

Broken Routes

Why Ghana's Public Transport System Fails
the People Who Need It Most

*A Civic Education Research Paper on
Transport Policy, State Retreat, and Public Accountability
in the Ghanaian Bus System*

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“Woforo dua pa a, na yepia wo.”

— Twi (Akan)

“When you climb a good tree, you are given a push.”

The state is meant to be that good tree — the infrastructure, the bus system, the reliable route — that lifts citizens and gets a push from public investment. This paper asks why Ghana let the tree fall.

“Ati deka me wo na ave o.”

— Ewe (Volta Region)

“A single tree does not make a forest.”

One private bus company, one donor-funded BRT scheme, or one trotro cannot substitute for a national transport system. A forest of public infrastructure requires collective will and sustained state commitment.

“Hanya daya ba ta kai gida ba.”

— Hausa (Northern Ghana)

“One road alone does not lead you home.”

Every Ghanaian, wherever they live, deserves more than one broken option for getting from one place to another. Transport is not a luxury. It is the road home.

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Abstract

Every morning, millions of Ghanaians leave their homes and face the same gamble: will the trotro come? Will it be full before it moves? Will the seats hold? Will they arrive? Ghana carries over 86 per cent of its road-based public transport on a fleet of ageing, privately owned minibuses that no government planned, no government sustains, and no government adequately regulates. This paper argues that Ghana's transport crisis is not an accident. It is the direct and predictable result of three decades of policy decisions that dismantled state-run transport, handed regulatory power to private unions, and then failed to replace what was lost. The people who suffer most are those who cannot afford the alternative.

This paper traces the full arc of Ghana's public transport failure. It begins with the colonial-era Government Transport Department of 1909 and the State Transport Corporation of 1965, which showed that Ghana could run buses. It documents how World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s forced the withdrawal of transport subsidies, and how the resulting collapse of the State Transport Corporation, Omnibus Services Authority, and City Express Services in the 1990s created the vacuum that trotros now fill. It examines Metro Mass Transit Limited, established in 2003 as a corrective, and shows how political interference, weak governance, and asset-stripping — including the sale of buses originally worth \$175,000 each for as little as GH 2,500 — reduced it to a shadow institution. It analyses the Aayalolo Bus Rapid Transit scheme, launched with World Bank financing in 2016 and effectively abandoned by the Transport Minister's own admission in 2023. And it counts the cost: 53,507 Ghanaians killed on roads between 1991 and 2021, and over one million vehicles currently operating without a roadworthy certificate.

This paper is written for every Ghanaian who commutes by trotro, who has waited two hours for a bus that never came, who has sat next to exposed wires and worn-out springs, or who has simply wondered why a country this large and this capable cannot run a reliable bus. The answer is not that it cannot. It is that those with the power to fix it have chosen, repeatedly, not to. This paper gives you the evidence, the history, and the questions to ask the people responsible.

Keywords: public transport, Ghana, Metro Mass Transit, trotro, GPRTU, structural adjustment, Aayalolo BRT, transport policy, civic education, road safety, state retreat, privatisation

1. Introduction

It is 5:45 in the morning at Achimota Station in Accra. The first commuters are already there, standing in the half-light, scanning the road. The buses that were supposed to serve this city — the red-and-white Metro Mass coaches, the air-conditioned BRT Aayalolo buses — are either sparse, unreliable, or simply not coming. So people wait for the trotro. When it arrives it is already half-full from the previous stop. By the time it pulls out it is packed. The seats do not all have cushions. Some windows will not close. The engine sounds like it is making a decision. The driver is in a hurry because he still owes today's hire money to the vehicle owner. He will be in this same trotro again tomorrow, and the day after, and the year after that.

This is not how a nation of 34 million people should be moving itself around. Ghana has the money, the population, and the infrastructure history to run a proper public transport system. Other African countries smaller and poorer have done it. But in Ghana, the morning lorry station is still run by a private union, the buses are still minivans from the 1990s, and every reform attempt has stalled, been sold off, or been quietly buried.

The problem is not a mystery. It is a policy outcome. Ghana's public transport crisis is the result of three specific decisions made over the past four decades: the forced privatisation of state transport under World Bank conditionality in the 1980s and 1990s; the repeated failure to build a replacement state institution that is insulated from political interference; and the accommodation of a private union structure that profits from the chaos and has no incentive to end it.

This paper is a corrective. It is written for every Ghanaian who has been told that the trotro is "informal" transport, as if it were a temporary arrangement that will sort itself out. It is written for commuters, students, workers, and market traders who have watched bus scheme after bus scheme launch, deteriorate, and disappear. It maps the institutional history, the policy failures, and the political economy of Ghana's transport crisis — and it sets out what citizens are entitled to demand.

The central argument of this paper is this: **Ghana's broken transport system is not the result of poverty or bad luck — it is the result of deliberate policy choices that have, repeatedly, put political interests ahead of the public good, and left the poorest Ghanaians to absorb the cost.**

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 shows that Ghana once had a functioning state transport system and traces its history from 1909 to the 1980s. Section 3 explains how World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes forced the withdrawal of transport subsidies and destroyed what had been built. Section 4 documents the collapse of the specific state transport companies that followed. Section 5 examines Metro Mass Transit, the replacement institution created in 2003, and how it was undermined. Section 6 analyses the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) and explains who really governs transport in Ghana. Section 7 describes how the trotro system works and who bears its risks. Section 8 counts the death toll from a system in which over one million vehicles are not roadworthy. Section 9 examines the Aayalolo BRT, Ghana's most recent failed reform attempt. Section 10 sets out what citizens can constitutionally demand. Section 11 concludes.

2. We Had Buses: A History of State Transport in Ghana

The first thing to understand about Ghana's transport crisis is that it was not always like this. Ghana ran buses. The state ran them, the state paid for them, and for much of the twentieth century ordinary Ghanaians had access to a public transport network that, however imperfect, was designed around their needs rather than around profit.

