, the Northern Peoples Congress' leaders decided to look for alternative sources of revenue and at the same time improving on the existing ones. Aware that agriculture was the backbone of the economy, they sought to reduce or eliminate all obstacles confronting its development. Beginning from the early 1950s, it seemed clear that the most fundamental of these problems was the inefficiency of the existing transportation system, particularly the railway, for transporting cash crops from the north to the coast. Therefore, from the early 1950s, Northern Nigerian leaders decided to construct more roads in the region, particularly in the northeast provinces, the only areas of the colony relying solely on road. On the other hand, in order to pressure the Central Government into constructing a railway extension there, in December 1953 the Northern Nigerian government recommended to the Federal authorities the construction of a railway extension from Nguru to Gashua [50]

However, the newly appointed General Manager of the NR, Mr. Ralf Emerson, was not favourably disposed to this recommendation. He stated that if the Northern Regional government wanted the railway line constructed, the NR would support the project but on the condition that the annual interest on the capital for it, estimated by the NR to be £900, 000, would be paid by the regional government.[51].

The Northern Regional Government rejected this proviso and reminded the NR that the railway was a federal matter and it was wrong to ask a regional government to spend any amount on railway development in its region.[52] In 1954, the Central Government directed that all discussions on new railway extensions in Nigeria should be temporarily suspended. This was because since an International Bank of Reconstruction and

Development (IBRD) Mission was then in Nigeria studying the colony's economy in general, the colonial officials believed that it would be better to allow the Mission to complete its work before considering new proposals for railway extensions.

In its consideration of the request for the construction of a railway extension to Bornu Province, the Mission reviewed the three routes considered to date. These were the Lafia-Gombe-Biu-Maiduguri, Nguru-Damaturu-Maiduguri, and the Zaria-Rahama-Potiskum-Maiduguri.[53] It also examined the development of roads in the northeast region that was made possible by the ECA's financial assistance.[54] However, as to which of these two modes of transportation should be developed immediately, it believed that the determinant should be 'the total cost to the community, and on the possibility of making users of the facility share the cost.' Thus, 'the decision must therefore take into account the traffic potential of the …northeast.'[55] But in 1953/54, such freight traffic was very low and was less than 100,000 tons, including export and imports from Chad area. Consequently, for at least the period 1955-1960, the Mission recommended,

> (1)…the tarring of the Jos-Maiduguri road as a single lane road be completed…and that estimates be developed for the cost of widening the road to two tarred lanes and maintaining it, and for the cost of carriage by road; and (2) that estimates be developed for a railway extension, assuming (a) 60lb. /yd. rail, rather than light second-hand rail as contemplated in the previous plan, and a ballast track; (b) diesel traction with 750 h. p. locomotives... and (c) 200,000 tons of traffic per year, with maximum of 150,000 tons in one direction, for which one daily freight train and one pickup train three times a week for local traffic would suffice.[56]

Contrary to the submission of Ekundare,[57] Omiunu, and Onokerhoraye,[58] the IBRD Mission did not specifically recommend a new railway line into Maiduguri in the period up to 1960.On railway development in the northeast, the report stated in general:

> In the Mission's view the Nguru-Maiduguri extension plan should definitely be abandoned. This extension would be very long: it would not serve the Bauchi-Potiskum region: and it would require renewal of the 143 miles Kano-Nguru section with 60lb/yd rail, an expenditure which is not justified by the present or immediately foreseeable traffic. We do however recommend a forty-mile extension from Nguru to Gashua, at an estimated cost of £400,000 to give better service to the Bornu and North area.[59]

Judging from this submission, it is clear that the Bank did not see the economic need for constructing an elaborate railway line in the area. The recommendation for the Nguru-Gashua railway line seems to have been made in an be an attempt to mollify Northern Region's political leaders and colonial officials who would have felt disappointed by the rejection of the more elaborate Maiduguri line. The reluctance of the Mission to support the construction of a new and extensive railway line in Bornu would appear to have been buttressed by the seemingly feeble reason it gave for recommending the Nguru – Gashua railway. This was that 'there is no all-weather road in the area.' Since the problem of the area was lack of roads, it is conceivable that constructing new roads would have solved the problem.

