Benchmarking Ghanaian cities: A report on urban transportation and accessibility

Gilles Duranton, Adam Storeygard, Victor Couture, Prottoy Akbar, and Bernardo Ribeiro

- Nearly 60% of Ghana's population already lives in urban areas, and urbanisation is expected to continue rising.
- The policy challenge is clear: how to make growing cities accessible to jobs, schools, shops, and other destinations.
- This study compares accessibility, measured as the time needed to reach destinations, in Ghanaian cities and other cities in Africa.
- Using Google data on simulated trips and venue locations, we find that accessibility in Ghanaian cities is generally lower than the African average in simple rankings.
- This gap is explained by Ghanaian cities being larger and denser on average, with fewer major roads. While venues are often nearby in Ghanaian cities, travel speeds are relatively low, largely due to relatively high congestion.
- Policy should focus on reducing traffic delays while planning for urban growth, looking beyond congestion relief in Kumasi, and targeting the destinations where access remains weakest.

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Urban policy challenge in Ghana

Nearly 60% of Ghana's population already lives in urban areas, above the averages for sub-Saharan Africa and West and Central Africa, and urbanisation is expected to continue rising in the coming years. In that context, policymakers face a clear challenge: managing a growing urban population while designing cities that allow residents to reach jobs, schools, shops, and other destinations without spending too much time getting there.

Our research

Our report measures urban accessibility across more than 120 cities in Africa and compares the four Ghanaian cities in the sample—Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi, and Tamale—with other cities on the continent. We aim to identify the broad factors that impede the residents in Ghanaian cities from reaching destinations.

Measuring urban accessibility

To measure accessibility, we combine travel time data from trips simulated on Google Maps with information on the location and characteristics of venues from Google Places. We collect travel data for the same routes for both driving and walking, which allows us to compare accessibility across the two modes of transportation.

The importance of measuring accessibility for urban policy

Comparable accessibility data remains scarce, limiting the ability of policymakers to measure accessibility needs effectively. Determining whether slow speeds, traffic congestion, and/or long travel distances constrain residents is crucial for designing effective urban policies.

Research questions and key findings

Research question	Key findings
How do travel speeds, congestion, distance, and accessibility in Ghanaian cities compare with other cities in Africa?	Accessibility in Ghanaian cities ranks below the African average in simple comparisons. However, this gap is explained by basic city characteristics such as population, area, and road networks.
What are the key determinants of accessibility and its components in Ghanaian cities?	Lower travel speeds are the main mobility constraint in Ghana. This is mostly driven by congestion, especially in Accra and Kumasi, while shorter distances to destinations partly offset the speed disadvantage.
How do accessibility constraints differ across venue types and transport modes?	Accessibility to hospitals is comparatively strong, but access to several everyday commercial and service categories, including groceries, restaurants, retail, offices, and government services is weaker. Within cities, motorised modes usually yield the highest

overall accessibility, while walking can be important for local trips, such as grocery shopping.
Within cities, trips by car yield the highest accessibility, but walking outperforms driving in neighbourhoods close to the city centre and for local amenities, such as grocery stores.

Policy recommendations

Our research can inform policy by identifying the specific barriers to urban access in Ghana. Based on our findings, here is what we recommend:

Reduce congestion while planning for urban growth

Ghana's main accessibility constraint is lower travel speed, driven mostly by higher congestion. Since residents in Ghanaian cities often live relatively close to destinations, the largest gains are likely to come from reducing traffic delays.

Some congestion is expected in growing cities, so Ghana should plan ahead to preserve the benefits of agglomeration. This points to better traffic management and investments in roads, road maintenance, and public transport. Targeted tools such as tolls, pricing, or vehicle restrictions may help in specific settings, but they can be costly and complex to implement and may simply shift traffic elsewhere. They should therefore complement broader transport investments.

Go beyond reducing traffic delays in Kumasi

Kumasi faces the most severe accessibility challenges among the Ghanaian cities in the report. The city combines high congestion, low uncongested speeds, and weaker proximity to destinations. Policies to reduce traffic delays in Kumasi should therefore be complemented by investments that improve the underlying road network.

Target key destinations

Ghanaian cities perform comparatively well in access to hospitals, but access for everyday commercial and service categories is weaker. Policy should therefore focus on the specific destination types that remain hardest to reach.