2.1. The Colonial Foundation

Ghana's first formal public transport infrastructure dates to 1909, when the colonial administration established the **Government Transport Department**.¹ Its original purpose was administrative — moving colonial officials and government cargo — but over time it expanded into passenger services. The British colonial state understood something that successive Ghanaian governments have struggled to act on: a large, dispersed population cannot be governed or made economically productive without organised movement.

By the mid-twentieth century, trotros were already operating alongside the government system. The word “trotro” itself comes from the Ga language: *tro* meant threepence, which was the standard bus fare in the 1940s when Ghana still used the British West African pound.² British colonial officials called these private minibuses “pirate passenger lorries” — not because they were dangerous (though some were), but because they undercut the state system and operated outside official control.³ The British tried to eliminate them. They failed. The trotro was cheaper, more flexible, and available on routes the official buses did not serve. It persisted because the official system did not cover enough ground.

1. Wikipedia Contributors, “Intercity STC,” accessed June 17, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercity_STC.

2. “Trotro (Ghana),” accessed June 17, 2026, [https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Trotro_\(Ghana\)](https://www.in-formality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Trotro_(Ghana)).

3. “Trotro (Ghana).”

2.2. The State Transport Corporation

On 9 March 1965, a legislative instrument formally mandated the Government Transport Department to manage commercial transportation services in Ghana.⁴ This became the **State Transport Corporation (STC)**, which for several decades operated a network of scheduled passenger buses and a freight haulage division that was added around 1968.⁵ STC ran routes between cities, maintained a central fleet, and provided the kind of scheduled, predictable service that the trotro system has never been able to offer.

STC was not without its problems. Public sector enterprises in Ghana were chronically underfunded, susceptible to political interference, and often unable to compete on wages with the private sector. But the institutional architecture existed. The state had buses, had routes, had staff, and had a mandate. That mandate was abandoned, not because it was unworkable, but because of decisions made far from the lorry stations of Accra and Kumasi.

2.3. The Other State Carriers

Alongside STC, two other state transport bodies operated. The **Omnibus Services Authority (OSA)** ran urban bus services, particularly in Accra. The **City Express Services (CES)** operated additional routes.⁶ Together, OSA, CES, and STC constituted a genuine state transport network — one with real capacity, real assets, and a real mandate to move the Ghanaian public.

All three would be gone by the end of the 1990s.

2.4. What the History Tells Us

Ghana's transport history demolishes the idea that public bus systems are somehow alien to the country, or that trotros are the natural Ghanaian solution. They are not. The trotro

4. Wikipedia Contributors, "Intercity STC."

5. Wikipedia Contributors.

6. Eric Mensah, "The Politics of Public Transportation in Ghana: The Case of Metro Mass Transit Limited," *ResearchGate Preprint*, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378592626_THE_POLITICS_OF_PUBLIC_TRANSPORTATION_IN_GHANA_THE_CASE_OF_METRO_MASS_TRANSIT_LIMITED.

became dominant because the state system was destroyed, not because it was ever better than a functional public alternative. The question this paper asks is: why was it destroyed, and by whom?

Ghana ran buses. It can run them again.

3. The World Bank Told Us to Stop: Structural Adjustment and the Privatisation of Ghana's Buses

In the 1980s, Ghana was broke. Years of economic mismanagement under successive governments — military and civilian — had left the country with a collapsed cedi, a broken foreign exchange system, and public institutions running on empty. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank arrived with money and with conditions. Ghana accepted both.

3.1. The Economic Recovery Programme

In 1983, Ghana launched the **Economic Recovery Programme (ERP)**, negotiated with the World Bank and IMF. Over the following decade, Ghana received more than six billion dollars in loans from the World Bank and associated institutions.⁷ The conditions attached to those loans were a package of reforms known as **Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)**: reduce government expenditure, cut subsidies, privatise state-owned enterprises, and deregulate markets.

The theory was that inefficient state enterprises were a drag on growth. The market, freed of government interference, would allocate resources better. Private operators, driven by profit, would invest and improve.

In transport, the theory was catastrophically wrong.

3.2. What Structural Adjustment Did to Ghanaian Transport

The SAP conditionalities directly targeted the state transport sector. Subsidies to public transport were withdrawn. The state was instructed to step back from owning and operating bus services. The logic was that private operators would fill the gap.

The result was immediate and documented. Following deregulation and the withdrawal of subsidies in the mid-1980s, Ghana's efficient public bus transport system gave way

7. "Conditional Development: Ghana Crippled by Structural Adjustment Programmes," 2015, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/03/01/conditional-development-ghana-crippled-by-structural-adjustment-programmes/>.

to congested streets filled by private cars, shared taxis, and the rickety privately-owned minibuses that became known as trotros.⁸ There was no managed transition. There was no plan for what would replace what was removed. The state simply stopped, and the market — meaning whoever owned a minivan — moved in.

The National Democratic Congress government privatised the State Transport Corporation and City Express Services in the 1990s, and liquidated the Omnibus Services Authority entirely.⁹ Ghana's three main state bus companies were gone within a decade.

3.3. The Myth of the Market Solution

The Structural Adjustment orthodoxy held that the private sector was inherently more efficient than the state. In transport, the evidence does not support this. Private transport operators in Ghana have no incentive to invest in vehicles, because the vehicle-hire system — in which a driver pays a daily fee to a vehicle owner and keeps whatever is left — transfers all risk onto the driver and all asset control onto the owner. Owners have no incentive to maintain vehicles beyond the minimum that will keep them operational for another day's hire. Drivers have no incentive to drive safely when they are racing against the clock to cover their hire money before expenses.¹⁰

What structural adjustment created was not a competitive market in transport services. It created a system in which owners accumulated depreciating assets, drivers absorbed poverty-level income risk, and passengers sat in the result.

8. "Transport Deregulation and Sustainability of the Urban Bus Transit Initiative in Ghana," *Academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/67186334/Transport_deregulation_and_sustainability_of_the_urban_bus_transit_initiative_in_Ghana.

