

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 392

Today I begin a historical diary of the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project (TRRP). The Budget Statement 2005 (presented on October 8, 2004) informed us: "...we have awarded a contract to the firm Parker, Parson, Brinkerhoff/Trintoplan [PB] to undertake a comprehensive National Transportation Study to address the sea, air and land transportation needs of the country over the next 30 years. The study commenced earlier this month and is expected to last eighteen months. In the case of land transportation, our policy objective is to develop a road network to ensure that within Trinidad no place will be more than 2 1/2 hours away. Priority would be given to the development of a light Rail Mass Transit System from Arima to Diego Martin and from Port-of-Spain to San Fernando. A full feasibility of this proposal will be completed by July 2005 at which time an investment decision will be taken. If feasible, we expect to have a system in place by the year 2012, with some segments operational by 2008."

The Budget Statement 2006 (presented on September 28, 2005): "...in our 2004 Budget presentation, we advised this House of the award of a contract for the Comprehensive National Transportation Study. This study has commenced and is expected to be completed by July 2006. One of the major issues which the consultants have encountered in the initial review of the land transportation sector is the general gridlock that occurs on the nation's roadways and, in particular, along the main East-West and North-South arterial roads in Trinidad. It is our intention to reintroduce a rail system in Trinidad to provide a viable solution to our public transportation problems. In this context, we have already embarked on a Mass Transit Study, and in 2006, we shall invite proposals for the first trial phase of our new light rail system. The new Mass Transit Rail System is expected

to cost at least \$15 billion, when it is fully implemented, but we believe that this expenditure is justified and required."

The Comprehensive National Transportation Study (CNTS) was not completed by its originally stated date of July 2005, but was extended to July 2006. Meanwhile, the Government started a new Mass Transit Study, with the expectation that they would invite proposals for the first trial phase of a new light rail system in 2006.

The CNTS was the first national transportation planning study to be undertaken since 1967, or for nearly 40 years. Yet, even before the study was finished, the Government found it expedient to begin a mass transit study in order to implement a light rail system. In other words, before light rail was found feasible, it was being planned to be implemented. But that is not all.

Do you know who received the contract for the Mass Transit Study? It was the very same consultant who was doing the CNTS. Their contract was simply expanded to include planning for the implementation of light rail transit.

Was this not a potential conflict of interest by PB? Shouldn't such a big international firm have known better? Would anything but a rail system have been recommended for the country?

So, before the national transportation planning study had completed any analyses and recommendations, the consultant was mandated to plan for implementation of rail transit.

Government interference with the process was likely to cause the 25-plus million dollar CNTS to be reduced to another Government report with limited utility and applicability, whereas it should have been the document to chart our people's future transportation mobility and accessibility. Thus, the

entire national transportation planning process was compromised.

On January 5, 2006, *Newsday's* Charleen Thomas reported that "...Government placed an advertisement inviting letters of interest (LOI) [on January 4, 2005] to design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) the system, which is now being called 'the rapid rail project.' *Newsday* understands the advertisements will be placed worldwide, as Government seeks to get a DBOM contractor who is 'committed to quality; has experience in the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of rail transit systems and who will bring innovative design and building approaches to ensure timely completion.'

"The advertisement advised proposers, that is, firms, consortiums and joint ventures, that their LOIs should be submitted no later than 1 pm on Carnival Tuesday, February 28, 2006... Only those proposers sending LOIs by the deadline date will receive qualification forms and instructions, as Government intends to 'select one DBOM contractor for the entire project.' The LOIs are to be sent to the US offices of Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas, the consulting firm which got the \$25 million contract to undertake the National Transportation Study.

"Government anticipates that by March 31, 2006 the qualification forms and instructions will be issued and responses evaluated to select the potential DBOM contractor. It noted that the selection process will evaluate the proven experience on similar DBOM contracts, as well as the approach of the DBOM contractor to manage, plan, design, construct, operate, maintain and control the project, delivering a quality product at a reasonable price.

“The actual price of the project will be negotiated after selection. The selected contractor may also have to provide some interim solutions to relieve the current traffic congestion.

“A contract is expected to be awarded by the fall of 2006, with an expected design and construction of the initial phase expected to take between five and six years to complete. This phase will consist of one or more of the segments — Sangre Grande to Arima; Arima to Port-of-Spain; Port-of-Spain to Diego Martin; Port-of-Spain to Chaguanas and Chaguanas to San Fernando as determined by Government and the selected contractor.”

The TRRP historical diary continues next week.

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