

“Public transport is inextricably linked with politics, and since it affects virtually everybody, is often manipulated by politicians in an attempt to win the support of potential voters. Politicians are also often inclined to rely on advice from people who are not qualified to give it, or to rely too heavily on their own judgement without a full understanding of what is involved. Many of the decisions made by politicians relating to transport, even if well-intentioned, are misguided or inappropriate, and while they may sometimes result in short-term benefits, they often make the problems even worse in the longer term...” Richard Iles, 2008, *Public Transport in Developing Countries*, p.13.

That author suggests that the public transport industry is influenced to a large extent by its organisational structure and ownership, including the nature of planning, regulation, and enforcement of services.

Traditionally, public transport, or transit, or mass transportation is the movement of people and their incidental baggage in vehicles that are available to the public, operating on established routes and fixed schedules, and serving prescribed stops at usually prescribed rates of fare.

In Caribbean territories, the majority of public transport services are supplied by individual or small groups of private suppliers and operators, and these generally operate on established, but flexible routes as passenger demands dictate. There are usually no fixed schedules, but vehicles depart a terminal when filled. Generally, operators are free to choose routes, frequency, and hours of operation. But fares and type(s) of vehicle(s) may be regulated, and on some urban areas congested routes are barred to para-transit (discussed in the next section). There is often

limited or non-existent government monitoring, control, coordination or administration of the public transport industry.

Para-transit is the term applied to small passenger vehicles operating informally on a fare-paying basis, often as a valuable alternative to traditional bus transit services. Para-transit systems are characterized by a variety of services, including: (a) Personalized door-to-door service; (b) Shared services with routes determined by individual passengers; (c) Regular service along fairly well-defined routes (similar to bus transit).

Para-transit operators are responsive to the needs of the public and adapt quickly to changing patterns of demand. Because of their small size, para-transit vehicles are able to provide frequent and viable service at low levels of demand. Para-transit is operated by individual private owners or small enterprises, is highly competitive, and is run at a profit. As a result, para-transit places little burden on government finances, except that they ply on the travelled roadway and inconsiderately add to the traffic congestion.

The organisational arrangement is a little more complicated in TnT as bus transportation is provided by a public-owned regulated company (PTSC) and private-owned 25- and 12-seater bus operators (large and small maxi-taxis with limited regulations).

There is currently no agency in TnT charged with the responsibility for planning and organisation of efficient public transportation. The result is that the public transport industry is highly fragmented, with variations in the standards of service, and poor policies, regulations and enforcement.

Cultural factors also influence the development of public transport. *“Status is regarded as important in some societies, and private*

transport is often regarded as a status symbol, while the use of public transport is seen almost as a stigma. Everybody aspires to ownership of their own car or motorcycle, and as per capita incomes rise, so does the level of ownership of private transport... the majority of people will travel by private transport if they can afford to do so: they are often happy to sit in stationary cars in traffic jams for long periods, and cannot easily be persuaded not to use their cars, even if the alternative public transport service would enable them to make their journey more quickly, more cheaply, or both.” p. 16.

It is the responsibility of elected officials in a democratic environment to develop and implement policies in the best interests of the electorate, policies which as far as possible reflect the electorate’s wants and needs, but do so in a socially, economically, and environmentally responsible manner.

For this reason, any major undertaking must be conducted within the policy framework established by Government, the undertaking cannot determine the public transport policy; it can only reflect policy. Specifically, transportation planning cannot determine the public transport policies of Government; it can only recommend which public transportation options best achieve the specifically established goals and objectives that result from the application of government policies.

To promote public transport, the following are recommended:

- (a) To develop a range of public transport measures in partnership with service providers and other stakeholders to encourage people to use other forms of transport rather than cars;
- (b) To work with public transport providers to develop integrated ticketing, fares and marketing

initiatives to encourage greater use of public transport;

(c) To promote travel awareness programmes and travel plans for schools and businesses, and for employees;

(d) To ensure that public transport services address user needs, including those of commuters, students, tourists and the disabled

(e) To ensure that operations become more economically viable, requiring the minimum financial support,

(f) To promote safe and secure, reliable and sustainable public transport.

(g) To better meet the needs of the transport disadvantaged in the community;

(h) To promote community inclusion by providing an equitable, affordable and accessible public transport system;

(i) To ensure that planning for public transport is integrated into the statutory land use planning and development control processes.

(j) To ensure that the public transport system caters to the needs of tourists and complements the visitor experience.

(k) To ensure effective planning and efficient management of the system – plan and manage the system to meet the needs of the community in the most efficient way;

(l) To be responsive to community needs – engage with the community to design a system that is as responsive to their needs as possible;

(m) To address the challenges of future growth – monitor and plan for current and predicted growth to ensure the public transport system is prepared to address future opportunities and challenges;

(n) To provide a high level of accountability – ensure there is clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of those involved in delivering the public transport system;

(o) To provide public transport at a reasonable cost – ensure that both the government and the community are supplied with a public transport system that represents good value for money;

(p) To provide community access and mobility – ensure that the whole community has a reasonable level of access and mobility in support of the Government's social justice objectives;

(q) To integrate public transport - provide an adequate framework for coordinating the different forms of public passenger transport to form a comprehensive integrated and efficient system.

e-mail: info@ccost.org