DYNAMIC JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, RICHMOND, INDIANA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Volume 6 , Number 1, 2026, ISSN:2834-0418, Email: jsmsususa@gmail.com

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION AND THE FAILURE OF FEDERAL ROADS IN NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM DELTA AND EDO STATES

Opoh E. Wilfred

&

Okereka Onofere Princewill

Abstract

The deterioration of federal roads remains one of the major infrastructural and governance challenges confronting Nigeria. Although the Federal Government has constitutional responsibility for the construction, alteration and maintenance of federal roads, the condition of many federal roads is also influenced by the activities, resources and cooperation of state and local governments. This article examines the relationship between intergovernmental coordination and the failure of federal roads, with particular evidence from Delta and Edo States. The study adopts a qualitative, documentary research design, drawing on constitutional provisions, scholarly literature, official government documents and previous empirical studies on intergovernmental relations and road infrastructure in Nigeria. The analysis is anchored principally on Deil Wright's intergovernmental relations framework and supported by fiscal federalism theory. The article argues that poor coordination among federal and state institutions contributes to delayed intervention, overlapping responsibilities, weak information sharing, inadequate drainage and right-of-way management, political rivalry, funding constraints and ineffective maintenance arrangements. Evidence from Delta and Edo States illustrates the practical consequences of coordination failures. Recent official interventions on roads such as the Benin–Sapele, Benin–Ekpoma–Auchi–Okpella–Okene– Lokoja and Benin–Agbor–Asaba corridors demonstrate that road deterioration cannot be addressed solely through federal expenditure without effective collaboration with state institutions. The article recommends institutionalising joint federal-state road-management committees, establishing clearer protocols for emergency maintenance, strengthening intergovernmental fiscal arrangements, improving joint monitoring and adopting performance-based maintenance contracts. The paper concludes that sustainable improvement in federal road infrastructure requires a shift from fragmented governmental responsibility to coordinated, cooperative and accountable intergovernmental governance.

Keywords: Intergovernmental Coordination, Federalism, Federal Roads, Road Infrastructure, Cooperative Federalism, Fiscal Federalism, Delta State, Edo State, Nigeria

Introduction

Road infrastructure constitutes a critical component of economic development and public administration because it facilitates the movement of people, agricultural products, industrial inputs, finished goods and public services. In a country as geographically extensive and economically diverse as Nigeria, the effectiveness of the road network has direct implications for regional integration, trade, employment, security and access to social services. Consequently, the condition of federal roads should be understood not merely as an engineering problem but also as a governance and intergovernmental-management problem. Nigeria operates a federal political system in which governmental responsibilities are constitutionally distributed among federal, state and local authorities. The 1999 Constitution, as amended, places the construction, alteration

and maintenance of roads declared by the National Assembly to be Federal trunk roads within the Exclusive Legislative List. This constitutional arrangement establishes federal responsibility for federal trunk roads. Nevertheless, federal roads physically traverse states and local government areas, meaning that their effective management frequently requires cooperation among institutions at different levels of government. This distinction is important because a road may be legally classified as a federal responsibility while its physical performance is affected by activities within the jurisdiction of state and local authorities. Drainage, urban development, traffic management, environmental conditions, land-use changes, roadside development, security and local economic activities can all affect road performance. Therefore, a narrow interpretation of constitutional responsibility may not provide an adequate framework for understanding why roads fail or why maintenance interventions are sometimes delayed.

Intergovernmental relations provide an appropriate analytical perspective for examining this problem. Wright (1988) conceptualised intergovernmental relations as involving interactions among governmental units and emphasised the importance of overlapping authority, administrative behaviour and cooperation. From this perspective, the effectiveness of public policy depends not simply on which government possesses formal authority but also on how governmental actors interact in implementing policies and delivering public goods. Contemporary scholarship similarly emphasises coordination as a central component of effective intergovernmental governance in Nigeria (Adedeji, 2025).

