

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis - XI

This is the eleventh article in our analysis of the transport system in the country. Last week I submitted the first of my two requests to the Minister of Transport. Today I would like the Minister to venture where no other Minister responsible for transport has gone before: go out and experience first hand the problems of the road users who comprise the common man. You would be surprised to learn that the majority of road users do not drive an automobile, and have no choice but to seek out public transport.

It is critical to identify the true stakeholders and understand their priorities, know what they want and why, and address their priorities and win their trust.

I am suggesting that you leave your car (and bodyguard, if you have one) and spend at least two weeks using buses, maxis, taxis and PH (whatever is available) in various areas of the country. For example, you may start from your home in Maraval and walk out to Saddle Road for transport to your office in POS. Try to ignore the fact that you may have to wait for sometime and then have to depend on PH, and later you would have to wait to transfer to another taxi to reach your office.

Next day, start the process in the morning at Busy Corner in Chaguanas and you would have to wait a long time for a taxi or maxi for POS. Experience the pushing and shoving to get into the vehicle, and see for yourself how especially women and children suffer, being unable to cope with the physical strength and agility of the men. Then hold onto your seat for the ride of your life! Don't forget the return journey in the evening. Check the numbers of persons, particularly women and children awaiting public transport at the Chaguanas and San Fernando taxi stands and at City Gate in POS. Do

not take the first available vehicle if you happen to get one, but wait until dark to see how many people still remain.

Then at Chaguanas walk along the Chaguanas Main Road between the Old Southern Main Road and Busy Corner and count the hundreds of persons, particularly women and children, awaiting transport. These people are going to POS, San Fernando, Curepe, St. Mary's, Caparo, Tabaquite, round-road (meaning around Greater Chaguanas, such as Enterprise, Cunupia, etc).

On another day start the journey at Claxton Bay with the intention of reaching POS. You would have to wait on transfers at Couva and Chaguanas.

On yet another day try to travel from Matelot to Sangre Grande. I understand that carpooling is already at work on this route since commuters normally have to pay about \$20 dollars to reach Sangre Grande.

Do you know the distance between La Romaine and Gulf City Mall in San Fernando? Well, people from South would tell you that Gulf City Mall is in La Romaine. Yet PH trips to reach the Mall from La Romaine cost \$10.00 in December last year.

These are few examples of the hardships faced by those who have no choice but to use public transport for accessing activities that are necessary for their livelihood.

Then there are those who must walk long distances, often without opportunities for shelter from rain or sun, in order to reach the point to await public transport, without any assurance of the arrival of any other transit vehicle. These persons are often vulnerable to assault, attack or other anti-social behaviour, especially after dark.

There is the issue of waiting facilities – called terminals and stops in the case of buses, and

formal and informal taxi or maxi-taxi stands and stops. The bus terminals are all sheltered and provide some level of amenities and security. There are only two off-street maxi-taxi terminals and these have been provided with toilets and security: at City Gate and the Yellow Band on South Quay. Every other taxi and maxi-taxi stand in the entire country is on-street and have no toilets or shelters for either vehicle operator or passengers. These taxis (and maxi-taxis occupy valuable road space and they have out-grown the capability of holding the numbers required, resulting in spill-over. Any plan for public transport must provide appropriate off-street facilities and amenities in a reorganised fashion.

There is also the issue of personal safety and security at public transport facilities – particularly for women travelling alone.

The Priority Bus Route (PBR) was created as a busway. This means it was conceived as dedicating its two lanes for the exclusive use of buses. In 1997 I had the privilege of meeting the renowned World Bank transport economist, Gabriel Roth, who was visiting the University of the West Indies (UWI) at St Augustine. I asked him if there was any particular place in Trinidad that he had heard about and would like to visit, and I offered to take him. I was thinking that perhaps he may have wanted to experience Maracas Bay or the Lake Asphalt. He said that he had heard very little about a very extensive (26 km) busway in Trinidad, but there was not much information in the literature, and he would like to see it if possible. So I obtained a pass from the Ministry and drove on the PBR for his research. I later found out that the South Miami-Dade Busway in Florida was just being completed at

that time (1997) and was only 13 km long.

The PBR is an extremely valuable asset whose capacity should not be jeopardized by illegal or inappropriate use. Since its primary function is to move people, other non-public transport uses should be prioritised and only be granted a pass when they will not impact on the primary function. It is suggested that emergency vehicles such as ambulances, police on call, and fire engines on call be treated as top priority uses and be given passes. In other words, the PBR should be given priority for High Occupancy Transit (HOT) Vehicles, such as Buses and Maxi-Taxis, with a heavy emphasis on very large buses such as articulated and bi-articulated. Bi-articulated buses are split into three sections, with two accordion-type joints, instead of one as in the case of the articulated bus, with each unit is 25 m in length and is capable of carrying up to 270 passengers.

Where does a potential transit patron access user-friendly information on types of services routes, stops / stations, and schedules? How does a tourist know where the transit stands are?

Government must see itself as being responsible for securing the provision of a well-organised public transportation system that delivers high quality passenger transport services in a safe, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner, and that provides reasonable access for all members of society, regardless of their destinations. The required attitude is that public transport should be a first class service and not merely for those who cannot afford to drive.

Please Sir, remember that the key stakeholders are the lifeblood of any project. We can annoy them at our risk, and we can ignore them at our peril.

Next week, I plan to introduce some measures to improve our transportation conditions.

e-mail: [lfsystems@carib-link.net](mailto:lfsystems@carib-link.net)