

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 380

The recent public arguments as well as the court judgments concerning the Arbor-Rosewood School in lower Maraval has raised some interesting issues in the subject of traffic impact assessments with respect to physical development.

The following are some of the arguments identified against the approval of that development: (1) The accepted practice is that the Director of Highways is the recognised authority in the public service for the evaluation, for planning purposes, of the impact of an industrial establishment, or an institution, such as a school, with respect to traffic. (2) The Director of Highways is the only public authority with the technical competence to do so. (3) There is no statutory authority vested in the Minister to personally determine the impact of such an establishment or institution on traffic, nor any power of the Minister to override or reverse a decision of the Director of Highways to support, or not support, as the case may be, an application for the grant of planning approval for such an entity on the grounds of its impact on traffic.

I decided to check with my professional colleagues who have been in the business of traffic impact assessment studies longer than I.

Dr. Trevor Townsend has more than thirty years as a transportation systems engineer, including seven years (1981-1988) as Chief Traffic Engineer of the Traffic Management Branch (TMB). As Chief Traffic Engineer, he was responsible for the development of the Traffic Management Branch. He holds a PhD Transportation Systems Analysis from Northwestern University, Illinois, USA, and currently functions as Senior Lecturer in Transportation Engineering, Department of Civil Engineering at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in St Augustine.

Dr. Townsend reminded me that all traffic impact assessment (TIA) studies were a part of the requirements by the Town and Country Planning Division (T&CPD), and the T&CPD would send requests for TIA studies directly to the Chief Traffic Engineer, if such studies were required. As far as he is aware, during his dealings with traffic impact or associated works (1981 to 1998), all TIA studies were conducted directly by the TMB.

Further, as far as he is aware, all experimental traffic measures done in Maraval have been planned and implemented by the TMB, including the very first one-way scheme on Anderson Terrace, as well as the more easily recognised one-way roundabout circulation scheme of the Queen's Park Savannah.

It is important to note that TMB was never under the Highways Division; in fact, TMB was not a part of the Ministry of Works when formed in 1981 (which always contained the Highways Division) until 1987, when the Ministry of Works, Settlements and Infrastructure was formed. John Humphrey was Minister and Dr. Carson Charles was Junior Minister for a brief period. Dr. Charles later took over the portfolio of the Ministry of Works, Infrastructure and Decentralisation, and TMB was given an enhanced role in transportation planning. Dr. Charles was one of the youngest civil engineering PhD graduates from UWI, with a focus on Transportation Planning.

Even when TMB became a part of the Ministry of Works and Transport, from 1995 onwards, it was never under the Highways Division, but both TMB and Highways Division reported independently to the Chief Technical Officer.

It was only during the period 2005 to 2010 that TMB was placed

under the Highways Division. The then Chief Traffic Engineer, Suresh Jogie, was promoted to the position of Director of Maintenance, and the new Chief Traffic Engineer, Dexter Wong Wai, was required to report to the Director of Highways. It might be interesting to note that the presiding Minister was Colm Imbert, the last Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North-East, which includes Maraval.

Therein, the process was begun of T&CPD having to send requests for TIA studies to the Director of Highways. This move to place TMB under Highways Division displayed a clear misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the roles of highway engineering and traffic engineering – everything henceforth would now be seen from the perspective of exclusively highway engineering, to the detriment of traffic impact assessments. Any transportation engineer would strongly object to this move.

Under the current arrangement, the T&CPD has no choice but to request reviews of TIA studies by the Ministry responsible for highways (in this case, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, since the TMB is under the director of highways).

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June 29, 2015