

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 170

Traffic Engineering and Control magazine of June 2009 states that the *“European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani has confirmed that an action plan in the field of urban mobility, including mobility, will be published later this year...he said that around half of all journeys by car were less 5 km long which he said confirmed a great potential for the use of bicycles [which provides zero emission answer to travelling in our cities ... it can be an effective, healthy, fun way to get from one place to another, but it is crucial that we make sure it is safe].”*

Despite TnT Authorities' apparent obsession with exclusive programmes for inter-urban (between cities) transportation mobility, such as highway widening and construction, rapid rail transit, and water taxi, the major traffic delays is intra-urban (within the cities) which extends unto the highways, resulting in highway congestion. In other words, the most significant contributor to highway and main road traffic is the urban centre (cities and towns), because of the inability of the urban centre's internal roads to adequately receive and distribute traffic from the highways and main roads.

Since most of the travel distance by auto traffic is short, there might be an opportunity to change the mode of travel from auto to bicycle and walking, and so reduce congestion. I know there is the primary concern within TnT of personal safety and security, as the pedestrian or the bicyclist is more vulnerable to the bandit. This is a valid issue, but I suspect that this impact will be substantially reduced when the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase. Then there is the issue of safety, which I will return to.

According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), approximately 25 percent of all trips

in the US are less than 2 km in distance, but almost 75 percent of these trips are made by auto; and ITE suggests that in many cases, these short auto trips could be replaced by walking and biking. It further states that according to the Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health, 70 percent of adults in the US do not get the recommended amount of physical activity, and about 25 percent record being completely inactive when not at work; and this is not surprising, as regular use of autos for all types of trips reduces the amount of walking and other physical movement associated with many of these tasks. I am sure it is not uncommon for many of us to get into our car to pick up the newspapers or bread at the nearby outlet on a Saturday, when we could do it by walking, jogging or riding, for which our body would be so grateful.

Motor vehicle use contributes to air pollution through carbon emission, water pollution from vehicle fluid leakage, tyre disposal and decomposition, and scrapped vehicle dumping. However, bicycle use or walking does not emit pollutants, and their cost is quite low. Riding and walking can therefore offer a low-cost and environmentally friendly alternative to auto use.

A pedestrian or bicyclist is always more likely to be injured in a crash with a vehicle. Therefore, walking and bicycling must be carefully planned for. Here in TnT it is almost suicidal to attempt to use a bicycle in our hazardous traffic conditions. There is no provision or safe accommodation for bicycles, and poor maintenance of walkways and footpaths. There is lack of bicycle and pedestrian planning, as well as training programmes in such a challenging environment that currently only favours vehicles, with absolutely no

consideration for bicycles and almost none for pedestrians. Don't even talk about the elderly and other persons with physical disabilities!

My maternal grandfather was a bicyclist in a crash with a car on his way home from work in 1973 on the Caparo Valley Brasso Road in Montrose, Chaguanas; he was killed immediately. I was his first grandchild and he was special to me, and my father permitted me to keep his mangled wreck for many years.

The following might be considered radical, but they are proposed detailed requirements for walking and cycling for a society that wants to be considered advanced and that favours environmentally sound alternatives for its people and visitors. These have been placed for review by the reader, and will be discussed in subsequent articles.

To promote cycling: (a) Provide city-owned bicycles with bicycle locks and racks at key locations including the Transit Hub, Educational Institutions, and businesses; (b) Provide adequate promotion on cycling, with emphasis on a healthy lifestyle, zero emission/environmentally friendly mode, free and quick; (c) Distinctive branding of bicycles; (d) Provide additional bicycle racks at prominent key locations for private bicycle parking; (e) Encourage tenants to provide shower facilities for cyclists; (f) Well and regularly maintained estate bicycles to ensure good condition; and, (g) Free basic maintenance services to private bicycles for tenants.

To ensure safety and security of cyclists, there is need for: (a) Dedicated, clearly marked and distinguished and step-free cycle paths adjacent to main roads, preferably alongside pedestrian footpath; (b) Cyclists to have priority over vehicles at road crossings; (c) well-lit and patrolled

streets at night; and, (d) Free hire of cyclist helmets on request at Transit Hub

To promote walking, there is need to ensure (a) A clean and well maintained environment along footpaths; (b) Priority to pedestrians over vehicles and cyclists at road crossings; (c) Crossings are clearly marked as zebra crossing at intersections and step free crossing is provided, either by dropping the kerb or raising the road at crossing to promote access for mobility impaired; (d) Footpaths are avoided which are obscured from the main roads; and, (e) Well-lit and patrolled streets at night.

Happy New Year!

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