It is no wonder then that the General Manager of the NR, Emerson, rejected even the recommended line because it was not financially feasible until 1965. Furthermore, there were railway rehabilitation works in the North that needed to be carried out first before a new project could be constructed. In essence therefore, the Nigerian economy in the 1950s could not possibly bear the financial burden of the Bornu Railway Extension. At least then, before 1960, the fate of the Bornu extension should have been finally sealed. But this was not the case. In late 1954, the Northern Region Government asked its Federal counterpart to incorporate into the *Nigerian Railway Development Programme, 1955-1960*, a budget for the construction of the railway line from Nguru to Gashua and the surveying of possible railway lines going through Bauchi to Maiduguri. The decision to approach the central government was influenced by several factors.

Under the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, railway matters were the exclusive responsibility of the Federal Government. Hence, no railway construction could have been undertaken anywhere in Nigeria without being initiated by Lagos. Second, the cost of any major railway construction at this time would certainly have been beyond the financial capabilities of Northern Region, the poorest in the colony. Third, in the early 1950s, Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was not only a member of the NPC, but its deputy leader, was the Minister of Transport.[60] Thus in accordance with prevailing politics of ethnic rivalries, for national economic resources in Nigeria then, Balewa's colleagues in the NPC expected him to use his office in government to pressure the Federal Government into approving the construction of the Bornu Railway Extension.[61] Bassically, he was to work very hard to 'deliver' the project for his 'people' as their own share of the national cake. The Colonial Office underscored this point later when it stated that:

> Northern Ministers in the Federal and Regional Governments have

> committed themselves to the achievement of this railway extension because they fully understand its economic importance and because there is strong public pressure on them to do so. The Prime Minister of the Federation, whose home is in North-Eastern Nigeria, is the most active supporter of the extension.[62]

It is therefore fair to argue that it was through Balewa's efforts – on behalf of his party, region, home province, Bauchi, which was along the route of the proposed BRE railway - and Britain's geo-political calculations on Nigeria that made possible the BRE project. In late 1954, the new Governor-General, James Robertson, requested a committee of ministers to draw up a development plan (later tagged the Economic Development Programme). At the end of its work, it did not recommend any budget for the BRE, a development the Transport Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, refused to accept as the final decision on the matter. To him, lack of finance was not a sufficient factor to sound the death knell of an extension that was then seen in Northern Nigeria as very important to its economic survival. Balewa argued that part of the Federal Government reserves could be used to finance the extension.[63]

However, Balewa's reasoning rattled the colonial officials, especially at time that a new federal structure that had just been put in place. Set against this backdrop, there appeared to be a deadlock between the colonial officials and the leaders of the Northern Region. Since the obstacle to the construction of the extension at this time was finance, it should have been easy to simply abandon a project for which there was no finance, but this was not the case. In order to placate the northern elite, the colonial officials came up with a joker. Although, there was no ready capital for the BRE, its proposal should be included in the EDP as an annex until the appropriate time in future when the capital for it could be sourced.[64] This tricky solution seemed a harmless arrangement. Notwithstanding this ingenious stop gap, members of the northern political class would not be content with just attaching a project so important to them in the appendix of the EDP. Rather, they continued exert pressure on the central government to source for capital for the BRE project.[65]

In view of the foregoing, to finance the BRE, which was originally estimated to cost £20 million, the Colonial Office and the Imperial Treasury encouraged the Nigerian Colonial government to approach the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) for a loan. After protracted negotiations between the Nigerian government and the IBRD on the one hand, and the IBRD and Imperial Treasury on the other hand, a loan of £10 million, which was fifty per cent of the project cost was obtained. The balance came from both the Nigerian government and the NRC.[66] The construction of the 400- mile BRE started on 27 August 1958 and was completed on 30 November 1964.[67]

4. Conclusion

This research essay examined the background to the construction of the Bornu Railway Extension in the northeastern part of Nigeria during the British government's decolonisation programme in Nigeria. From the early years of the twentieth century there had been clamour for the construction of a railway line from Lagos to Bornu. But as a result of several political, social, and economic factors - including lack of finance - construction of a railway line to Bornu was not seriously addressed until 1954, when the Northern Nigerian political and business leaders pressured London and Lagos into agreeing to construct the railway in the late 1950s. About fifty per cent of the capital for the BRE was secured through a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The second part of the required £20 million was raised internally within Nigeria. The BRE was eventually constructed and opened four years after Nigeria got her political independence in 1960.

