

Ebute-Metta Junction – a busy station in the centre of the Railway Compound in central Lagos, focussing largely on goods and container transport – is also the Headquarters of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC). From being almost moribund in the 1960s and 70s, the railway is facing a new future, with huge investment taking place in new lines and a major railway hub for the city.

In parallel with this modernisation plan, a push is being made by a small group of people with a passion for culture and heritage, supported by the MD and General Manager of the NRC, to preserve some of the original buildings to house a growing national railway collection. Legacy 1995 is a Nigerian charity, with an international membership, which is working with the NRC to deliver a railway museum for Nigeria.

Having experience of developing railway museums in the UK and as Chair of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, I was invited to visit Ebute-Matta to meet the Legacy team and help them to develop a project plan for a facility incorporating heritage, social and commercial objectives. The proposal also aims to benefit the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum through the generation of new ideas and information sharing across West Africa, and the creation of a pan-African network of railway museums, promoting sustainable development and capacity building across the continent.

Four buildings within the railway compound have already been transferred to the Legacy 1995/NRC partnership for development as heritage sites, including the former General Manager's house built during the colonial period, the locomotive drivers' hostel, the carriage and wagon shed and another typical colonial officer's house. In parallel several significant artefacts have been set aside for the collection, including four British built 'River Class' steam locomotives, a steam breakdown crane and several carriages and wagons in various states of repair.

Arriving on Saturday 14th September, I spent two days touring the railway compound to orientate the museum buildings in the broader railway context and identify potential quick wins for collecting from within the site.

Jaekel House, the former General Manager's house has been restored to its colonial original glory and houses a small museum charting the story of Nigerian Railways. It sits in a delightful garden and provides an oasis of calm, open to visitors and available for special events and weddings.

On Monday we were privileged to meet with the Railway District Manager, Lagos, Engineer Jerry Oche, who fully supports the development of the museum. He was able to introduce us to the Managing Director, who facilitated a meeting with the Minister of Transport in Abuja to get his support for the project.

A stakeholder workshop on Tuesday 17th September brought together railwaymen, academics and members of the cultural and heritage sectors for us to present the project, get their buy in and gather ideas for taking the project forward. This work has been collated and priorities are beginning to emerge, along with initial drafts of a collecting policy, site master plan, collections management plan, business case and long-term development plan.

From a long-held pipe dream of the NRC/Legacy Joint Committee, it seems now as if this project is going to become a reality.

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