

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 211

I felt privileged to have been invited as a formal witness to an attempt to enter the Guinness Book of Records as the largest percussion instrument. My friend, Jomo Wahtuse, invented the Jomoline more than 33 years ago. It is an elliptical steelpan with a three-octave range and consisting of 30 notes. It is capable of producing the sounds of the cello pan, double second, and double tenor. It was launched on May 6, 1977 at the Trinity Cathedral in POS, and iconic composer-arranger, Len Boogie Sharpe, did the demonstration.

So what does this have to do with traffic and transportation? Wahtuse's account of his trials and tribulations in seeking acceptance of his radical ideas concerning this musical instrument got my attention. I felt a bond with him.

On September 12, 1995, while with the Traffic Management Branch (TMB) of the Ministry of Works and Transport (MOWT), I wrote a memo to the Chief Planning Engineer, Road Planning, giving recommendations to meet the rapidly growing transportation needs in the Borough of Chaguanas. Included among those strategies was the need for a bridge in Montrose, Chaguanas, linking Edinburgh Boulevard to Caparo Valley Brasso Road, opposite Claire Street. At that time Edinburgh Boulevard was not yet constructed, but its right-of-way was in place—Edinburgh Boulevard was built around 2004-05.

Over the years I did further details of this project and took several of the MOWT technocrats and Borough Corporation officers, including some of the Mayors and Councillors to the site. They agreed without exception that this was a good project, but nothing happened.

I requested a meeting with the new Transport Minister, Mr. Jack Warner, and got a meeting at

6:00am on Monday August 16, 2010. I was meeting him for the first time. I presented several ideas and the discussion went on for one-and-a-half hours—I never expected to be given so much time, but I was grateful, and sought to maximise this opportunity.

The moment I suggested the connector road and bridge in Montrose, the Minister said, "Done!" He then instructed the Director of Highways (who was present) to see that this was implemented immediately and completed for the opening of the new school term.

The MOWT did not have a double-lane Mabey (bailey) bridge in stock and so a single-lane bridge was installed with traffic lights. The completed project was opened on Wednesday 10, 2010, some fifteen years after first being conceived.

Why couldn't this important, yet simple transportation measure, with which everybody agreed, be implemented sooner? There was no champion! A champion is a person of significant influence with the decision-makers. The champion must first accept and believe in the idea before being willing to sell it. In this case, Mr Warner was not only the champion, but also the decision-maker. Why did his predecessors not buy into the project?

Jomo Wahtuse has a scientific approach to his innovation. He assumes that steel drums may not always be available for constructing steel pans, as cheaper materials and shapes might eventually be used for transporting petroleum products. Further, he is concerned about the consistency of the steel used and its yield and ultimate tensile strength in order to better appreciate constructability and proper duplication for commercial purposes. So the Jomoline was fabricated from sheet metal and several efforts made with varied

shapes and carbon composition. Of course, funding was always an issue, as he had to finance these efforts himself.

I expect that in six to eight weeks the Jomoline will be entered into the Guinness Book of Records and the international community will want to learn some more about Wahtuse's invention. He has created other steelpan instruments such as, the Manitone, the Xylopan, and his latest, the Venturi Electronic Pan.

What is even more interesting for me is that he has also made a recommendation for improvement in our education system with respect to "Pan tuning Technology." He is suggesting that it be added to the secondary school level syllabus as a CXC subject at the ordinary level. The course would include physics, chemistry, metallurgy, workshop practice (the art of pan tuning preparation), music, and ethics. In addition, he believes that a second course may be conducted at the tertiary level which would comprise pan tuning, metallurgy, electrolysis, physics, chemistry, music (practical on the instrument.), quality control and quality assurance, business, and English communication skills. He obviously is seriously interested in developing the steel pan as a professional music industry.

Nearly a generation has passed since Wahtuse invented the Jomoline. It has put no money in his pocket, but has taken quite a bit. It must be frustrating continuing to knock on doors in order to find the champion. I have appealed to him to document his work, as down the road, several years from now, someone will discover his valuable efforts. In fact, that is why I do this series.

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