

Bus Passenger Movement in Ghana: A Case of Intercity State Transport Corporation (ISTC) Coaches Ltd.

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Abstract

The Intercity State Transport Company is one of the two state funded transport companies in Ghana competing with a range of other service providers mainly from the private sector in the industry. Once well respected and described as the pride of intercity travels in Ghana, it is currently a mere shadow of its former glory with rapid decline in passenger movements over the past years. This study sought to analyse passenger movements over the past five years and also explored challenges that have led to the steady decline of ISTC over the years. Secondary data was provided by the company and this was complemented with in-depth interviews with management. Findings of the study revealed that the service suffered a 60% decline in passenger movement between 2007 and 2011; however there was a high utilization of its services in January 2010 and December 2011. Finally, there was no statistically significant difference in the volume of passengers between 2010 and 2011.

Keywords: intercity, intercity bus, passenger movement, ISTC

Introduction

Intercity bus transport is a popular means of travelling between cities and aligning villages and towns in Ghana. Its services include freight and passenger movements from one location to the other. For this service to be provided, a company has to be formed. As a result of that there have been concerted attempts by various past Governments of Ghana to offer intercity bus transport service to her citizen. One of such efforts is the establishment of Intercity State Transport Company (ISTC). But there is a number of private transport operators of which Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) offers about 70-80% of passenger and freight traffic. This is an off shoot of intra urban dominance of GPRTU of 70-80% (Abane 2011). GPRTU has been able to co-opt other intercity bus transport operators by sharing some of its terminals/stations with other transport companies/union such as VVIP/VIP, DIPLOMAT. Aside this, some private owners or operators like VIP/VVIP, DIPLOMAT for instance are either members or former members/executives of the union. Other unions/transport operators in the industry are Concerned Drivers Union, Progressive Transport Owners Association and Co-operative.

All these intercity operators have boosted the range of choices for intercity travellers in Ghana. One palpable issue to consider when making a choice for a particular ICB service is the fare and commensurable accoutrement such as comfort, availability of air condition, reliability, ample leg room, and space for baggage. Some passengers might have a strong predilection for a particular transport operator based on certain socio-demographic characteristics. So despite all odds such passengers will keep patronizing such a company. Any service provider found wanting in providing adequate service to the teeming passengers would end up losing passengers to competitors.

As a result of competition and other challenges bedevilling ISTC, this study sought to find out the volume of passenger movement for the last 5 years; monthly volume of passenger movement for the last two years and the daily passenger movement for the last one year. The hypothesis of the study is to ascertain the significant difference in the volume of passengers between 2010 and 2011. The company used to offer intercity bus transport service to all regional capitals in Ghana. Currently, it is not as vibrant as it used to be in some years past. This has not only resulted in the decline in the volume of passenger movement but also the amount of revenue generated.

Literature Review

A passenger is described here as someone who arrives in, departs from, or transfers through the transport mode on a given day. A passenger is also any person who travels in a vehicle, but bears little or no responsibility for the tasks required for that vehicle to arrive at its destination (Gajendran, 2012). The socio-demographic characteristics of the passenger therefore influence the choice of mode which might be dependent on the distance and urgency of the journey.

Cities are centres of economic, social, political and environment livability occupying a pride of place in policy formulations, by city administrator and policy makers (Ogunkoya, 2008). More importantly, movement access to education, recreation, business and work is paramount to the continued existence of the city (Litman, 2002). The concept of intercity originated from the intercity sector of British Rail and includes long-distance travels of over 100km between cities, towns or regions or states (Kato et al., 2010). Intercity transport is

responsible for connecting cities, aligning towns and villages by a network of service provided by both the government and private entities for passengers and freight traffic. This company would have to make profit and by so doing only ply route that seem profitable to them.

“Intercity bus” originates from Carl Eric Wickman in 1913 that was fed up with his inability to sell a seven-passenger automobile on the showroom floor of the dealership where he worked. He then started using it to transport miners between Hibbing and Alice, Minnesota, United States (Wrenick 2011; Woldeamonuel, 2012). This was later to provide service regularly in what started a new company (Greyhound) and industry.

