

Maxi Taxi Association and Public Transport Problems

This is continued from last week (April 7, 2016) concerning my agreement to use this column over the next few articles to feature a report which was prepared by the Association of Maxi Taxis Trinidad and Tobago (AMTTT) with regard to the proposed Mass Transit System for Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), following discussions with representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) on December 10, 2015.

Research has shown that ninety (90) percent of public transportation is performed by 25,000 privately-owned 4-5 passenger sedans and 4,500 privately-owned 9-25 seater maxi taxis. (Dr. Trevor Townsend, 2011, Sustainable Transportation Development—A Trinidad and Tobago Perspective.) These vehicles offer a flexible and affordable 24-hour service throughout the thoroughfare of the main cities and numerous communities.

Interestingly, these modes of private transport were successfully able to survive the negative effects of three recessions (1980's, 1990's and 2000's) with minimum fleet depletion, loss of jobs, and at the same time maintaining affordable fares despite substantial price increase for vehicles. For example, in 1990 a maxi taxi one-way trip from Arima to POS along the Priority Bus Route (PBR) was \$3.00. In 2016, the same trip is \$7.00. Simultaneously, in 1990 the cost of a 25-seater was approximately \$170,000 and by 2015 the price reached \$615,000.

Although, there remains a competitive fare structure among the taxi, maxi and [PTSC] bus, it is interesting to note that there is an imbalance on one of the major destinations. On the San Fernando to Port of Spain route the taxi fare is \$17.00, the PTSC Coach is \$10.00 and State-owned Water Taxi \$15.00. Unfortunately, the absence of the maxi taxis, due to several issues, is a

major contributing factor. The last maxi fare in 2014 for the route was \$8.00. In comparison with another major route, the Arima to POS fare structure reflects a more competitive balance with the taxi being \$9.00, maxi taxi \$7.00, PTSC Limited-stop bus, \$4.00 and the All-stops bus is \$2.50.

Noteworthy, there is a significant demand for PTSC coach service between the main cities, Sangre Grande and San Fernando, to POS, respectively, as has been experienced with the waiting lines during the rush hour periods (6-9.00am and 3-6.00pm). In addition, PTSC's free fare for citizens sixty-years and over has attracted wide spread participation from the intended segment.

As for school transport, the partnership between the Ministry of Education, PTSC and the maxi taxis have been successfully satisfying the needs of the under-privileged children from most of the rural communities. This tripartite plan between public entities and private owners augurs well for public transport.

Meanwhile, the Water Taxi service from San Fernando to Port of Spain and the Tobago Ferry are mostly overbooked. This is clearly an indication that this mode of transport is an essential component of the public transport system.

Additionally, the introduction of the Police Transit Unit (2005) and Traffic Wardens (2010), respectively, as part of the traffic management plan, has assisted on a daily basis to help control the traffic congestion being experienced on the streets of the major cities. The Traffic Wardens compliment the operations of the T&T Police Service Traffic Branch.

Regarding structural development, the concept implemented for Route 1 and Route 2 Maxi Taxi facilities should be used

as a model for other areas including the conventional taxis.

In 2009, the PTSC and the AMTTT successfully provided the shuttle service for the Fifth Summit of the Americas (17-19 April) and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (23-27 Nov). This was a major achievement for both organizations as the magnitude of service was much more than forecasted by the Local Organization Committee.

Public Transport Problems

There is no doubt that T&T has public transport issues which need to be urgently addressed. Obviously, with any further demand for public transport the issue will get worse. As stakeholders, it is important that the problems associated with these issues be identified and acceptable solutions adopted and implemented. The following problems are documented as:

- Escalating Vehicle ownership: An interview in 2016 with Mr. Wayne Richards, Transport Commissioner, revealed that the current vehicle population is estimated at over 800,000. Effects: overcrowding especially on the main arteries; longer journey time per trip; reduced productivity; stressful employees; longer working hours for drivers; and in some instances, family lives are negatively affected; and children are required to leave home much earlier which can impede their learning and health.

- Lack of transport facilities: Since the inception of the maxi taxi industry in 1979, only two transport facilities were built to satisfy the needs of the operators and commuters. In 1993, the Route 1 (Yellow) transport facility was established and in 1996, Route 2 (Red) maxi taxis were relocated from the city streets to the P.O.S. Transit Centre (aka City Gate).

Continued next week.

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