The road sector provides a particularly useful setting for examining these relationships. Ogbu and Ezeh (2019), in their study of federal and state road maintenance in Nigeria, found that partnership and functional-dualism approaches to intergovernmental relations significantly influenced road maintenance. Their findings suggest that cooperation rather than competition between levels of government can improve road-maintenance outcomes. The problem is especially relevant in Delta and Edo States because the two states contain important transport corridors connecting the South-South and South-East regions with other parts of Nigeria. Major federal highways passing through the states support commercial, agricultural and industrial activities. Yet several corridors have experienced deterioration, traffic disruption and recurring maintenance interventions.

Official government evidence demonstrates the significance of the problem. In March 2024, the Federal Government conducted inspections of federal road projects connecting Edo and Delta States, including the Benin–Sapele corridor, and directed contractors to undertake immediate maintenance of deteriorated sections. The Federal Ministry of Works also reported concerns regarding the Benin–Ekpoma–Auchi–Okpella–Okene–Lokoja road in Edo State. These developments raise a fundamental public-administration question: To what extent does the quality of intergovernmental coordination influence the persistence or reduction of federal road failures in Delta and Edo States?

This article therefore examines the relationship between intergovernmental coordination and federal road failures, focusing on the institutional, fiscal, administrative and political factors that influence road infrastructure outcomes.

Conceptual Clarification

Intergovernmental Relations

Intergovernmental relations refer broadly to the interactions, institutional arrangements, communication processes and cooperative or conflictual relationships among different levels of government.

Wright (1988) presents intergovernmental relations as broader than the formal constitutional concept of federalism because it focuses on actual interactions among governmental officials and institutions. This perspective is particularly useful in Nigeria because formal constitutional powers do not fully determine how governments behave in practice. Intergovernmental relations include political, administrative, financial, legislative and technical interactions. They may involve formal meetings, joint committees, fiscal transfers, policy implementation, information exchange, dispute resolution and collaborative projects. In the Nigerian context, intergovernmental relations may be understood through Federal-State, Federal-Local and State-Local interactions. For this article, emphasis is placed on Federal-State relations because federal trunk roads fall primarily within federal jurisdiction.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Intergovernmental coordination refers to deliberate efforts by different levels of government to harmonise policies, resources, responsibilities and actions in order to achieve common objectives. Coordination is therefore narrower than the general concept of intergovernmental relations. Government may interact without effectively coordinating their actions. Effective coordination requires communication, shared objectives, role clarity, joint planning, information exchange, resource mobilisation and monitoring.

Adedeji (2025) argues that coordination is central to the capacity of Nigeria's governmental tiers to deliver public goods and services and observes that conflictual relations have often weakened effective coordination. For road infrastructure, coordination should encompass: joint identification of road problems; information sharing; project planning; funding arrangements; drainage and environmental management; traffic management; contractor supervision; emergency interventions; monitoring and evaluation; and accountability. 5.3 Federal Roads

Federal roads are roads under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government as defined by Nigeria's constitutional and legal framework. The Second Schedule to the 1999 Constitution includes the construction, alteration and maintenance of roads declared by the National Assembly as Federal trunk roads. Federal roads are strategically important because many serve as national and inter-state transportation corridors. Their performance therefore affects economic integration beyond the immediate state in which they are located.

Federal Road Failure

Federal road failure refers to the deterioration of road infrastructure to a level at which the road can no longer provide safe, efficient and reliable transportation services. Road failure can involve: potholes; cracks; rutting; pavement deformation; erosion; failed bridges and culverts; inadequate drainage; shoulder failure; flooding; structural pavement failure; and prolonged

deterioration resulting from inadequate maintenance. Road failure is not necessarily caused by a single factor. Engineering deficiencies, excessive axle loading, poor drainage, environmental conditions, inadequate maintenance, funding constraints, weak supervision and institutional failures may interact.