In this study intercity bus transport service in Ghana means a fast moving long-distance bus service that does not stop frequently or wait for long in picking passengers during the journey. The characteristics of Ghana’s intercity buses may include:

- Comfortable seats that may include a folding table, armrests, and that sometimes recline. Comfort is considered to be an important feature in these buses.
- Luggage racks above the seats where passengers can access their luggage during the journey.
- Luggage bays, where passengers' luggage can be stowed away from the seating area.
- Overhead lights and fans that can be used by individual passengers with little or no disturbance to other passengers.
- Bathrooms. The bathrooms on buses generally do not have running water or flushing toilets, and are sometimes equipped with hand sanitizer.
- On some buses, movies or other videos are shown to passengers.
- Fridges: which is been used by the driver and his crew to have their drink or food refrigerated.

In terms of volume of intercity passenger movement in Ghana, Abane (2013) noted that Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) constitutes 70-80%. Other players such as Metro Mass Transit Ltd, ISTC, Progressive Transport Owners Association (PROTOA), Concerned Drivers Union, VIP, VVIP, and DIPLOMAT are jostling for the remaining 20%. GPRTU would still dominate into the near foreseeable future because it has been able to absorb operators of Ford, VIP, VVIP, and DIPLOMAT by sharing its terminals or stations with them. Though majority of these terminals are owned by metropolitans, municipalities and districts assemblies, the GPRTU operates it and pay taxes to the government through its local branches.

Study area and Research methodology

Ghana is a country in West Africa, a former British colony known as the Gold Coast until 1957. The capital city of Accra is the largest city in the country. English is the official language of the country, but there are seven written languages studied in schools. The female population is 12,633,978 (51.2%) while males is 12,240,845 (48.8%) of the total population (GSS, 2010). Ghana’s population is growing at the rate of 1.9%. At this rate the population would be 30,536,326 in 2025 and 38,735,638 in 2050. Population density rose from 79 persons per square kilometre in 2000 to 103 persons per square kilometre in 2010. The country is presently more than 50 percent rural (GSS, 2010).

STC is a public transport agency set up by the Government of Ghana with the aim of competing with private operators in the carriage of passengers and goods by road. STC was hatched in 1901 as a government transport department. The rationale was to provide ‘labor and human carrier’ service to cater for the interest of trading and mining companies. In addition, it was to carry transferred civil/public servants to where they had been posted to (ISTC, Head Office, 2013). These services were gradually replaced by motor vehicles when in 1920, the department was incorporated into the Public Works Department. Two years later, the department gained its autonomy under the Ministry of Transport and Communication. The passing of Legislative Instrument (LI) 414 in March, 1965 established the department as a corporate body known as the State Transport Company.

In June, 2000, the assets of the company were purchased and organized into a new company, Vanef STC by a consortium of business concerns known as the Vanef Consortium. This was after the STC was put on divestiture under the Ghana government’s systematic programme to make previously owned state institutions more viable by divesting them to worthy private investors. In 2003, the name of the company was changed to Intercity STC Coaches Limited. As at 2004, the Company has 19 local and 3 international stations including Kumasi, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Cape-coast, Ho, Abidjan, Ouagaougou and Cotonou. Intercity STC currently operates in four countries (4): Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Benin (ISTC, 2004). However as a result of the decrease in the volume of passengers, some of these stations like Cape Coast, Dormaa-Ahenkro, Fambisi, Tudu have either been temporarily suspended or only offering skeletal services.

The study is purely qualitative as it relied on the interview with the management of ISTC and a secondary analysis research approach that involves reanalysis of data collected and processed by one researcher for a different purpose (Babbie, 2007). The advantages of secondary analysis are obvious and enormous. It is cheaper and faster than doing original surveys. In this direction, it can be argued that secondary analysis allows

large scale surveys to be finished more quickly compared to survey research and hence saving time and cost. This data was accessed courtesy of the management of ISTC, Head Office in Accra. It covers a trend analysis of number of passengers from 2007-2011 and daily number of passengers for 2011.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the data obtained from the management of ISTC from 2007-2011 is presented below:

Table 1: Yearly passengers from 2007-2011

Year	Passengers	Percent
2007	1,006,496	
2008	956,468	-5%
2009	752,350	-21.3%
2010	588,952	-21.7%
2011	396,507	-32.7%