9. Mensah, "The Politics of Public Transportation in Ghana: The Case of Metro Mass Transit Limited."

10. "Vernacular Neoliberalism: How Private Entrepreneurship Runs Public Transport in Ghana," *ResearchGate*, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297594336_Vernacular_Neoliberalism_How_Private_Entrepreneurship_Runs_Public_Transport_in_Ghana.

3.4. Who Bears the Cost of This History

It is important to name this clearly. The withdrawal of transport subsidies was not a natural economic process. It was a condition imposed by foreign creditors on a government that had little room to negotiate. The Ghanaian state accepted those conditions. The people who bore the cost were not the officials who signed the agreements. They were the commuters.

Structural adjustment did not fix Ghana's economy. It dismantled institutions that, with proper investment and reform, could have been made to work. In transport, we are still living with the consequences.

The trotro is not the Ghanaian solution to the transport problem. It is the residue left after the solution was removed.

4. OSA, CES, STC: A Graveyard of Good Intentions

By the mid-1990s, Ghana had liquidated or privatised every state transport company it owned. Understanding how each one failed is important, because the same pattern repeats in every subsequent attempt at public transport. The diagnosis matters. If you misdiagnose the illness, you prescribe the wrong medicine.

4.1. The Pattern

The collapse of OSA, CES, and STC followed a pattern that transport researchers have identified consistently across Ghana's public sector transport history:¹¹

1. **Underfunding** — The state invested in the initial fleet but not in sustained maintenance budgets. Vehicles aged without replacement. Running costs exceeded income.
2. **Political interference** — Management decisions were influenced by political cycles rather than operational logic. Staffing, routes, and procurement were subject to patronage pressures. Companies were expected to run on political timetables, not transport ones.
3. **Lack of qualified staff** — Public service pay could not compete with the private sector for skilled mechanics, accountants, and operations managers. Institutions were hollowed out from within.
4. **Unregulated competition** — As private trotro operators expanded, they undercut state buses on fares, undercut them on speed (trotros are door-to-door; state buses are scheduled), and took away revenue. The state companies were not given the tools to respond.

11. "An Examination of Factors Leading to the Collapse of Public Sector Organizations in Ghana: A Case Study of Metro Mass Transport," *ResearchGate*, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353982198_AN_EXAMINATION_OF_FACTORS_LEADING_TO_THE_COLLAPSE_OF_PUBLIC_SECTOR_ORGANIZATIONS_IN_GHANA_A_CASE_STUDY_OF_METRO_MASS_TRANSPORT.

5. **Financial impropriety** — In the absence of strong accountability mechanisms, assets were misused. This is not unique to transport: it is the standard pathology of underfunded, overpoliticised state enterprises in a weak-accountability environment.

4.2. The Omnibus Services Authority

OSA operated the urban bus network, primarily in Accra. It was the service that most Accra residents depended on for daily commuting. When OSA collapsed, there was no replacement. The National Democratic Congress government chose liquidation rather than reform.¹² The Accra urban bus network effectively ceased to exist as a state service. It has not been adequately replaced since.

4.3. City Express Services

CES operated intercity routes. It was privatised, not liquidated, which meant some services continued under private management. But privatisation without proper regulation and subsidy structures means the state retains the responsibility for universal service without the tools to enforce it. Private operators go where it is profitable. They do not go where it is necessary.

4.4. The State Transport Corporation

STC was the flagship. In 1995 it was restructured and fully incorporated, later rebranding as **Intercity STC Coaches Limited** in 2003.¹³ It survives today as a joint state and privately-owned company, operating scheduled intercity coaches from Accra to Kumasi, Takoradi, Tamale, and other destinations. STC is functional, but it is a ghost of what a national public transport operator should be. It serves a narrow premium intercity market. It does not solve the daily commute.

12. Mensah, "The Politics of Public Transportation in Ghana: The Case of Metro Mass Transit Limited."

13. Wikipedia Contributors, "Intercity STC."

4.5. What Was Lost

When OSA was liquidated, Accra lost its urban bus network. The city has never had a comparable replacement. When CES was privatised without a proper regulatory framework, intercity passengers lost the service guarantee of a state carrier. When STC was restructured without the investment needed to compete, it retreated to a narrow market segment.

The question is not whether these institutions could have been saved in the form they existed in the 1990s. Some of their problems were real and needed addressing. The question is why the response was to destroy them rather than to reform them, and why the government did not simultaneously create the replacement infrastructure that a country of Ghana's size and urbanisation rate required.

There was no plan for what came after. That is not a structural adjustment outcome. That is a governance failure.

5. Metro Mass Transit: The Bus That Politics Ate

In January 2001, President John Agyekum Kufuor stood at his inauguration and told Ghanaians that the country needed a mass transit bus system in its cities.¹⁴ Two years later, in 2003, **Metro Mass Transit Limited (MMT)** was incorporated as Ghana's answer to the collapse of OSA, CES, and STC.¹⁵ It was the most serious attempt Ghana had made to restore public bus services since structural adjustment dismantled what came before.

It failed. Not because the idea was wrong. It failed because the institutional design guaranteed it would be a political football, and because nobody was held accountable when the buses were sold.

5.1. What MMT Was Supposed to Be

MMT was conceived as a quasi-governmental urban and peri-urban bus operator. It was given a fleet of Daewoo buses, each purchased at \$175,000.¹⁶ At launch, the company had vehicles, a mandate, and political support. Its routes covered Accra, Kumasi, and other major cities. For a period, it provided something close to a scheduled public bus service.

5.2. The Ownership Structure That Guaranteed Trouble

From the beginning, MMT's governance structure was a problem. The company's shareholders were a mixed group of state-adjacent institutions:¹⁷

14. Wikipedia Contributors, "Metro Mass Transit Company Limited," accessed June 17, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro_Mass_Transit_Company_Limited.

15. Wikipedia Contributors.

16. "Daewoo: We sold MMT buses to Ghana at \$175,000 each," <https://www.graphic.com.gh/business/business-news/ghana-daewoo-we-sold-mmt-buses-to-ghana-at-175-000-each.html>.

