

WOODEN FERRIES IN ABIDJAN

AN OPPORTUNISTIC MARKET RESPONSE



Five million Abidjanais face transport challenges every day, such as long detours to cross bridges, congestion, high cost and air pollution. The mode share of public road transportation is distributed between mini buses, taxis and buses. No rapid bus transit system is in place, and the construction of an elevated train service connecting the north of Cote d'Ivoire's metropolis with the Atlantic coast is not expected to start before 2022. Development of waterways could help improve the peoples' transport woes.

Boats have been a mode of public transit in Abidjan since 1974 when the Société de Transport Lagunaire introduced waterbuses across the inner city lagoon. Several private companies are competing for new concessions, yet the potential of water transit is much higher. In the past decades, the growing demand for cheap and fast water transit has instigated private investors to establish wooden ferry lines (*pinasses*). The diesel-driven *pinasses* outnumber waterbuses in terms of offered services and passenger volumes, and are especially important to poor urbanites.

After an informal settlement was established on the Adjahui peninsula between the municipalities Koumassi and Port Bouët in 2012, the demand for water transit grew steadily. Many of the new residents depend on crossing the lagoon for their commute between home and work. Eleven new ferry lines were opened by individual private

investors looking for a mid-term investment opportunity for their savings. These *pinasses*, which mainly employ Adjahui residents though often under precarious work conditions, offer an efficient, safe and sustainable transit system with high passenger volumes (> 54,000 travels every day).

Our study within the Waterfront Metropolis Abidjan Project shows that this paratransit system with its *pinasses* has not gained much attention by urbanists and planners yet. The sustainability and popularity that the transit system is enjoying among its users could be improved considerably. Profits are actually large enough to reinvest proceeds into the improvement of services, such as board security, quays, and environment-friendly gears, however such investments are discouraged because contractual periods are unclear.

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