Source: ISTC Accra head office, 2013

Table 1 indicates the ISTC yearly passenger movement for five years (2007-2011). In 2007, 1,006,496 passengers embarked on intercity journeys by ISTC. In the following year, there was a 5% decline in the volume of passengers to 956,468. Year 2009 witnessed a further decline of 21.3% from the previous year to 752,350. There was a further decline in 2010 by 21.7% of that of 2009 to 588,952 and 32.7% reduction in passenger movement. The above analysis reveals that there is deep drop of more than 60% in the volume of ISTC passengers over the five year period. From 2007-2011, there was a 60.6% decline in the volume of passengers' movements. This continuous drop in passenger movement according to the General Manager resulted from the loss of 80% of the clients to competitors. Aside this, the company has just 39 operational buses since most of the vehicles have broken down. These 39 buses have been distributed to the five functional stations- Kumasi (11), Accra (15), Tamale (2), Bolgatanga (3) and Takoradi (8). This deep drop would surely affect the profitability of the company. Perchance this downward trend continues, ISTC might go practically out of business.

Table 2: Monthly breakdown of passengers from 2010 and 2011

Month	Passenger		Change %
	2010	2011	
January	61,077	45,315	-25.8%
February	49,161	34,109	-30.6%
March	51,978	32,914	-36.7%
April	51,749	30,309	-41.4%
May	52,261	26,746	-48.8%
June	45,384	25,379	-44.1%
July	50,386	28,922	-42.6%
August	57,657	34,348	-40.2%
September	46,872	30,743	-34.4%
October	41,977	24,141	-42.5%
November	37,244	24,643	-33.8%
December	43,206	58,938	36.4%
Total	588,952	396,507	-32.7%

Source: ISTC Accra head office, 2013.

Table 2 shows a comparatively analysis of monthly passenger movement for 2010 and 2011. In January, 61,077 and 45,315 passengers patronized ISTC in 2010 and 2011 respectively. There was a 25.8% reduction in the passenger movement comparatively. In February, 49,161 and 34,109 passengers travelled in 2010 and 2011 respectively. This represents a 30.6%, 19.5% decline in 2011, and from the previous month respectively. A total of 51,978 and 32,914 passengers travelled in March, 2010 and 2011 respectively. This depicts a 36.7% decline in 2011 but a 5.7% increase and 3.5% decrease from the previous month in 2010 and 2011 respectively. In April, a total of 51,749 and 30,309 in 2010 and 2011 travelled respectively indicate a 41.4% reduction in 2011, a further 0.4% and 7.9% decline from the previous month in 2010 and 2011 respectively. A total of 52,261 and 26,746 passengers travelled in May, 2010 and 2011 respectively. There is a 48.8% decline in 2011 with a 1% increase and 11.8% reduction from the previous month in 2010 and 2011. The numbers of passengers in June 2010 and 2011 were 45,384 and 25,379 representing a 44.1% decrease in 2011 with a decline of 13.2% and 5.4% from the previous month in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Table 2 further shows that there were 50,386 and 28,922 passengers in July, 2010 and 2011 respectively. This represents a 42.6% decline in 2011 with 11% and 14% increase from the previous month in

2010 and 2011 respectively. In August, 2010 and 2011, 57, 657 and 34, 348 passengers travelled. A 40.2% decline in 2011, 14.4% increase and 18.8 decrease from the previous month in 2010 and 2011 respectively. A total of 46, 872 and 30, 743 passengers travelled in September, 2010 and 2011 respectively. Noticeably, there is a 34.4% decline in 2011, 18.7% and 10.5% reduction in September, 2010 and 2011 respectively. In October 2010 and 2011, the total number of passengers was 41, 977 and 24, 141 respectively. It can be deduced that 42.5% decline. There was a 11.2 % decline and 2.1% increase in November, 2010 and 2011 respectively. There was an appreciable increase in the passenger movement in December, 2010 and 2011. More so, there was an increase from the previous month for 2010 and 2011. The reason adduced for this increase was notably as a result of the fact that the year was coming to an end. Hence people were just crisscrossing the length and breadth of the country either to reunite with family, recreation, excursion, convention or for any other purpose.