Theoretical Framework

Intergovernmental Relations Theory

The principal theoretical framework for this article is Deil Wright's Intergovernmental Relations perspective.

Wright's work emphasises the interaction among governmental levels and identifies different patterns of authority relationships. His framework is useful because it moves attention away from constitutional structures alone toward actual governmental behaviour, administrative interactions and policy implementation.

Three broad relationship patterns commonly associated with Wright's framework are: Coordinate-authority relationships – where governmental levels operate within relatively distinct spheres of authority; Inclusive-authority relationships – where one level dominates and other levels operate substantially within its framework; and

Overlapping-authority relationships – where governmental responsibilities overlap and cooperation, bargaining and negotiation become necessary. The overlapping model is particularly relevant to federal road governance in Nigeria. Although the Federal Government has formal responsibility for federal trunk roads, successful management often requires state and local cooperation.

For example, a federal road may require:

state assistance in traffic diversion; state cooperation on drainage; local cooperation concerning roadside development; state security support; community engagement; and coordination during emergencies. The theory therefore predicts that where governmental authorities overlap, and coordination is weak, policy implementation can become inefficient.

Fiscal Federalism Theory

The analysis is further supported by fiscal federalism theory. Oates (1999) argues that fiscal federalism concerns the assignment of governmental functions and fiscal instruments among different levels of government.

The theory is relevant because road infrastructure requires substantial and sustained financial resources. Where expenditure responsibilities and revenue capacities are poorly aligned, governments may experience fiscal pressures that affect infrastructure maintenance. Nigeria's fiscal structure is highly significant in this regard. States depend substantially on federally distributed revenues, while the Federal Government retains important revenue sources. This creates a vertical fiscal relationship that influences the capacity of subnational governments to participate in infrastructure provision.

Fiscal federalism helps explain why a state government may have strong incentives to support the maintenance of a federal road but lack a clear fiscal mechanism for doing so.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative documentary research design. The study relies on secondary evidence obtained from academic publications, official government documents, constitutional materials, institutional reports and relevant studies on intergovernmental relations and road infrastructure.

The documentary approach is appropriate because the article seeks to analyse institutional relationships, policy arrangements and documented road-management experiences rather than estimate a statistical causal effect from newly collected survey data.

The sources reviewed include:

academic journal articles; books on federalism and intergovernmental relations; the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;

Federal Ministry of Works publications;

Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation reports; World Bank reports; and previous empirical studies on federal-state relations and road maintenance.

The evidence is analysed thematically around five variables: institutional coordination, fiscal relations, political relations, administrative capacity and road-maintenance outcomes.

Intergovernmental Coordination and Federal Road Governance in Nigeria

Constitutional Allocation of Responsibility

The starting point for understanding federal road governance is the constitutional distribution of responsibilities. The Constitution assigns federal trunk roads to the Federal Government through the Exclusive Legislative List.

However, constitutional responsibility does not eliminate the practical need for intergovernmental cooperation.

Federal roads cross state boundaries, urban centres, local communities, agricultural areas and industrial zones. Their effective performance can therefore be influenced by activities controlled by state and local governments.

This produces a distinction between formal responsibility and functional interdependence.

Formal responsibility answers the question: Who is legally responsible for the road?

Functional interdependence answers the question: Which institutions must cooperate for the road to function effectively?

The distinction is central to understanding road failures.

Institutional Fragmentation

One of the major challenges confronting road governance is institutional fragmentation. Federal agencies may be responsible for road construction and maintenance, while state ministries of works, transport agencies, environmental agencies, local governments, security agencies and urban planning authorities perform functions that affect the road environment. Where these institutions lack effective coordination, several problems may emerge: duplication of interventions; delays in responding to road deterioration; inadequate drainage coordination; poor traffic management during construction; inconsistent project priorities; inadequate information exchange; and disputes over responsibility.

The problem is therefore not simply the absence of institutions but the absence of sufficiently integrated institutional processes.