*** This article derived from the author's unpublished Ph.D. thesis (2004) titled**:** 'Political Economy of Rail Transport in Nigeria, 1945-1985' submitted to the University of Manchester.

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Notes

[1] *Correspondence relating to Railway Construction in Nigeria Cd. 2787* (London, 1905): Enclosed with Crown Agents to Colonial Office July 12 1900, 'West African Railways General Scheme of Railways and other Works in the Colonies of Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Lagos and Nigeria. Report by Messrs. Shelford and Sons [dated June 30 1900]'

[2] *Correspondence relating to Railway Construction in Nigeria Cd. 2787 …* Sir W. Macgregor to J. Chamberlain, Secretary of State for Colonies, August 9 1900; Sir R. Moor to J. Chamberlain, January 17 1901 and Sir F. Lugard to J. Chamberlain, 9 April 1901. See also High Commissioner Moor's concrete proposal to have a railway line extended to near Lake Chad, Sir R. Moor to J. Chamberlain, 25 April 1901.

[3] Ibid, 29: Sir W. MacGregor to J. Chamberlain, 11 Aug. 1900.

[4] Ibid, 35: Sir R. Moor to J Chamberlain, 17 January 1901.T. M. Tamuno 'Genesis of the Nigerian Railway II, *Nigeria Magazine* No 84 March, 1965, 40.

[5] *Correspondence relating to Railway Construction in Nigeria Cd. 2787…*Sir F. Lugard to J. Chamberlain- 'Railway Extension' 9 April 1901.

[6] Nigeria National Archives, Kaduna, SNP 7 Acc. No 1859/1907: "Transport Policy upon Railway Construction in Northern Nigeria."

[7] Ibid.

[8] Cmd.468 Report on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, 50-52 and Appendix VIII.

[9] Some of the lines constructed included the Zaria-Gusua-Kaura Namoda; Kano-Hadejia-Nguru; and Ifo-Ilaro-Ido.

[10] National Archives, Kew(NA) CO583/160/20 'Railway Construction in Nigeria' Despatch from Graeme Thomson, Governor of Nigeria to the Rt. Hon. L.C. M.S. Amery, Secretary of State for Colonies. June 7 1928

[11] Ibid.

[12] K. J. Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces* (Zaria, Northern Nigeria, 1955), 3.

[13] Ibid, 3.

[14] O. Oshin 'Nigerian Railways under stress 1912-45: a study in colonial transport planning and management,' *Odu: A journal of West Africa Studies* (Nigeria) 37 1990, 60.