17. Wikipedia Contributors, "Metro Mass Transit Company Limited."

Shareholder	Ownership
SIC Insurance Company	—
National Investment Bank	—
Ghana Oil Company	—
Agriculture Development Bank	—
Prudential Bank Limited	—
Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT)	—
<i>Combined (institutional shareholders)</i>	55%
Government of Ghana (direct)	45%

Individual stakes not publicly disclosed; aggregate split confirmed.

The government of Ghana held only 45 per cent. The majority was split among semi-public financial institutions that answered to their own boards, not to the Ministry of Transport. This structure meant that MMT was never fully owned by the state, never fully accountable to the public, and never fully insulated from the competing interests of its multiple institutional shareholders.

In practice, what this produced was a company that governments could use for political purposes — launching routes before elections, commissioning new buses with fanfare — without bearing full accountability for the operational failures that followed.

5.3. The Political Interference

Research into MMT's management consistently identifies political interference as the primary cause of its operational failure.¹⁸ Governments of both major parties used MMT for political signalling: making appointments based on patronage rather than competence, directing resources to politically strategic routes rather than economically viable ones, and changing management with each electoral cycle. A state transport company requires years of

18. Mensah, "The Politics of Public Transportation in Ghana: The Case of Metro Mass Transit Limited."

investment before it achieves operational stability. MMT was given electoral cycles instead.

5.4. The Bus Scandal

The clearest evidence of institutional failure is what happened to the buses.

Daewoo sold each original MMT bus to Ghana at \$175,000 — roughly GH 2 million at current exchange rates.¹⁹ These were not cheap vehicles. They were full-sized urban coaches, built for heavy daily use.

Over 700 of those buses were sold as scrap during the NPP government between 2017 and 2021.²⁰ In October 2020, 313 buses were sold for GH 2,500 each.²¹ Some sources report prices as low as GH 3,000 per bus for vehicles that had been valued at GH 38,000.²²

To be clear about the arithmetic: buses bought at \$175,000 each were sold for GH 2,500 each. That is not depreciation. That is asset-stripping.

The former management disputed that the buses were operational at the time of sale, arguing that they were end-of-life “scrubs” whose maintenance costs had made them liabilities.²³ This defence deserves scrutiny. Even if the buses were unserviceable, the question that follows is: why were buses maintained so poorly that vehicles designed for two decades of service became liabilities in half that time? And who was responsible for the maintenance decisions?

Legal practitioner Martin Kpebu described the episode as “another example of weak accountability and growing impunity in the management of state assets.”²⁴ He was correct.

19. “Daewoo: We sold MMT buses to Ghana at \$175,000 each.”

20. “Over 700 Metro Mass Transit buses sold as scrap under NPP government — Deputy MD,” <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Over-700-Metro-Mass-Transit-buses-sold-as-scrap-under-NPP-government-Deputy-MD-2008274>.

21. “Metro Mass Transit sold 313 unserviceable buses for GHc 2,500 each in October 2020,” 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/TV3GH/posts/metro-mass-transit-sold-313-unserviceable-buses-for-ghc2500-each-in-october-2020/1348156747346136/>.

22. “Metro Mass Scandal: Kpebu questions sale of GHc 38,000 buses for GHc 3,000,” <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Metro-Mass-Scandal-Kpebu-questions-sale-of-GH-38-000-buses-for-GH-3-000-2018884>.

23. “From Procurement to Disposal: What the Metro Mass Transit Bus Sales Reveal About Transport Policy,” <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1465366/from-procurement-to-disposal-what-the-metro-mass.html>.

24. “Metro Mass Scandal: Kpebu questions sale of GHc 38,000 buses for GHc 3,000.”

5.5. What MMT Tells Us About Reform

MMT's story reveals a structural pattern in Ghana's approach to public transport reform:

1. A political moment creates the will to invest.
2. A new institution is created with fanfare.
3. The institution is designed in a way that makes governance ambiguous.
4. Political interference undermines operational management.
5. Assets deteriorate and are eventually disposed of below value.
6. The political moment passes.
7. The institution limps on as a diminished version of what it was intended to be.

MMT today still exists. It still operates some buses. But the question of whether it can ever fulfil the mandate it was given in 2003 — a reliable, affordable, city-wide bus service — remains unanswered.

The buses are gone. The question of accountability is still waiting.

6. Who Actually Runs Transport in Ghana: The Union System

If you want to understand why Ghana's transport system looks the way it does, you have to understand who actually controls it. It is not the Ministry of Transport. It is not the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority. It is not Metro Mass Transit. It is the unions.

6.1. The Ghana Private Road Transport Union

The **Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU)** was founded on 19 May 1967 in Accra.²⁵ It is a member of the Ghana Trades Union Congress and has branches in all sixteen regions of the country. By 2005 it had 30,000 members. By 2011, that had grown to 120,000.²⁶

The GPRTU is unusual in the history of trade unionism. Most trade unions represent workers against employers. The GPRTU represents both. Its membership includes commercial drivers (the workers) and commercial vehicle owners (effectively the employers). This means the GPRTU does not engage in traditional collective bargaining — you cannot negotiate wages between two groups when both groups belong to the same union.²⁷

What the GPRTU does instead is govern the operational environment of informal transport: fare pricing, vehicle conduct at lorry stations, allocation of routes, and conflict resolution between drivers and owners. In the absence of a functioning state regulatory system, the GPRTU fills that space.

6.2. PROTOA

The **Professional Transport Operators Association (PROTOA)** is the other major union operating in the same space.²⁸ PROTOA and GPRTU compete for station control and membership, and their rivalry has at various points created friction at major lorry

25. Wikipedia Contributors, "Ghana Private Road Transport Union," accessed June 17, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana_Private_Road_Transport_Union.

26. Wikipedia Contributors.

27. Wikipedia Contributors.

28. "Trotro (Ghana)."

terminals. In Accra, both unions operate stations, and their overlapping jurisdictions mean that governance is divided, contested, and inconsistent.