Evidence from Delta State

Delta State provides an important case for examining federal road governance because of its strategic position within Nigeria's southern transportation network. Federal roads in the state connect major commercial and population centres and provide links between Delta, Edo, Anambra, Bayelsa and other states.

Official evidence indicates that maintenance interventions have been required on several roads in Delta State. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation reported maintenance activities on sections of the Kwale–Umutu Road, Asaba–Illah–Ebu Road and Benin–Asaba–Onitsha Dual Carriageway. The recurrence of maintenance interventions demonstrates the continuing need for effective road-asset management.

The challenge extends beyond pavement rehabilitation. Delta State's environmental and urban conditions make drainage and water management particularly significant. Where drainage systems are inadequate or disconnected from surrounding urban development, water can accelerate pavement deterioration.

Consequently, federal road maintenance in Delta State requires cooperation between federal road authorities and state institutions responsible for urban planning, drainage, environmental management and traffic. The case demonstrates that road governance cannot be reduced to the contractor-federal government relationship. The wider institutional environment influences the performance of the road asset.

Evidence from Edo State

Edo State offers another important case because it contains major national transportation corridors connecting the South-South region with the North and South-West. One of the most significant examples is the Benin–Ekpoma–Auchi–Okpella–Okene–Lokoja corridor.

In March 2024, the Federal Government publicly expressed concern over the condition and pace of work on the road and directed contractors to accelerate rehabilitation. The intervention followed an inspection of project sites in Edo State.

Federal-state coordination has also been visible in joint inspections. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation reported a joint inspection involving the Minister of Works and state government officials on federal roads connecting Edo and Delta States. During the inspection, the need to address drainage and deteriorated road sections was emphasised. This example illustrates the practical value of coordination. A federal authority may have responsibility for the road, but the state government's involvement can be important in addressing drainage, traffic management and local environmental conditions.

The Edo evidence therefore supports the argument that effective road governance requires more than constitutional jurisdiction. It requires institutional cooperation.

Major Factors Weakening Intergovernmental Coordination

Political Rivalry

Political rivalry can weaken intergovernmental cooperation when federal and state governments belong to competing political parties or political blocs.

Infrastructure projects may become politically interpreted rather than administratively managed. Government officials may disagree over responsibility for road conditions, funding, project credit and project priorities.

Existing research on Nigeria's intergovernmental relations identifies conflict and political competition as significant features of the federal-state relationship (Adedeji, 2025; Akume, 2014). The implication for roads is significant. When political actors compete over responsibility rather than cooperate around outcomes, road users bear the cost.

Inadequate Funding

Road infrastructure requires long-term funding. It is insufficient to allocate money only for initial construction because roads require routine and periodic maintenance.

The Federal Ministry of Works has identified inadequate funding as a major challenge to highway development and reported large financial obligations relating to highway projects. Fiscal constraints can affect coordination because state governments may be unwilling or unable to contribute to federal road projects without formal arrangements for cost recovery. A sustainable framework therefore requires predictable funding mechanisms and clearly defined financial responsibilities.

Weak Information Sharing

Effective coordination depends on reliable information.

Road deterioration is dynamic. A road section that is passable during the dry season may become severely damaged during the rainy season. State and local authorities may receive early information from communities, transport unions and local officials.

If such information does not reach federal agencies promptly, intervention may be delayed. A coordinated road-management system should therefore establish a formal mechanism for states to report: road failures; bridge defects; flooding;

drainage obstruction; accident-prone sections; encroachment; and urgent maintenance requirements.

Ambiguity in Cost-Sharing

A major challenge is the absence of sufficiently institutionalised arrangements for state participation in federal road maintenance.

States have strong incentives to ensure that federal roads passing through their territory remain functional. However, if they spend state funds on federal assets without an agreed framework, questions of accountability and reimbursement can arise.

