

The following email was sent to me from CG, based on my last article: "... I would like to express my gratitude for being the voice of the silent majority of citizens who live in the south west peninsula. I live in Palo Seco and work in Chaguanas and it takes me all of three hours each way to get to and from work. The roads are terribly congested and utterly sickening. This highway to Point Fortin is a blessing for all south westerners who struggle each day with traffic and inefficiencies in public transport.

"On a daily basis I take a taxi (usually PH) from my home to Siparia. Once in Siparia I wait for nearly an hour (on a good day) for a taxi, PH, or minibus outfitted with seats like a maxi taxi to get to San Fernando. This trip from Siparia to San Fernando takes the following route:

1. Siparia to Murray Trace, to Pluck Road San Francique
2. to Woodland to La Romain,
3. once in La Romain drivers usually use secondary streets to bob and weave away from the gridlock of traffic
4. to the mess at the Cross Crossing Interchange to San Fernando.

"The trip from Siparia to San Fernando which can take as little as twenty minutes without traffic, usually takes an hour or more during the day between 5:30am until about 9pm. Add to that bumpy roads, in a cramped vehicle and our heat whilst wearing a business suit and high heels it is clear that I am exhausted and not even near Chaguanas yet.

"I hope that others like me are so encouraged to express their support for the highway project."

Journalist Paolo Kernahan wrote in his column last Saturday, "In this country we must begin to understand that the word 'consultation' actually means 'this

is how it is going to be, we just thought you should know.' It was difficult to see how anyone could have expected a different outcome from the recent 'consultation' held between government officials and opponents to certain segments of the Pt Fortin highway... If the Highway Re-Route Movement is serious about flying the environmental flag on this issue then its members must present detailed research on the Oropouche Lagoon."

The People's Partnership Manifesto, which is now Government public policy states on page 66, "The tone of the country will change and barriers will be broken down through consultation, participation, involvement and consensus building. This will help us to achieve unity of purpose in our efforts and partnership and trust in the society."

Many people are sceptical about whether they can truly influence the implementation and results of a transportation project. Others feel that these plans are too long-term to warrant attention. Often the public finds that these projects are difficult to comprehend.

In a democratic society people should have opportunities to debate issues, frame alternative solutions, and affect final decisions in ways that respect the role of the decision-makers. Knowledge should be the basis of such participation. The public needs to know details about a plan or project to evaluate its importance or anticipated costs and benefits.

The focus of public participation should be on decisions rather than on conducting participation activities simply because they are required, in order to avoid commenting on proposals just before formal decision-making.

The public should be conceptualised as a collection of discrete groups and individuals;

each has different interests and different levels of energy for participation. They have needs such as: What issues or decisions affect which specific groups or individuals? How can their ideas be incorporated into decisions? Consensus does not mean that everyone agrees enthusiastically but that all influential groups and individuals can live with a proposal. The more specific the objectives, the better they will guide their involvement.

When I examine a map showing a layout of the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway Project, it is clear that there are at least two route components: (a) Golconda to Point Fortin, passing through Debe, Penal, Siparia Fyzabad, Vance River, and Guapo; and (b) Golconda to Mon Desir, passing through Cross-Crossing interchange, South Trunk Road, Mosquito Creek, and St Mary's Junction. So the highway consists of two routes up to Fyzabad, and it then continues as a single route to Point Fortin. This means that any blockage of the Debe-Mon Desir does not mean that the highway is stopped but that a portion of one route is challenged, and requires some deliberation. Further, a highway does not necessarily mean four or more lanes and multiple carriageways, and interchanges. We had two-lane, single carriageway highways with stop-bar and traffic signal intersections for many years, such as the Princess Margaret Highway and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway. Let us allow technical and economic justification guide us.

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