6.3. The Political Economy of the Unions

The unions are not simply operational bodies. They are political actors. Commercial transport operators have historically been a significant political constituency in Ghana. Transport unions have mobilised their members during elections, aligned with ruling parties, and leveraged their control of lorry stations as political capital.

This relationship works in both directions. Governments have historically avoided confronting the union structure — even when that structure perpetuates exploitation of drivers and unsafe conditions for passengers — because doing so risks alienating a large and organised constituency. The unions, in turn, have used their political access to resist regulatory reform that would reduce their power.

The result is a regulatory vacuum at the heart of Ghanaian transport. The GPRTU sets fares for trotros, but it does so without independent scrutiny, transparent methodology, or the kind of consumer accountability that a state regulator would require. Fare increases are announced and applied. Passengers have no forum for challenge and no alternative to accept them.

6.4. What Unions Cannot Do

There is a specific and important thing that the union system cannot provide: capital investment. Unions manage operations within the existing fleet. They cannot buy new buses. They cannot build terminals. They cannot establish reserved lanes. They cannot integrate routes across the city. They cannot run a scheduled service. They cannot provide the infrastructure that would make public transport reliable.

All of those things require a state. And the state has been absent from the investment side of transport for four decades.

6.5. The Accountability Gap

When a trotro overloads and crashes, who is accountable? Not the driver, who may be unlicensed and who was under economic pressure to move fast. Not the vehicle owner, who is shielded by the informality of the hire arrangement. Not the GPRTU, which has no formal liability for the vehicles its members operate. Not the DVLA, which registered the vehicle without adequate inspection. Not the Ministry of Transport, which has no mechanism for fleet oversight.

The accountability gap is not an accident. It is the predictable result of a system designed around the convenience of those who profit from it, not the safety of those who use it.

The unions run transport in Ghana. They run it for their members. You are not a member.

7. The Trotro Economy: Who Profits, Who Pays, Who Risks

The trotro is Ghana's most honest institution. It tells you exactly what it is. It does not pretend to be safe. It does not pretend to be on time. It does not pretend to know how long the journey will take. It arrives when it arrives, it fills when it fills, and it moves when the driver decides. For 86 per cent of Ghana's road-based public transport passengers, this is the only choice.²⁹

Understanding the trotro means understanding not just what you see at the lorry station, but the economic structure that produces what you see.

7.1. What the Trotro Is

The trotro is a privately-owned minibus, typically a 15-to-23 seater, that operates on informal urban and peri-urban routes.³⁰ The routes are not planned by the state. They emerged organically over decades as operators went where passengers were. Some routes are well-served. Others, particularly in new peri-urban developments where people are poor and roads are bad, are barely served at all.

Trotros carry an estimated 60 per cent or more of urban commuters in Accra alone, and 86 per cent of Ghana's road-based public transport passengers nationally.^{31 32} This is not a marginal informal sector. It is the national transport system.

7.2. The Hire System: How the Economics Work

The economic structure of the trotro system distributes risk and profit in a specific and damaging way:

The vehicle owner acquires a minibus (often imported second-hand from Europe or Japan)

29. "TROTRO: The Most Enduring Urban Transport System and Its Place in National Economy," 2025, <https://thebftonline.com/2025/11/19/trotro-the-most-enduring-urban-transport-system-and-its-place-in-national-economy/>.

30. "Trotro (Ghana)."

31. "TROTRO: The Most Enduring Urban Transport System and Its Place in National Economy."

32. "Trotro (Ghana)."

and hires it out daily to a driver. The owner receives a fixed daily hire fee regardless of how much the driver earns. The owner bears no operational risk for any given day. Over time, the owner's risk is depreciation and maintenance, both of which the owner minimises by investing as little as possible in the vehicle's upkeep.

The driver pays the daily hire fee first, before anything else. Everything the driver earns above the hire fee and fuel costs is income. If the driver has a bad day — fewer passengers, a breakdown, a traffic delay — the hire fee still has to be paid. The driver bears all daily operational risk. This creates an incentive to speed, to overload, and to drive without rest in order to maximise the number of trips before the day ends.

The passenger pays the fare, assumes the physical risk of the vehicle's condition, and has no recourse if the journey is unsafe, uncomfortable, or does not arrive.

This structure is what researchers have called a form of “vernacular neoliberalism” — the logic of the unregulated market applied at the level of the daily commute, with all the consequences that unregulated markets produce when people have no alternatives.³³

7.3. What Trotros Cannot Be

The trotro has survived for eighty years in Ghana because it is flexible, cheap to start, and fills gaps that the state leaves open. But there are things the trotro system structurally cannot deliver, regardless of how hard individual drivers work or how well individual unions manage their stations:

- **Scheduled service.** Trotros leave when full, not when the clock says. You cannot plan your departure time or your arrival time.
- **Vehicle safety standards.** The hire system means owners have no incentive to invest in safety beyond the legal minimum (which is already poorly enforced). Ageing vehicles stay on the road.

33. “Vernacular Neoliberalism: How Private Entrepreneurship Runs Public Transport in Ghana.”

- **Accessible routes.** Trotros do not serve unprofitable routes. People in peripheral areas, new housing developments, and low-density communities are underserved by design.
- **Driver welfare.** Drivers working the hire system have no employment contract, no pension contribution, no health coverage, and no sick leave. The driver who has been on the road for fourteen hours to cover his hire money is the one who fell asleep at the wheel.

7.4. The VIP Premium and What It Reveals

At the other end of the private transport market is VIP Jeoun, a private intercity bus company founded in 2008 with nine buses.³⁴ It now operates air-conditioned 42-seater coaches across the country, and in January 2026 commissioned 35 new executive buses with 360-degree camera systems and extra legroom.³⁵

VIP Jeoun is a private company. It is not subsidised. It makes a profit. It works.

But it is not public transport. It serves passengers who can afford premium fares on intercity routes. It does not go to the estate in Kasoa where the nurse lives. It does not serve the market trader in Madina at 5am. It does not connect the factory worker in Tema to her job. VIP Jeoun's existence is not an argument against state transport. It is evidence that well-run, properly capitalised bus operations are commercially viable — and that the state could create the conditions for that quality of service to reach everyone, not just those who can pay for it.

