

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 91

This is the final part in my 100-day plan for traffic and transport for consideration by the new Government Administration.

## **Laser Speed Detection and Traffic Safety Enforcement**

Data from the Central Statistical Office show that 60 percent of all fatal traffic accidents occur between 6:00pm and 6:00am. Also, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays together account for 50 percent of all fatal traffic accidents. These occur primarily on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway (CRH), the Solomon Hochoy Highway (SHH), and the Eastern Main Road (EMR) on the Valencia Stretch.

The Police should be encouraged to patrol these and other roads especially during the night-time and early morning hours. It is now urgent to pass legislation to have the Police speed trap mechanisms change from the primitive method of three men hiding in the bush to modern laser gun enforcement technology. This would also assist night-time surveillance.

The Police and Licensing Officers also seem to have other priorities than traffic enforcement. There is need for serious investigation of the need for a separate agency dedicated to traffic monitoring, enforcement and parking.

## **Highway Intersection and Interchange Improvements**

The Churchill-Roosevelt Highway is already being planned to be elevated at critical intersections along its route.

The current interchanges along the Uriah Butler Highway and Solomon Hochoy Highway are Diamond-type interchanges which are normally for low-volume ramp traffic. With the increased surrounding development and higher traffic turning movements, there would be need to upgrade the interchange to provide for the

higher ramp-turning and crossing traffic movement.

Uriah Butler Highway and Solomon Hochoy Highway are major constraints and separators to the people of the highly built-up Chaguanas, as more than 60 percent of all traffic in the fastest growing urban centre in the country desire to connect between the east and west sides of the highway.

Planning must be started to create several east-west connection locations using viaducts. A viaduct is a highway which is elevated above (or below) the local distributor road which connects the bisected community. The primary advantage of a viaduct type system is that community continues to interact (with vehicles and pedestrians) at grade and avoids over-passing or under-passing the highway to access activities on either side of the community. The following viaducts are proposed.

A viaduct would be constructed at the Jerningham Junction Road linking Pierre Road, and elevating the Uriah Butler Highway. Another viaduct would be constructed at Edinburgh Boulevard linked to the Southern Main Road at Edinburgh Village, and elevating the Solomon Hochoy Highway. These viaducts would serve to create important links to a ring road system that interact with the Greater Chaguanas Area.

## **Traffic Management within Urban Centres**

All road users should acknowledge that the traffic situation has reached crisis proportions, and the high vehicle volumes on the roads coupled with the inability to increase the capacity of roadways within urban centres have exacerbated the problem. Therefore, motorists stopping on the roads to do things that would have been considered innocuous in years gone by, such as, buying newspapers, vegetables or doubles, or vans

delivering bread, or trucks offloading cement, now severely add to the delays experienced these days. The following should be considered for urban centres:

(a) There would be no stopping on main roads in urban centres 50 metres before or after intersections.

(b) Specially designated stopping bays for transit vehicles would be painted along specific routes.

(c) Pedestrian priority and markings would be promoted.

(d) A system of dedicated traffic and parking wardens would be instituted for ticketing offenders of the strategies described above. This would require legislative approval. These wardens would operate in urban areas on foot and bicycles.

(e) Taxis and maxi-taxis occupying stands in urban areas have long out-grown the capability of holding their numbers required, resulting in spill-over, and tremendous reducing in the traffic-carrying capacity of the roadway. This cannot be sustained. Any plan for public transport must provide off-street facilities in a reorganised fashion. Planning for this must begin immediately. This component would be handled by the Transit Authority (discussed in the Newsday last week).

(f) Loading and off-loading by commercial vehicles on the main routes in urban centres cannot be permitted, especially during peak period. Investigations would be conducted to limit these activities to between 6:00pm and 6:00am. Crime and security concerns would obviously feature here.

## **Other Travel Demand Management Measures**

Consideration would also be given to developing the concept of alternative work hours, such as (1) Staggered hours: different work groups are assigned to begin at different times (2) Flexi-time: allows employees to choose their own schedules within company-set

guidelines (3) Compressed work-week: Four-day work weeks allow employees to complete 40 hours of work in four 10-hour days.

### **Accessibility Needs of the Differently-Abled**

Accessibility needs of people with reduced mobility, disabled people, elderly people, families with young children, and the young children themselves are critical to plan for, as they should have easy access to transportation infrastructure. A pilot project would be started in Scarborough, Tobago to integrate all the sidewalks and footpaths within the city. Sidewalks would be re-built to be uniform with respect to elevation, gradients at property entrances, and at corners to facilities wheelchairs. There would be the establishment of appropriate pedestrian crossings and footpaths. The texture of the footpath surface would be properly varied to facilitate detection and understanding by the blind.

### **National Road Link Continuity Improvements**

Several roads need to be upgraded or built to facilitate improved access and reduced congestion. They include

- Western Main Road from Diego Martin Highway to Tembladora, or appropriate causeway linking these areas;
- Diego Martin Highway between Victoria Gardens and Diego Martin Main Road;
- Caparo Valley Brasso Road between Southern Main Road, Montrose and Guaracara Junction;
- Tabaquite Rio Claro Road between Tabaquite and Rio Claro; and,
- Rivulet Road in Couva.

### **New Vehicle Licensing System**

I have to confess that I believe that the current Transport Division (commonly called the Licensing Office) should be scrapped. The daily allegations of corruption and graft must be addressed. There must

be an operational model that is more accountable and responsive to our needs. I cannot think of any reason why these processes require uniformed officers (except the road operations, and a separate system has already been suggested in this article).

The new vehicle licensing operation will include the following:

- Develop a scheme for handling overloaded vehicles on the roadways.
- Develop and implement formal certified training course for licensing personnel and driving instructors
- Investigate appropriate methods for disposal of scrapped tyres and derelict vehicles
- Develop system and routes for transporting hazardous materials, including varied time-of-day.

### **A Comment on the Rapid Rail**

The Transport Minister must tell us exactly why the rapid rail is so critical for solving traffic congestion, in a non-campaign-like manner. We no longer need to hear about the 90 percent who want it, or about the detractors who are against it. We need to be treated as intelligent people who could think for ourselves, so tell us in a scientific and technically robust way how we will benefit from this transport strategy.

Next year, I will attempt two projects: (1) to visit communities all over Trinidad and Tobago, and write about their traffic and transportation problems, and (2) to detail the planning of an appropriate Bus (including PTSC and Maxi-Taxi) Rapid Transit (BRT) system for the country.

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