

## Analyzing Road Safety Challenges in Bauchi State: Assessing the Role of Toyota Hiace Vehicles and Strategies for Improvement

The Toyota Hiace is one of Toyota's most versatile models, designed to efficiently transport both passengers and cargo in both urban and rural areas. Its well-thought-out design ensures compliance with safety standards, incorporating features such as airbags and comfortable seating. For decades, this vehicle has served as a primary choice for commercial transportation in Nigeria. However, it has unfortunately become a deadly trap for thousands of passengers due to certain circumstances.

In response to the alarming number of fatal accidents associated with the Hiace, the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) once considered banning the bus entirely. According to a 2013 report from the Nigerianeye website, the Corps Marshal of the FRSC Stated that "31 percent of Hiace crashes result in flames," and he recommended the implementation of speed limit devices for the vehicle. Bauchi State, among others, heavily relies on the Hiace for interstate journeys and has experienced some of the most devastating accidents in the country. Some of these few instances of accidents involving Toyota Hiace in Bauchi State are shown below:

Local Government	Newspaper/Date	Fatalities	injured
Toro LGA	Premiumtimes/Jan 5th, 2023	18	0
Darazo LGA	Premiumtimes/Jan 15th, 2023	5	12
Toro LGA	Gazettengr/Feb 25th, 2023	15	7
Gamawa LGA	Dailypost/March 24th, 2023	25	10
Darazo LGA	Dailypost/April 5th, 2023	2	5

The table presented above illustrates a selection of recent accidents involving Toyota Hiace, including the number of casualties, dates, and the affected local Government areas. Among these incidents, Gamawa LGA stands out as the most heavily impacted, experiencing over 25 fatalities in a single accident that occurred in Udubo town. The accident was attributed to over speeding and tyre burst. Tragically, the passengers were unable to escape as the bus windows had been welded shut to accommodate



more cargo. Many similar accidents can be attributed to negligence on the part of authorities who lack proper transport sector regulations and fail to enforce existing laws. Additionally, the transport unions themselves often neglect safety requirements and do not ensure that only licensed and qualified drivers have access to commercial vehicles. The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) holds significant responsibilities in inspecting vehicles to ensure compliance with standards for tyres, seating, licensing, and overall safety measures.

While it is not intended to vilify the Toyota Hiace brand, the vehicle's design renders it vulnerable to severe accidents. Several factors consistently contribute to these crashes, including:

- I. Over-speeding: A significant cause of accidents, with some drivers even disabling their vehicle's speedometers.
- II. Unrestricted and unabated use of substandard tyres, including old and worn-out ones, greatly increasing the risk of fatal accidents.
- III. Inexperienced and unlicensed (untrained) drivers, who pose a substantial threat on the roads.
- IV. Some drivers further exacerbate the situation by welding vehicle windows shut to accommodate more cargo, making it impossible to attempt rescuing the casualties.
- V. Various road obstacles, human factors, and even unleashed animals also contribute to these accidents.
- VI. Overloading due to sheer greed of drivers may distort center of gravity of vehicle which on small tilt may result in somersault causing deadly accidents
- VII. Lastly, poor road conditions such as cracks, potholes, faded pathway markings, and missing traffic signs further compound the risks.

Referenced to the above factors it is advisable to encourage drivers to read and understand the driving code and road signs. These factors remain the most heartbreaking predicaments on our roads as according to an online news agency, The Whistler, reported on March 9th, 2023, that there were 2,733 accidents recorded from January to March of the year under review, resulting in the loss of 1,441 lives and 8,339 injuries. As reported by the Federal Road Safety Corps to effectively address and reduce such unfortunate disasters, the Bauchi State Government must enforce existing laws and create new policies for managing these incidents. This also applies to Federal Government through agencies responsible for the safety of our roads and vehicle worthiness inspectors.

