

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 79

Last week I suggested three short-term transport solutions for Trinidad: (1) Relocation of the westbound right-turning lane on Churchill Roosevelt Highway (CRH) at the intersections with Aranguez Road and El Socorro Road; (2) signal synchronization of CRH intersections; and, (3) creation of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on one of the three directional lanes of the CRH and Uriah Butler Highway (UBH).

I focus today on another issue: reduction of delays caused as a result of traffic incidents. According to the US Federal Highway Administration, a traffic incident is a road user occurrence, a natural disaster, or other unplanned event that affects or impedes the normal flow of traffic. The following are examples of traffic incidents:

(1) Traffic-related incident:

- Vehicle stalling/disablement
- Crash
- Cargo/goods spill
- Debris on road
- Hazardous material spill

(2) Non-traffic-related incident

- Industrial accident
- Bridge collapse
- Emergency road work

(3) Emergency-related

- Natural disaster, such as floods and severe storm damage.
- bushfire with smoke
- Human-caused catastrophe

In the USA, traffic incidents cause approximately 25% of traffic congestion. Most of us could easily recall being caught in huge traffic jams as a result of some of these activities. And we often only know what is going on when we actually arrive at the incident. Many may recall the incident a weekday afternoon in February this year at the intersection of the CRH and the Uriah Butler Highway when a large loaded container truck overturned blocking the intersection. Motorists were delayed for up to six hours.

Traffic incidents should be managed so that congestion is reduced. Traffic Incident Management (TIM) is an important tool in lessening the impact of non-recurring congestion as well as providing for a safer environment for drivers. TIM is a planned and coordinated process to detect, respond to, and remove traffic incidents and restore traffic capacity as safely and quickly as possible. This process would involve coordination of a number of public and private sector personnel, including: Police, Fire, emergency medical services, emergency management services, towing services, safe transfer and removal of hazardous materials, and services by the Highways Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport (MWT).

The primary functions of TIM are to move road users reasonably safely and expeditiously past or around the traffic incident, to reduce the likelihood of secondary traffic crashes, and to preclude unnecessary use of the surrounding local road system. Traffic incidents can be divided into three general classes of duration, each of which has unique traffic control characteristics and needs. These classes are:

- Major—expected duration of more than 2 hours;
- Intermediate—expected duration of 30 minutes to 2 hours; and
- Minor—expected duration under 30 minutes.

The duties and responsibilities of the personnel identified above should include:

(a) Police

- To secure incident scene
- To perform primary response duties
- To assist other responders in accessing the incident scene
- To establish emergency access routes

- To cordon and direct the perimeter of incident scene and impact area
- To conduct crash investigation
- To perform traffic control

(b) Fire

- To protect incident scene
- To rescue/extricate victims
- To extinguish fires
- To respond to and assess incidents involving a hazardous materials release
- To contain or mitigate a hazardous materials release

(c) Emergency medical services (EMS)

- To provide medical treatment to those injured at the incident scene
- To determine destination and transportation requirements for injured victims
- To transport victims for additional medical treatment

(d) Appointed TIM emergency management services

- To coordinate response activities
- To provide evacuation recommendations
- To facilitate communication and coordination across jurisdictions
- To advise the broadcast media and facilitate prompt, reliable information to the public

(e) Towing services

- To recover vehicles and cargo/goods
- To remove disabled or wrecked vehicles and debris from incident scene
- To mitigate non-hazardous material (cargo/goods) spills

(f) Safe transfer and removal of hazardous materials

- To mitigate incidental vehicle fluid spill on the roadway

(g) Highways Division, MWT

- To protect incident scene
- To implement traffic control strategies and provides supporting resources
- To monitor traffic operations

- To disseminate motorist information
- To assess and direct incident clearance activities
- To develop and operate alternate routes
- To assess and perform emergency roadwork and infrastructure repair

It is currently not uncommon for a minor traffic incident to cause delays similar to a major traffic incident. The establishment of the Government-appointed TIM emergency management services is critical to the success of reduction in congestion caused due to any type of traffic incident. This, followed by new assignments of the Highways Division, as well as the activities of the other key stakeholders will be pivotal in this key traffic solution measure.

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