A clear cost-sharing framework could allow states to undertake emergency interventions subject to agreed standards and subsequent federal reimbursement where appropriate.

Administrative Capacity

Road management requires technical personnel, procurement expertise, project-management capacity, monitoring systems and engineering supervision.

The Federal Ministry of Works has identified shortages of technical personnel as one factor affecting effective project supervision.

Administrative capacity is also important at the state level because state institutions need sufficient technical competence to participate effectively in joint road-management programmes.

Result and Discussion

The evidence reviewed in this article demonstrates that federal road failure should be understood as a multidimensional governance problem.

First, formal constitutional responsibility remains important. Federal roads are federal assets, and the Federal Government has primary responsibility for their construction and maintenance.

Second, however, practical road governance is interdependent. Roads operate within territories governed by multiple institutions. Therefore, federal responsibility does not eliminate the need for state and local cooperation.

Third, fiscal capacity influences institutional performance. Where funding is inadequate or unpredictable, maintenance becomes reactive rather than preventive.

Fourth, political relations affect administrative coordination. Cooperative political relations can facilitate joint inspections, information sharing and emergency interventions, whereas rivalry can produce blame-shifting and institutional paralysis.

Fifth, the evidence from Delta and Edo States demonstrates that coordination can have practical effects. The reported joint inspection of roads between Edo and Delta and the emphasis on drainage and immediate maintenance provide examples of federal-state interaction in response to road problems.

The findings are consistent with Ogbu and Ezeh (2019), who found that partnership and functional-dualism models significantly influenced road maintenance. Their argument that governments should cooperate rather than compete is particularly relevant to the Delta-Edo context.

The findings are also consistent with Wright's conception of overlapping authority. Federal road governance represents an area in which formal authority and practical interdependence coexist.

Conceptual Model

The relationship identified in this article can be represented as follows:

Intergovernmental Coordination

→ joint planning

→ information sharing

→ fiscal cooperation

→ technical cooperation

↓

Quality of Road Governance

→ timely intervention

→ effective supervision

→ preventive maintenance

→ drainage management → accountability

↓

Federal Road Outcomes

→ improved road condition

→ reduced road failure

→ safer transportation

→ lower travel costs

→ improved economic connectivity

Conversely:

Weak coordination

→ political rivalry + funding delays + fragmented administration + weak monitoring ↓ Delayed maintenance

↓

Road deterioration and recurrent failure

This conceptualisation shows that road failure is not simply a physical phenomenon. It is also an outcome of institutional and administrative processes.

Policy Implications

The findings have several implications for public administration and infrastructure governance.

Establish Federal-State Road Coordination Committees

Permanent Federal-State Road Coordination Committees should be established in states with major federal road corridors.

Such committees should include representatives of: Federal Ministry of Works; relevant federal road agencies; State Ministry of Works;

State Ministry of Transport;

State environmental and planning authorities; local government representatives; security agencies; and relevant road-user/community organisations.

The committees should meet regularly rather than only during road emergencies.

Develop Joint Road-Condition Monitoring Systems

Federal and state governments should develop a shared digital road-condition database. Road users and state authorities should be able to report failed sections, flooding, bridge problems and drainage failures.

Such information should be automatically transmitted to the relevant federal road authority for assessment and response.

Institutionalise Emergency Cost-Sharing

A legal and administrative framework should permit states to undertake emergency repairs on federal roads where delay could endanger lives or severely disrupt economic activity.

Such interventions should operate under agreed technical standards and financial procedures.

Strengthen Preventive Maintenance

Government should shift from reactive rehabilitation toward preventive maintenance. The World Bank has previously emphasised the importance of road maintenance and sound asset-management practices in Nigeria.

Preventive maintenance is generally preferable to waiting until road deterioration requires major reconstruction.

Improve Contractor Accountability

Contractors should be subjected to measurable performance indicators, including: completion time; quality standards; maintenance response time; durability; safety; drainage performance; and defect-liability compliance.