[15] Nigerian Railway 'Approximate Outline of Ten-Year Programme of Capital Expenditure' (1938) cited in K. J. Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces* (Zaria, Northern Nigeria, 1955), 3.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid
[18] NA CO 852/601/9 'Report *of the West African Vegetable Oils and Oilseeds Mission'*. 33-45.
[19] K. J. Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces…* 3.
[20] Ibid, 5.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Nigeria Annual Report on the Government Railway 1949-1950,* 11.
[25] K. J. Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces…* 7.
[26] NA CO583/301/9 'Nigeria Railway Policy' Governor of Nigeria to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Savingram No 2072, 10 July 1951.
[27] NA CO554/326 'Surface Transport in Nigeria' Sir H. Poynton (CO) to Sir E. Alan Hitchman (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Materials) 26 July 1952 in reply to Sir E. A. Hitchman to Sir H. Poynton (CO) 20 July 1952; *West Africa* 16 January 1960.
[28] For instance in the 1949/50 financial year she had to pay £900,768 as interest on loans and recorded a deficit balance of £327,214 in the overall performance for the same year - *Nigeria Annual Report on the Government Railway 1949-1950* 11.
[29] NA CO583/301/9 'Nigeria Railway Policy' Governor of Nigeria (Sir John Macpherson) to the Secretary of State for Colonies, Despatch No. 107 25 May 1951; K. J. Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces…* 7.
[30] *Nigeria Annual Report on the Government Railway 1950/51.*
[31] Under the new Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which replaced the much criticised the Richard Constitution of 1947, the small and weak regional assemblies in the Western, Eastern, and Northern regions, which seemed as debating societies were enlarged and invested with legislative and financial powers. Furthermore, each region had its own executive council composed of majority of African members as compared with the British official members.
[32] NA CO554/326 Sir E. A. Hitchman (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Materials) to Sir H. Poynton (CO) 20 July 1952. In reply Sir H. Poynton wrote, 'Criticism of Lagos has always been a favourite past time in the North of Nigeria…' H. Poynton (C O) to Sir E. Alan Hitchman 26 July 1952.
[33] Federal House of Representatives Debates, Session 1954/55, 863-893.
[34] Sir Louis Chick, *Report of Fiscal Commissioner on the Financial Effects of the Proposed Constitutional Arrangements* (Lagos, 1953), 1.
[35] See J. R. Hicks and Sydney Phillipson, *Report of the Commission on Revenue Allocation* (Lagos, 1951), 59-62.
[36] Specifically in the term of reference, he was asked to examine the principle of derivation and make recommendations on it. See Sir Louis Chick, *Report of Fiscal Commissioner on the Financial Effects…*1.
[37] Sir Louis Chick, *Report of Fiscal Commissioner on the Financial Effects*… paragraphs. 34-38.
[38] Ibid.
[39] *Report of the Committee on Marketing Boards* (Lagos, 1954).
[40] A. O. Phillips, 'From a service state to a paternal state,' An Inaugural lecture delivered in March 1981 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (Ibadan, 1995), 13.
[41] Thus the capital base, which the Nigerian bourgeoisie needed so badly, not only to dispense favour to friends and hangers-on, but also to challenge more vigorously the British control of Nigeria, was finally achieved.
[42] Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria*…54.
[43] A. G. Adebayo, *History of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria, 1946-1990 (*New York, 1993), 102. Fortunately for Northern Nigeria, during the Korean War, the United States was stockpiling the mineral, which made the price to shoot up.
[44] B. J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order. Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan, 1978), 75.
[45] NA CO 554/1974 'International Bank Loan for Railway Development in Nigeria, Background Note'; and O. Nnoli, 'A short history of Nigerian underdevelopment,' in O. Nnoli (ed.) *Path to Nigerian Development* (Dakar, 1981), 124.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Nnoli, 'A short history of Nigerian underdevelopment…' 124.
[48] Adebayo, *History of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria, 1946-1990…* 88. The fall could also be attributed to the accumulation of the commodity in Kano from 1952 onwards. The accumulation was due to the inability of the Nigerian Railway to transport them on time.
[49] V. P.Diejomaoh, *Economic Development in Nigeria* (Princeton, 1965) cited in Nnoli, 'A short history of Nigerian underdevelopment…' 124.
[50] J. N. Paden, Ahmadu *Bello Sardauna of Sokoto. Values and Leadership in Nigeria* (London, 1986), 269.

[51] Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces…* 7.
[52] Ibid.
[53] *Economic Development of Nigeria: Report of a Mission organised by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1955), 476.
[54] Crawford, *Traffic Survey in Zaria, Bauchi and Bornu Provinces…* 7.
[55] *Economic Development of Nigeria: Report of a Mission organised by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (Baltimore, 1955), 476-477.
[56] Ibid, 477.
[57] Ekundare, *Nigerian Economic History, 1860-1960* (London: Methuen & Company Ltd, 1973), 261.
[58] F. G. I. Omiunu and G. Onokerhoraye, *Transportation and the Nigeria Space Economy* (Benin, 1995), 124.
[59] *Economic Development of Nigeria: Report of a Mission organised by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*, 477.
[60] Abubakar Tafawa Balewa had succeeded the first Minister of Transport, Mr. Bode Thomas, in 1953, after the latter died.
[61] The idea of "employing" indigenes of the North in federal institutions in influencing policies, in controlling the Federal Government itself and channeling resources to the region was in fact a deliberate policy of the region. This policy, termed 'Northernisation' was well articulated by the leader of the NPC and the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello.
[62] NA CO554/326 Sir E. A. Hitchman (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Materials) to Sir H. Poynton (CO) 20 July 1952.
[63] T. Clark. *A Right Honourable Gentleman Abubakar From the Black Rock* (London, 1991), 266.
[64] Ibid.
[65] For a detailed discussion of this, see T. A. Ayoola, 'Political Economy of Rail Transport in Nigeria, 1945-1985' unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Manchester, 2004, 157 – 182.
[66] For a comprehensive discourse of the financing of the BRE, Ibid, 182-201.
[67] Ibid, 199.

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