The trotro is an adaptation to a broken system, not an alternative to fixing it.

34. "VIP Jeoun Transport commissions 35 new executive buses," 2026, <https://citinewsroom.com/2026/01/vip-jeoun-transport-commissions-35-new-executive-buses/>.

35. "VIP Jeoun Transport commissions 35 new executive buses."

8. The Price We Pay: Crashes, Deaths, and the Unroadworthy Fleet

There is a way to make the transport crisis abstract: policy failures, institutional design, political economy. This chapter makes it concrete. The broken system described in the previous chapters has a body count.

8.1. The Numbers

Between 1991 and 2021, **53,507 people died** in 336,335 reported road crashes in Ghana.³⁶ In the same period, 430,333 people suffered injuries of varying severity, many permanently disabling.³⁷ Ghana's road death toll is one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa relative to vehicle numbers. The National Road Safety Authority recorded **1,504 deaths in the first half of 2025 alone**.³⁸

These deaths are concentrated in the transport system that the state built, allowed to deteriorate, and handed to the informal sector. They are not random. They are predictable.

8.2. The Unroadworthy Fleet

As of December 2021, Ghana had **3,026,073 registered vehicles**.³⁹ Of those, **1,025,125 — thirty-five per cent — had failed to obtain the roadworthy certificate** required by law.⁴⁰ One in three registered vehicles on Ghana's roads is operating outside legal compliance standards for roadworthiness.

These are not forgotten vehicles gathering dust in yards. They are on the roads. They are picking up passengers at lorry stations. They are carrying children to school. They are

36. National Road Safety Authority, "Road Safety in Ghana — Statistics," accessed June 17, 2026, <https://nrsga.gov.gh/>.

37. National Road Safety Authority.

38. "1,504 lives were claimed through road accidents in first half of 2025 — National Road Safety Authority," 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/Hitz1039/posts/1504-lives-were-claimed-through-road-accidents-in-first-half-of-2025-national-ro/1191544779674552/>.

39. "Rickety vehicle menace: Over 1 million not roadworthy — Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority," <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-rickety-vehicle-menace-over-1-million-not-roadworthy-driver-and-vehicle-licensing-authority-2.html>.

40. "Rickety vehicle menace: Over 1 million not roadworthy — Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority."

driving the routes that the state bus system used to serve.

8.3. What Unroadworthy Looks Like

The physical condition of unroadworthy commercial vehicles is documented in health and engineering literature.⁴¹ Typical failures include:

- Corroded body frames and structural weaknesses
- Dilapidated seats with protruding sharp edges that become projectiles in a crash
- Worn-out tyres with insufficient tread depth
- Exposed electrical wiring that creates fire risk
- Non-functional brakes or brake systems below minimum standards
- Doors and windows that do not operate correctly
- No functioning seatbelts

Vehicle seating capacities are defined by the manufacturer's design — usually 15 to 23 seats for trotros — but actual use frequently exceeds those limits through standing passengers and deliberate overloading.⁴² An overloaded vehicle with worn brakes driven by a tired driver who is behind on his hire money is not an accident waiting to happen. It is an accident that has already been scheduled.

8.4. Who Regulates This?

The **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA)** is responsible for roadworthiness certification. One million vehicles without certification means the DVLA is either overwhelmed, under-resourced, or not enforcing the law. Probably all three.

41. "Engineering failure: How Ghana's 'Trotro' system is quietly threatening public health," <https://thechronicle.com.gh/engineering-failure-how-ghanas-trotro-system-is-quietly-threatening-public-health/>.

42. "Trotro (Ghana)."

The **Motor Traffic and Transport Department (MTTD)** of the Ghana Police Service is responsible for traffic enforcement. The MTTD is understaffed, undertrained for technical vehicle assessment, and operating under institutional pressures that this paper's companion volume (*Know Your Road Rights*) documents in detail.

The transport unions — GPRTU and PROTOA — have no formal statutory responsibility for vehicle safety. They can and do expel members for misconduct, but their interest is in keeping vehicles and drivers operational and paying station fees, not in removing unroadworthy vehicles from circulation.

The Ministry of Transport sets policy. It does not inspect individual vehicles.

In short: everyone is notionally responsible, and the collective result is that one million unsafe vehicles operate on Ghana's roads with no effective intervention.

8.5. The Economic Argument for Regulation

This is not only a safety issue. It is an economic one. Road crash deaths and injuries impose enormous costs on the Ghanaian economy: lost productivity, medical expenditure, insurance claims (where insurance exists), and the economic loss to families whose breadwinner is killed or disabled. The Copenhagen Consensus estimated that improvements to Ghana's urban transport system, including better safety standards, would generate returns far exceeding their cost.⁴³

Safety is not expensive. The absence of safety is.

53,507 people did not die because of bad luck. They died because of a system that was allowed to operate without adequate investment, adequate regulation, and adequate accountability. Those decisions were made by people in offices. Those people should answer for them.

43. "Ghana Priorities: Urban Transportation (BRT)," <https://copenhagenconsensus.com/publication/ghana-priorities-urban-transportation-brt>.

9. Aayalolo: How a Billion-Cedi Dream Stalled in Traffic

In 2016, Ghana launched what it called the future of Accra's transport. The **Aayalolo Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** system was funded by the World Bank, designed to carry 12,000 passengers per hour across the capital, and deployed with a fleet of 245 branded buses.⁴⁴ The name "Aayalolo" is a Ga phrase meaning "still moving on." The name was chosen with optimism.

By 2023, the Transport Minister told the public that the model was not working.⁴⁵ By 2025, fewer than half the original fleet was operational, and the remaining buses were competing for passengers with trotros — the system Aayalolo was designed to replace.⁴⁶

This is Ghana's most recent transport reform. It is the most expensively documented failure in this paper.