Based on the foregoing a paired sample t-test was conducted to find the difference in the volume of passengers between 2010 and 2011. The result of the analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the volume of passengers for 2010($M=90608$, $SD=149869.89$) and 2011($M=61001.08$, $SD=101261.43$) with $p>0.05$. Ojo's (in press) independent samples t-test analysis of 10 year passenger movement in the Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA), Lagos revealed a similar scenario with no significant difference in international passengers arrival and departure.

The management acknowledges mismanagement over the years as the bane of its underperformance. There have been a lot of changes in the management of the company just to reposition it at a vantage point amidst competition. The current management acknowledges that the inability of the company to maintain schedules have caused 80% of ISTC clients seeking other options. Furthermore, the inability of accessing spare parts had caused the dwindling number of operational buses from 71 to 30. The underperforming of the company engineered the workers of the company to go on demonstration on 25th September, 2013. The workers demonstrated because of several months of unpaid salaries and poor condition of service.

Table 3 reveals that 45315 passengers travelled by ISTC in January, 2011. Out of which 1,726 passengers travelled on the 27th and 1707 passengers on the 1st. The least number of 1,192 passengers travelled on the 20th. January is the month in which a lot of people are returning from the festive period and the students and pupils are resuming to school. So this accounts for the relative high number of passengers. A total of 34109 passengers were recorded in February. There was no available data for 29th, 30th and 31st but there was a steady rise in passengers from the 24th -28th of the same month. There was a further decline in passengers in March to 32,914. The least number of 890 passengers travelled on the 20th and the highest number of 1,189 passengers on the 8th. There was steady decline till July when an increase resulting 28,922 passengers was recorded. There was an increment in August where 34,348 passengers were recorded. The number of passengers later declined up till November when there was an increment in passenger movement. The month of December recorded the highest volume of passengers. All the days in December recorded a corresponding increase in passenger movement compared with others days and months in the year. The reason is that a lot of people were moving from one place to the other as the year was gradually coming to an end. Most transport companies during this period experience high volume of passengers.

In Aderamo (2010), the interstate service of Nigeria's Kwara State Transport Corporation fluctuated in passenger traffic between 1990 and 2007. The highest number of passenger traffic was recorded in 1991 when the Corporation just took off but declined by 21% in 1996. A similar situation was recorded by Abane (2009) in a study on MMT in Ghana. Though the number of interstate passengers patronizing the Corporation's service in Aderamo's (2010) rose by 18.8% in 1997 but continued to experience fluctuations in its performance. The average number of interstate passenger traffic for the eighteen-year period was 169, 264 passengers per annum.

Challenges of ISTC

ISTC as a transport company like any other state funded ventures in the developing economy is fraught with a number of challenges that potentially threaten its viability as a business entity (Abane, 2009). ISTC was once upon a time the pride of intercity trips for both the young and old but has witnessed a dwindling in passenger movement as espoused earlier on in this paper. The reasons for the change of tide are not far-fetched. Some of the major challenges are highlighted below.

Competition from other players

There are about 60 transport companies offering its services to the teeming passengers in Ghana today. Although not all these companies offer intercity bus services but a substantial number of them do. The entrants of notable players such as VIP/VVIP, DIPLOMAT, etc have really affected the patronage of ISTC. These service providers have similar luxurious buses that could be likened to that of ISTC. Besides, all these other companies are just jostling for the 20% passenger movement not captured by the GPRTU. The low presence of these service providers blind patrons of ISTC in all major cities and towns in Ghana. More so, the seemingly non-operational routes such as Cape Coast, Dormaa have given other service providers more leverage in the intercity market. Abane (2009) sees this to be associated with the inability of the ISTC to market itself as a viable alternative to

the other state funded and numerous private transport companies offering intercity bus services. The management of ISTC acknowledges that about 80percent of their clients have sought other options.

Service quality

This comprises the differences between the service provided by ISTC and what is received by the passengers. ISTC in the past was offering the best of its services as it was counted to be a privilege to travel by ISTC (Kamil, 2009). Notable then was the timely schedules of buses. Up till today, ISTC happens to be noted for having operational schedules for their trips. This alone has come under a lot of scrutiny. This invariably affects the out of vehicle waiting time. The number of operational buses of ISTC has been dwindling as the years pass by (Poku-Boansi, 2008) as the company can barely boast of 39 functional buses. This accounts for why some of the routes have been suspended to maximize other routes. The decreasing number of operational buses makes the ISTC to make less frequent trips. During a field exercise recently in Accra and Takoradi, the terminals/stations look old with the seats in very bad shape. The passengers had to wait for more than one hour before they set off. Many of the passengers expressed dissatisfaction by asking the driver about when they would set off.

