

Public Transport Problems: facilities, schedules, parking, ...

This is continued from the last two weeks (April 7 and 14 2016) concerning my agreement to use this column over a 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.

Public Transport Problems (continued from last week)

- 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 One (Yellow) transport facility was established and in 1996, Route Two (Red) maxi taxis were relocated from the city streets to the POS. Transit Centre (aka City Gate). Route One Maxi Taxi Association has secured a lease from the POS Corporation to operate on the land. Also, the Ministry of Works and Transport has a mutual agreement with the Association regarding shared responsibilities. The Association is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations. Also, the Ministry is responsible for paving the compound, road markings and traffic signs and any structural renovations.

Unfortunately, Route Two transport facility has no management structure in operation due to the 2010 Privy Council Judgment which debarred the PTSC from charging the drivers a user's fee to operate in the facility. In its findings, the Privy Council made reference to the Route One facility and its operational procedure. Meanwhile, all efforts by the Association to resolve the issue have been futile. This has negatively affected the quality of the service

and overall well-being of both commuters and operators. Customer Service is a critical component of a quality public transport plan. However, at the City Gate facility this service in non-existent and persons seeking information and/or assistance are at the mercy of "touts".

- Parking: *"Lack of parking remains one of the most formidable problems facing the capital city... strangling the city to death"*. (Gregory Aboud, President of DOMA, Trinidad Guardian, June 16, 2014.) The consequence of this is illegal parking along the main streets of the cities and boroughs. This hinders the free flow of traffic, as drivers jostle each other to either filter into one service lane or cross over at an interchange.

For instance, Henry Street between Duke and Park Streets in POS is a major thoroughfare. There is alternate parking on these streets [Henry, Duke and Park] on a daily basis. Each has three lanes; however, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service branch on Henry Street occupies one lane for their vehicles. In addition, motorists can legally park on the designated lane. The impact leaves two lanes of south-to-north traffic on Henry Street jostling to filter back into one lane. Simultaneously, the east-to-west traffic from Duke Street has to filter in a northerly direction into Henry Street or proceed across in a Westerly direction. The impact is *"a ball of confusion"* which causes a backup of traffic all the way down (south) to Independence Square Beetham Highway.

Regrettably, this scenario of illegal or double parking occurs on most of the urban roadways.

- Bus schedule: PTSC, the sole-operator of the country's commercial bus service, came into being on May 1, 1965 as a result of the Transport Service Act No. 2 of that year. The Act mandated that PTSC provide a safe, clean and

inexpensive transport service for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Yet, in spite of its long history, PTSC has failed to maintain a consistent bus schedule on a daily basis. Probably with the exception of its luxury coach service, most of the other services lack a proper bus schedule. As a result, additional stress is placed on the other transport modes.

Furthermore, some commuters will revert to driving their vehicles thus adding to the already congested roadways.

PTSC should be more diligent with its procurement process especially as the bus fleet is approaching retirement age; the new fleet should be acquired as soon as possible. Moreover, PTSC has too many suppliers (26) of buses. Consequently, the Corporation has not achieved economy of scale within their overall operations.

- Traffic offenders: Bad driving is foremost on the roadways especially where there is congestion. Illegal overtaking on the road is a growing concern and dangerous habit. It creates more havoc on the already congested road and even leads to severe collision with another vehicle or pedestrian.

Meanwhile, to date the authorities have not been able to effectively treat with the issue of *'Jaywalking'*. Pedestrians continue to cross the streets where regulations do not permit doing so. These include crossing between intersections without yielding to drivers and entering a crosswalk at a controlled intersection without waiting for a permissive indication to be shown.

Another concern involves delinquent taxi and maxi taxi drivers abusing commuters during the rush hours by refusing to operate along the designated journey. Instead, these drivers ply for hire using a shorter journey which results in commuters having to pay two fares to arrive at their final destination.

This development encourages persons to use their vehicles rather than public transport.

Continued next week.
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