9.1. What BRT Was Supposed to Be

Bus Rapid Transit, when implemented correctly, is an effective middle ground between conventional buses and rail. Dedicated lanes keep buses out of traffic. High-capacity vehicles move large numbers of passengers quickly. Integrated fares and real-time information make the system predictable. Cities from Bogotá to Istanbul to Dar es Salaam have used BRT to transform their urban commutes.

Ghana spent a decade planning Aayalolo. The project went from inception to official launch in approximately nine years.⁴⁷ By any measure, this was a long time to plan something that still launched without its core infrastructure.

44. "Abandoned 'Aayalolo' buses: Has Ghana's Bus Rapid Transit system failed?," <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1268819/abandoned-aayalolo-buses-has-the-bus-rapid-tran.html>.

45. "Model of running Aayalolo buses not working — Transport Minister," 2023, <https://gna.org.gh/2023/03/model-of-running-aayalolo-buses-not-working-transport-minister/>.

46. "Multi-million-dollar World Bank Aayalolo BRT now competing for passengers with 'trotro'," 2025, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Multi-million-dollar-World-Bank-Aayalolo-BRT-now-competing-for-passengers-with-trotro-1981582>.

47. "Abandoned 'Aayalolo' buses: Has Ghana's Bus Rapid Transit system failed?"

9.2. No Dedicated Lanes

The structural failure of Aayalolo is specific and preventable: the buses were deployed without adequate dedicated lane infrastructure. A bus that must use the same lanes as private cars, taxis, and trotros is not a Bus Rapid Transit. It is just a bus.

Without dedicated lanes, Aayalolo buses sat in the same traffic as everyone else.⁴⁸ The “rapid” in Bus Rapid Transit requires physical separation from the traffic that makes city movement slow. Ghana launched the vehicles but not the lanes. The result was that passengers had no reason to choose Aayalolo over a trotro that was going to the same place in the same amount of time.

9.3. The Deterioration of the Fleet

The promises made at Aayalolo’s launch included amenities that were unprecedented for Ghanaian public transport: air conditioning, WiFi, USB charging ports, comfortable seating. These features were not maintained.

By 2025, the once-functional USB charging ports were no longer operational, WiFi service had been disabled, and air conditioning systems in many buses had broken down.⁴⁹ Passengers had been promised a premium experience. They were receiving a sub-standard one. Some of the buses were visibly dirty and poorly maintained. Overcrowding, which Aayalolo was designed to reduce, had become a complaint.

The same pattern: initial investment, political fanfare, maintenance failure, deterioration, loss of public trust.

48. “Multi-million-dollar World Bank Aayalolo BRT now competing for passengers with ‘trotro’.”

49. “Multi-million dollar Aayalolo BRT faces criticism over overloading, deteriorating service quality,” 2025, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/1398261/multi-million-dollar-aayalolo-brt-faces-criticism.html>.

9.4. Why It Failed Where Others Succeeded

The contrast with Senegal is instructive. Dakar launched its BRT system in 2024 and it is now considered one of Africa's most successful urban transport interventions.⁵⁰ Senegal's approach was different in one critical respect: it built the infrastructure before launching the service. The dedicated corridors, the stations, the integration with existing transport — these were in place before the buses began running. Senegal also maintained political continuity on the project across changes of government, treating the BRT as national infrastructure rather than a partisan initiative.

Ghana treated Aayalolo as a political project. It was launched to coincide with political milestones, not operational readiness. The management model was contested from the start, with the unions that ran the existing trotro system resistant to a competitor that would take their passengers.⁵¹ When political support wavered, the operational support wavered with it.

The academic literature on BRT implementation in African cities identifies exactly this dynamic: governments that try to introduce formal public transport without adequately managing the transition for incumbent operators tend to produce hybrid systems that satisfy nobody.⁵²

9.5. The Lesson Aayalolo Teaches

Aayalolo is not a lesson against investing in public transport. It is a lesson against investing in public transport as a political event rather than as long-term public infrastructure.

Transport systems take decades to build. They require consistent political will across electoral cycles. They require proper engineering — lanes before buses, not buses before lanes. They require transitional agreements with existing operators. And they require a

50. "How Senegal's Radical Approach to Bus Rapid Transport Succeeded Where Ghana Stalled," <https://labarjournal.com/how-senegals-radical-approach-to-bus-rapid-transport-succeeded-where-ghana-stalled/>.

51. Brendan Finn and John Walters, "Bus Rapid Transit Implementation with the Inclusion of Incumbent Paratransit Operators in African Cities: Lessons from Accra," *Urban, Planning and Transport Research* 9, no. 1 (2021), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21650020.2021.2000485>.

52. Finn and Walters.

management structure that is insulated from the political cycle.

Ghana has not learned these lessons yet. The evidence is parked in a lot somewhere in Accra, with the air conditioning off.

10. What Citizens Can Demand: The Constitutional and Legal Basis

This paper has documented a long history of failure. But failure is not the end of the conversation. You are a citizen. Citizens have tools. This chapter sets out what the constitution and the law give you the right to demand from the people responsible for Ghana's transport system.

10.1. The Constitutional Basis for Public Transport

The **1992 Constitution of Ghana** does not guarantee a specific right to public transport. But it is not silent on the state's obligations toward the welfare of its citizens.

Article 34 of the Constitution sets out the Directive Principles of State Policy — the social and economic objectives that every government is constitutionally obligated to work toward. Article 34(2) states:

The State shall, in particular, take all necessary steps to establish a sound and healthy economy whose underlying principles shall include the guarantee of a fair and realistic remuneration for production and productivity; the affording of equal development opportunities to all citizens.

Transport is not a peripheral amenity. It is the infrastructure of economic participation. A citizen who cannot get to work, to market, to school, or to hospital reliably is a citizen who has been denied equal development opportunity. The state's obligation to create "equal development opportunities" includes the infrastructure that makes those opportunities reachable.⁵³

Article 35(3) further requires the state to "foster a spirit of loyalty to enable each citizen to maintain Ghana's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity." A state that cannot move its citizens safely cannot claim to have fulfilled its basic responsibilities to them.