Management challenges

The governments of Ghana have at various times changed the management of ISTC to ensure efficient service delivery. This at times culminates into change of name of the company. Kamil (2009) wonders if any transformation has happened despite this incessant change of management. A recent demonstration by the workers of ISTC was to address the alleged mismanagement of the company and some also questioned the ownership of the business, claiming that a consultant had pocketed part of their provident fund. The current management recognizes that as a result of mismanagement over the years, the company had not been able to perform up to standard and had lost majority of its trusted clients.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Government of Ghana has at various points being poised to revitalize the ailing company. First and foremost the indebtedness of the company could be looked at and the spate of mismanagement which has been the bane of any government owned enterprise could be arrested if appropriate measures are put in place.

Passengers still do patronize ISTC despite the challenges bedevilling the company. It is expedient if the management can identify what makes these passengers loyal to the company. Furthermore, more should be done to woo new customers. The management of company should improve on the schedules of buses as this has invariably affected how timely the bus operations are. This can assist in retaining customers and woo new ones. A similar study on volume of intercity passengers of Metro Mass Transit Ltd may be carried out. This can reveal the trend in passenger movement. The trend will from strategic decisions by management to position the company at a vantage point.

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Table 3: Daily passengers in 2011

Day	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1	1707	1218	1162	1132	862	811	925	1108	1110	815	891	1964
2	1523	1151	1172	1010	855	902	854	1108	1132	774	780	1980
3	1224	1002	1009	958	899	798	999	1108	997	854	930	1886
4	1312	1224	1001	925	749	785	858	1108	1120	789	799	1818
5	1501	1308	946	891	817	864	782	1108	1215	706	812	1899
6	1602	1442	1178	1110	799	776	812	1108	996	865	749	1883
7	1610	1212	1177	1178	894	913	842	1108	1224	794	768	1885
8	1286	1190	1189	1105	844	892	993	1108	979	778	728	1976
9	1502	1502	1010	1124	900	911	877	1108	988	822	735	1905
10	1192	1007	985	969	819	877	844	1108	895	803	908	1905
11	1802	1322	1020	1150	912	854	1131	1108	1021	703	802	1907
12	1554	1076	1063	902	877	905	1054	1108	903	802	824	1987
13	1237	1144	1112	1109	918	860	1104	1108	925	719	835	1890
14	1705	1021	1022	995	860	853	849	1108	905	814	765	1789
15	1552	1311	1081	906	921	867	897	1108	991	811	785	1802
16	1330	1342	1024	898	811	830	823	1108	995	795	774	1942
17	1556	1054	1101	990	951	875	916	1108	880	741	885	1958
18	1416	1191	1016	887	854	779	834	1108	982	789	886	1987
19	1791	1087	890	849	790	801	882	1108	1151	712	864	1928
20	1574	1501	1106	918	812	801	1002	1108	1229	807	853	1890
21	1192	1417	1171	922	919	772	1110	1108	997	733	843	1925
22	1228	1176	997	953	870	854	825	1108	859	818	901	1553
23	1264	1121	1082	1091	928	876	862	1108	1001	762	899	1893
24	1532	1085	1051	927	839	798	910	1108	942	738	764	1999
25	1543	1198	1004	1251	867	816	855	1108	965	766	799	1823
26	1398	1201	1085	1120	842	804	822	1108	996	782	822	1826
27	1729	1274	977	1090	817	888	1210	1108	1275	817	725	1992
28	1662	1332	1121	892	921	891	988	1108	1089	705	799	1880
29	1341	*	989	978	801	871	1151	1108	999	724	817	1981
30	1221	*	1165	1079	894	855	891	1108	982	804	901	1898
31	1229	*	1008	*	904		1020	1108	*	799	*	1987
Total	45315	34109	32914	30309	26746	25379	28922	34348	30749	24141	24643	58938

Source: ISTC Accra head office, 2013.

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