

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 158

Maxi Taxi Orphan Transit! How else to describe the latest predicament to befall Chaguanas Maxi Taxis? The authorities are planning to remove the maxi taxi hub currently located south of and parallel to Eleanore Street, and they will be placed at various locations on the roads in Chaguanas. So they are to be moved from an off-street facility to an on-street facility. It was reported that the maxi taxi operators are upset with the new arrangement. I am not certain if the new locations have been explained to them.

The existing transit hub is a roadway built on the road reserve, and it operates with two lanes of maxi taxis which must travel one-way east and exit onto the Southern Main Road. The problem has been with their entry into the hub. A private individual is claiming that the maxi taxis have been illegally using his land to access the hub. It appears that there is no other access to the hub except through this individual's land. The reason for this is that a private business warehouse and its carpark have been occupying the formal access to the road reserve, which is 10.5 metres wide. This was formally pointed out by technocrats in the Ministry several years ago, but no action has been taken.

Should the motoring public in Chaguanas be once again subjected to the inconsiderate and irresponsible behaviour of maxi taxi operators and their associates if their transit stands are relocated to the roadways? We already have to cope with the almost complete lack of Police enforcement with the result that there is a "free for all" at "Busy Corner" and at the "Flyover."

Isn't it easier for the authorities to seek to provide appropriate off-street facilities? Further, taxis and maxi-taxis occupying stands on the roads in Chaguanas have long out-grown the capability of holding

their numbers required, resulting in spill-over, and tremendous reducing in the traffic-carrying capacity of the roadway. This cannot be sustained. Any plan for public transport must provide off-street facilities in a reorganised fashion.

In 1979, 12-seater maxi-taxis were introduced, to be followed by 25-seaters later on. The intention was to facilitate higher capacity passenger vehicles, in order to maximise the movement of persons per unit segment of roadway. At present, the current mix of buses in Trinidad and Tobago consists of about 200 buses owned by the Government (including 40-, 60-, and 120-passenger types), 4,300+ privately-owned small maxi-taxis, and 200+ privately-owned large maxi-taxis. The Public Transport Service Act, which created the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) in 1965, did not give them responsibility for regulating taxis, or maxi-taxis. The Transport Division of the Ministry of Works was responsible (and still is) only for the licensing and inspection of taxis, and maxi-taxis. So nobody manages the maxi-taxis and taxis!

It was reported that Deputy Mayor Orlando Nagessar said some 300 maxis use the facility daily plying the Chaguanas-San Fernando and Chaguanas-Port of Spain routes.

The overwhelming majority of public transport services in Trinidad and Tobago are provided by private operators. In most developed countries public transport is provided by the public sector and is typically heavily subsidized with public funds and regulated. In comparison, our Government spends very little funding on public transport. They provide limited capital funds to the PTSC and guarantees bank loans to sustain its operations. The maxi taxi and route

taxi industry receives no financial assistance from the Government.

An off-street public transport terminal for Chaguanas is long overdue. The Local Area Land Use Plan for Chaguanas prepared in 2001 by the Halcrow Group in association with the Joint Consultative Council for the Construction Industry, recommended that the Seereeram site at Busy Corner be acquired by Government for this purpose. The Seereeram site is the plot of land bounded on the east by the northbound exit ramp of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, on the west by the Southern Main Road, on the north by the Chaguanas Main Road, and on the south Hilo Food Stores section of Mid-Centre Mall. The current activities at this site consist of Master-Serv automobile services, Singer household appliances, and Blimpie subs and salads.

This site is about one Hectare, inclusive of the existing taxi stand. I would recommend that studies be conducted for acquiring the site and developing a two-level transit facility with ramps and shelters, etc., which is possible to fit in a 100m by 50m area. However, proper analysis would be required to fit all the taxis and maxi-taxis and to lay them out according to route and access. The Busy Corner Transit Terminal will be the public transport hub for Chaguanas, and there will be smaller satellite public transport terminals and stops at strategic locations around the Chaguanas region.

But the maxi taxis might have an even bigger impending problem! Government has stated that maxi-taxis are to be used as feeder services for the line haul rapid rail train system, but how will these operate and who will manage it? What will be the role for PTSC and their buses? Will there be a plan for maxi-taxis and taxis? How will

maxi-taxis who are accustomed to making their money via long-haul trips survive on feeder routes? Shouldn't the discussions be going on already?

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