

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 178

Last Thursday I observed two incidents that reminded me to revisit the issues of driver behaviour and driver training. First, a car was parked on the acceleration lane of the southbound carriageway of Trincity Central Road, near the Scotiabank outlet of Trincity Mall.

The driver was presumably using the ATM facility. But, there is parking provided within the mall, right next to the bank. Perhaps, the driver thought that he would only be a minute, but where he was parked is a travel lane, not a shoulder, and the traffic markings are well laid out. Therefore, all vehicles exiting the mall at that time had to enter directly into the roadway, creating a less safe manoeuvre, just because of inconsiderate and irresponsible behaviour of a fellow motorist.

This behaviour might have saved the driver a minute, but could have caused other road users (including those on the other two travelled lanes) much greater losses in terms of traffic safety and traffic delays.

My other concern about this matter is where was traffic enforcement? Why wasn't there mobile traffic police almost immediately present to charge this brazen offender? I recall in Grand Rapids, Michigan a few years ago, my friend Earl and I were walking on the sidewalk downtown when we saw a vehicle make a U-turn on the roadway right beside us. Earl remarked, "That fella driving like a Trini!" We immediately heard the sound of a siren, and a police car appeared from nowhere and pulled up behind the U-turner. We recognised the offender as a friend of ours from Port of Spain. Needless to say, he was charged.

Why can't we have regular patrols at all times, to keep the potential lawless and thoughtless on guard, and to reduce the frustration of the law abiding road users?

The next incident occurred at the roundabout near Tru Valu on the Trincity Mall compound. I was within the roundabout, having just entered it from the western approach, when a Hilux pickup drove into the roundabout from the northern approach, right in right of me, without so much as slowing down at the approach.

As I recall, the law says that motorists approaching a roundabout must give way to motorists on the right, already in the roundabout. I checked that all the traffic markings (including the give-way markings) were in place. Any vigilant driver would have seen the traffic markings. There were no traffic signs which would have facilitated the redundancy, as well as another traffic control device, so important in traffic management.

Was the driver on his cellphone? He did not seem to be. He appeared to be a foreign national of South-Asian origin. If so, perhaps, he did not properly understand the TnT traffic regulations. This brings up another concern. With so many foreign nationals here, especially several from countries where English is not the mother-tongue, what is the process of determining their suitability to drive on our roads?

I have argued several times in this Series that the purposes of a driving test in any country are to ensure that new drivers have reached a certain minimum standard of training, and to set the standard to which instructors should aim. In addition, we do not have a foolproof approach to determining the quality assurance of the product – the safe driver. So, I am concerned that road users cannot yet be assured of the skills of drivers, whether they be foreign nationals or locals. The situation is made even more complicated if the allegations of bribery to receive a driving permit are factored in. So what is the

likelihood of encountering an ill-prepared driver on the road? I would suggest much higher than that of encountering a drunk driver.

Roundabouts appear to be becoming popular again. Therefore, it is critical that driver training includes roundabout operations as a fundamental part of the instructions, including, how to enter and exit, and the meaning of traffic signs and markings. In addition, there are also two-lane roundabouts, so there is a need to learn how the travel within the roundabout, including crossing lanes.

About ten years ago (with the opening of the new Piarco Airport), a new two-lane roundabout was built, and functioned quite well until sometime later on someone thought that the roundabout would function more effectively by creating a bypass road on the BWIA Boulevard southbound carriageway, for motorists wishing to proceed east towards the Airport.

It is not uncommon for a roundabout to have a slip road, when needed, where left turners may be permitted to avoid the roundabout, but it is mandatory that motorists within the roundabout who wish to exit at that point, be given the priority over the slip road users. In other words, what is wrong about the current bypass (slip) road (and has been from the inception of this bypass) is that the bypass has the priority over the roundabout users exiting the roundabout to head east to the Airport.

Let me ask you the reader, haven't you felt odd when exiting the roundabout and proceeding east, that you have to slow down or stop and awkwardly glance over to your left for the BWIA Boulevard southbound traffic also wishing to proceed east. In fact, according to TnT laws, it is the BWIA Boulevard traffic that should have been given the give-way bar, just as is done on a highway for the slip road or

acceleration lane onto the highway.
In other word, all persons giving
way must be on the left, and all
right-of-way traffic must be on the
right. That is the law. It would be
interesting to know how a traffic
accident at this location is handled.

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