53. Republic of Ghana, *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992*, Promulgated 7 January 1993, 1992.

10.2. What the Law Says About Vehicle Safety

The **Road Traffic Act, Act 683** (2004) sets out the legal framework for vehicle roadworthiness, licensing, and road conduct.⁵⁴ It empowers the DVLA to set and enforce roadworthiness standards. It requires annual roadworthy certification. It gives the MTTD the authority to stop and inspect vehicles.

The law exists. What does not exist is consistent enforcement.

Citizens have the right to report unroadworthy vehicles to the DVLA. They have the right to demand that MTTD officers enforce Act 683 at checkpoints rather than using those checkpoints as revenue-collection opportunities. The companion to this paper, *Know Your Road Rights*, documents those rights in detail.

10.3. The Right to Information Act

The **Right to Information Act, 2019 (Act 989)** gives every Ghanaian citizen the right to request information from public institutions. This right is directly applicable to Ghana's public transport institutions.

You can use Act 989 to request:

- **From SIGA (State Interests and Governance Authority):** The annual performance reports for Metro Mass Transit Limited and Intercity STC. SIGA is responsible for overseeing state-owned enterprises and should hold detailed records of MMT's financial performance, fleet size, and operational metrics.
- **From the Ministry of Transport:** The status of the Aayalolo BRT fleet — how many buses are operational, what the maintenance budget is, what the plan is for the non-operational vehicles.
- **From the DVLA:** Aggregate data on roadworthy certificate compliance rates by vehicle class, and the enforcement statistics for the past three years.

54. Republic of Ghana, *Road Traffic Act, Act 683*, Enacted by Parliament of Ghana, 2004.

- **From MMT directly:** A full account of the bus disposal programme — which buses were sold, to whom, at what prices, and what approval process was followed.

The law entitles you to this information. If it is refused, there is an appeal process. If the appeal is refused, there is the Information Commissioner. Use the tools available.

10.4. Questions for Your MP and MCE

Every Member of Parliament sits on committees that oversee government policy. The Parliamentary Committee on Roads and Transport is directly responsible for scrutinising the Ministry of Transport, MMT, STC, and the Aayalolo BRT. Every Ghanaian has the right to write to their MP.

The specific questions that your MP should be able to answer:

1. How many Metro Mass Transit buses are currently operational, and what is the government's plan for replacing the fleet that was sold as scrap?
2. What is the current status of the Aayalolo BRT's dedicated lane infrastructure? When will the dedicated corridors that make BRT actually rapid be completed?
3. What is the government's position on the GPRTU's role in fare-setting? Why does a private union set the fares for a service that 86 per cent of Ghanaians depend on, without independent regulatory oversight?
4. What accountability mechanism exists for the disposal of public transport assets below market value?
5. What is the government's long-term investment plan for urban public transport in Accra, Kumasi, Tamale, and other cities?

If your MP cannot answer these questions, that is itself important information.

10.5. Community Monitoring

Citizen monitoring of public transport infrastructure is a legitimate and effective form of civic engagement. Documenting unroadworthy vehicles, reporting to the DVLA, and photographing abandoned BRT buses are all within your rights and can form the basis for formal complaints or media engagement.

Civil society organisations that work on transport policy in Ghana include the Institute for Transport and Development Policy (ITDP) and local advocacy groups within the urban planning and road safety space. Connecting with these organisations amplifies individual action.

The government is accountable to you for the buses it runs, the buses it sells, and the buses it never built. Hold it accountable.

11. Roads Are Political

Ghana does not have a transport problem. It has a governance problem that expresses itself as a transport problem.

The evidence in this paper does not support the conclusion that Ghana lacks the capability to run public buses. It ran them for decades. The colonial Government Transport Department ran buses in 1909. The State Transport Corporation ran buses for thirty years. Metro Mass Transit ran buses, imperfectly, until its fleet was sold for scrap. Aayalolo ran buses until the political will evaporated and the maintenance budget ran dry.

The pattern is not incompetence. Incompetence is random. This pattern repeats too consistently to be random. State transport institutions are created with political energy, allowed to be captured by patronage networks, underfunded until they deteriorate, and then stripped of their assets when the political moment passes. The people who authorise the asset-stripping face no consequences. The people who inherit the resulting gap — the commuters, the drivers, the market traders, the nurses and teachers at 5am — have no recourse.

11.1. What a Different Choice Would Look Like

A different choice would look like this: a transport authority with statutory independence from the Ministry of Transport, funded by a ring-fenced transport levy, with a mandate to plan and operate urban bus networks across Ghana's major cities. Its board would include independent directors, transport professionals, and citizen representatives. Its performance would be publicly reported annually through SIGA. Its fleet procurement and disposal would be subject to independent audit. Its drivers would have employment contracts.

This is not a utopian idea. It is the institutional design that works in cities that have working public transport. It requires political will to build and political courage to protect from capture. That is the only ingredient Ghana is currently missing.

11.2. The Specific Obligations

The government of Ghana owes its citizens specific answers and specific actions:

- A full public account of the Metro Mass Transit bus disposals, with individual transaction records and the names of the approving officials.
- A funded timeline for restoring MMT to a minimum operational fleet.
- A dedicated lane infrastructure plan for Aayalolo BRT with committed completion dates.
- An independent transport regulator with statutory power over fares, fleet standards, and route licensing.
- A roadworthiness enforcement programme with published targets and annual public reporting.

None of these require new constitutional amendments. They require decisions. They require officials to do their jobs. They require citizens to demand it.

11.3. The Role of the Citizen

The first two papers in this series — *The People Are the Bosses* and *Know Your Road Rights* — made the same foundational argument: the state serves you. You are not a beneficiary of government charity. You are the principal. The MP, the Minister, the DVLA officer, the MMT board member: they serve at your mandate.

Transport is where that theory meets Monday morning at 5:45am. The question at the lorry station is not whether the bus will come. The question is who is responsible for making sure it does — and whether you are going to hold them to that responsibility.

You now know the history. You know the institutional failures. You know the names of the legislation. You know the questions to ask and the bodies to ask them to.

Roads are political. The question is whose politics they serve.

Make it yours.

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