INLAND WATERWAYS TRANSPORT IN LAGOS (NIGERIA) PROJECT

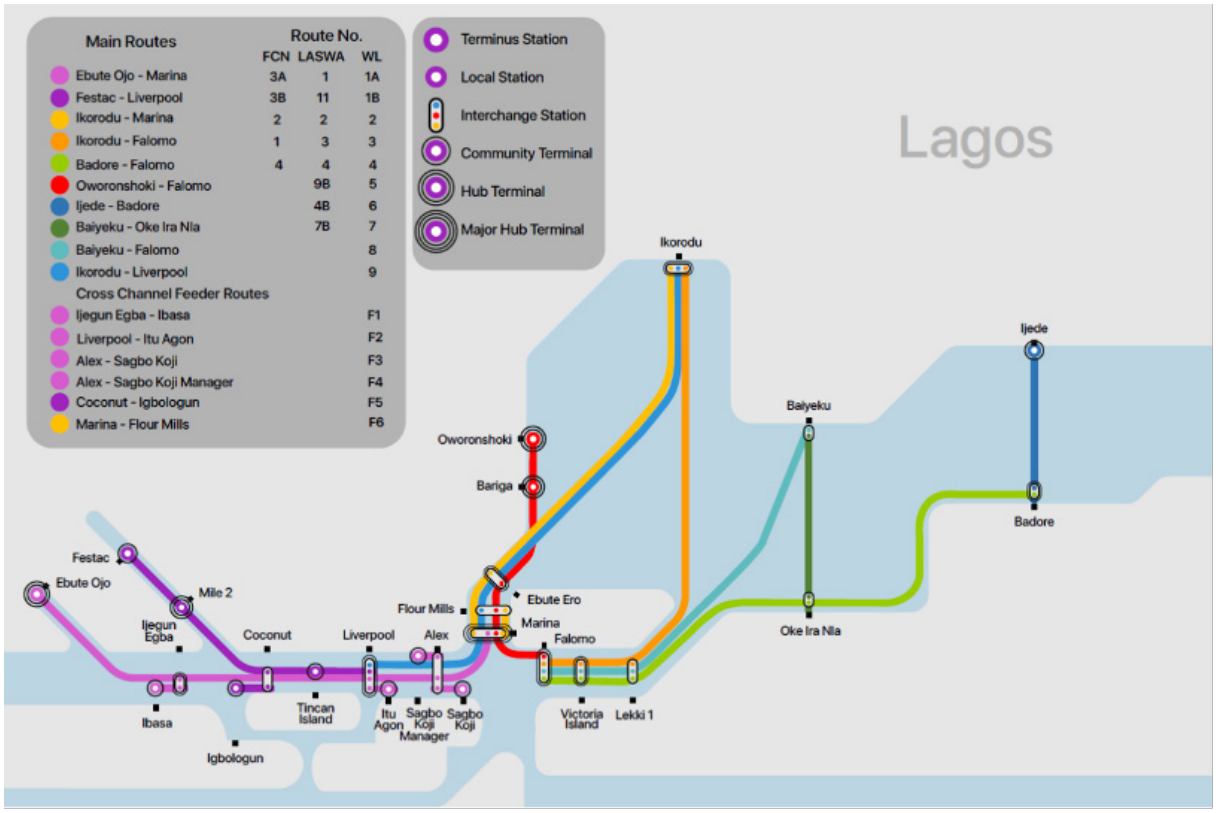

Image above: Planned inland waterways transit system, by RebelGroup International BV & associates, WIDE-LAG Project Operational Design and Business Model – ODBM: INTERIM REPORT (2023)

The **€410 million Global Gateway flagship project on waterborne public transport in Lagos, Nigeria** (2024-2030) known as the "OMI ÈKÓ" project, is moving forward. Following the **signing of all Financing Agreements** (subsidized loans of €130 and €170 million from AFD and the EIB, respectively, plus a €60 million EU grant) and the public launch of the project, **the Lagos State Waterways Authority (LASWA)** - contributing €40 million - has entered the full implementation phase. The private sector is expected to contribute €10 million of the total financing for "OMI ÈKÓ".

To accelerate the delivery schedule, LASWA is **leveraging advanced procurement procedures** that enable the early recruitment of **key technical consultants**—namely the Project Management and Operational Design (PMOD) Consultant and the Engineering, Procurement & Construction Supervision (EPCS) Consultant— ahead of the completion of the main works bidding documentation.

The project's aim is to develop green, safe, and efficient mass public inland waterways transportation (IWT) on the Lagos Lagoon. The vision is a long-term, ambitious one, fitting in the **Lagos State Development Plan (2022-2052)** and aiming to bring IWT modal share **from less than 1% to 5% of total public transport daily trips.** Through the **electrification and formalisation** of waterborne transport in Lagos State and resilient design of infrastructure, the project will offer a greener, safer, and more efficient transport network to Nigeria's largest city.

The project encompasses both the **construction of high-quality infrastructure and facilities**—including routes preparation, terminals, jetties, and charging stations for the e-vessels—and the **establishment of sustainable IWT operations** on the ferry networks—acquisition of the vessels, procurement of an Intelligent Transport System (ITS), and institutional strengthening and capacity-building of LAWSA as the local implementing agency and future manager of the system.

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Preparatory studies for the project were carried out between 2022 and 2023 within the framework of the **Covenant of Mayors of Sub-Saharan Africa (CoM SSA)** initiative, of which Lagos State has been a signatory since 2015.

Several other projects in the region move in the same direction as OMI ÈKÓ, drawing attention to the relevance of inland waterways (both rivers and lakes) in Africa, which currently capture only a fraction of goods movement on the continent, despite holding **significant potential for transport and trade** both within and between countries.

For instance, the SEALINK project in Nigeria, carried by Port of Antwerp Bruges and Nexim, aims at developing freight corridors on several rivers for inland waterways and coastal trade connectivity including through existing port revitalization and new ports; while on the Senegal river, the ribbon has been recently cut for the opening of a strategic navigation corridor linking Mali to the port of Saint Louis in Senegal.

These projects try to tackle some of the main obstacles in the sector—namely, **financial constraints and decaying infrastructure** (where present)—with the potential to unlock great benefits with comparatively low investment. Transport costs on inland waterways are estimated to be between 30 to 60% lower than bulk transport by road or rail.

If developed well, waterborne transportation in Africa can become a key asset to reduce road congestion, boost decarbonisation, and enhance the climate resilience of the transport system, both passenger and freight, thus deserving increasing attention.

Resources on the topic:

- Waterborne Technology Platform. (n.d.). *Global trends and drivers.* **https://www.waterborne.eu/vision/global-trends-and-drivers**
- International Association of Public Transport (UITP). (2025, December). *Global Waterborne Figures 2025 (Statistics Brief).* **https://www.uitp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2025/12/20251212_Waterborne-Global-Figures_WEB.pdf**