Performance-based maintenance contracting can improve accountability where properly designed and monitored.

Reduce Political Interference

Road infrastructure should be treated as a public asset rather than a political instrument. Federal and state governments should jointly publish: project costs; project status; contractor details; expected completion dates;

payments; variations; and maintenance obligations.

Transparency can reduce political disputes and strengthen public accountability.

Conclusion

This article examined intergovernmental coordination and federal road failures in Nigeria, drawing evidence from Delta and Edo States. The analysis demonstrates that the persistent deterioration of federal roads cannot be explained exclusively by engineering problems or inadequate funding. Institutional fragmentation, weak federal-state coordination, political rivalry, fiscal constraints, limited information sharing and administrative weaknesses also contribute to poor road outcomes.

The Nigerian constitutional framework establishes federal responsibility for federal trunk roads, but the physical and administrative realities of road governance create significant interdependence among federal, state and local institutions.

Evidence from Delta and Edo States demonstrates the importance of coordinated intervention. Official reports concerning the Benin–Sapele, Benin–Ekpoma–Auchi–Okpella– Okene–Lokoja and Benin–Agbor–Asaba corridors illustrate continuing maintenance challenges and the need for federal-state interaction.

The article therefore concludes that improving federal roads requires a transformation from a fragmented model of governmental responsibility to a cooperative model of intergovernmental road governance. Federal authority should remain clear, but state and local institutions should be integrated into information sharing, emergency response, drainage management, monitoring and community engagement.

The most sustainable solution is not to transfer constitutional responsibility for federal roads to the states, but to strengthen the mechanisms through which the different levels of government cooperate around a shared national infrastructure objective.

Ultimately, effective intergovernmental coordination should be treated as an infrastructure management instrument in its own right. Without it, additional expenditure on roads may continue to produce limited and unsustainable outcomes. With stronger coordination, predictable financing, professional administration and transparent monitoring, Nigeria can improve the durability and economic usefulness of its federal road network.

References

Adedeji, A. O. (2025). Intergovernmental relations and Coordination in Nigeria. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3(4), 14-22.

Akume, A. T. (2014). The effect of intergovernmental relations (IGR) on Nigerian Federalism: An examination of intergovernmental management 1999-2007. Canadian Social Science, 10(3).

Awodokun, A. A. (2024). Nigeria's intergovernmental relations: A comparative analysis of 1963 and 1999 constitutions. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2(1), 305-311.

Burke, B. F. (2014). Understanding Intergovernmental Relations, twenty-five years hence. State and Local Government Review, 46(1).

Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation. (2024). FERMA commences "Operation Free Our Roads" nationwide.

Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation. (2024). Minister of Works, state governments in joint inspection of Edo and Delta federal roads.

Federal Ministry of Works. (2024). Federal government addresses concern on Benin–Ekpoma–Auchi–Okpella–Okene–Lokoja Road.

Federal Ministry of Works. (2024). Prospects of the 2024 budget for highway projects.

Ikeanyibe, O. M., Chukwu, P., & Ibietan, J. (2019). Model and determinants of state-local governments' relations in Nigeria. Revista de Administração Pública, 53(6), 1040-1066.

Oates, W. E. (1999). An essay on fiscal federalism. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 37(3), 1120-1149. https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.37.3.1120

Ogbu, S., & Ezech, F. (2019). Federal vs. state roads: Assessing the influence of intergovernmental relations models on road maintenance in Nigeria. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, 4(5). *https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2019.4.5.94*

Oluwole, O. E. (2016). Intergovernmental fiscal relations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Issues and challenges. *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, 1(2).

World Bank. (2011). Nigeria's infrastructure: A continental perspective. World Bank.

World Bank. (2018). Nigeria Federal Roads Development Project: Implementation Completion and Results Report. World Bank.

Wright, D. S. (1988). Understanding Intergovernmental Relations (3rd ed.). Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.