

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 111

When will we get our own Prime Minister Joseph? No, not Martin Joseph! Pharaoh, King of Egypt appointed Joseph, a thirty-year old Hebrew as Prime Minister of Egypt more than 1400 BC. This young foreigner was given rule over the greatest country of the then known world. He governed the people and managed all the resources of the land. He developed a major programme of food security, so that when economic recession came, people from all the surrounding countries went to Egypt to buy food as their own countries suffered from extensive famine. The people of Egypt and all these other countries praised PM Joseph for saving their lives.

Why was Joseph successful as a leader? His desire was to preserve the quality of life of his people. How did he approach his assignment? He identified the important elements in his planning and development programme. As an exercise, I would like the reader to prioritise the following human services: providing for the elderly and physically challenged, providing child care, health services, personal security, education and training services, leisure and recreation services, tourism, transportation, sustainable employment creation, participatory public decision-making, public service accessibility, public service office accommodation, food security, industrial expansion, and public housing services.

There are two important terms in transportation that need careful appreciation: mobility and accessibility. Mobility refers to how frequently you travel, and is commonly measured as the product of the number of persons or vehicles and their distances travelled. Accessibility refers to how easily you travel between activities, or the overall difficulty in getting from an origin to a destination. While both

terms are important, the latter is a more important measure in determining transportation policy. Yet, our decision-makers have all focussed almost exclusively on mobility considerations. Let's see some of their recommendations to-date: (a) cheap foreign-used car for the common man, (b) purchase more buses, (c) construct interchanges along the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, (d) water taxi service for north-south, and (e) rapid rail trains for east-west and north-south.

It apparently has not been sufficiently recognised that our urban centres, such as POS, San Fernando, Chaguanas, Arima, Princes Town, Couva, etc. are the primary traffic generators, and their resultant congestion spills over onto the expressways and arterial roads. Further, in all these urban centres, pedestrian travel comprises a very high percentage of trips, and therefore is a mode that impacts significantly on traffic, but is hardly ever incorporated into the planning process. In every city or town or village, the pedestrian is treated as a nuisance who unnecessarily delays the moving vehicle, and must simply be tolerated.

I have been lobbying through these articles for a long time for the introduction of a public transport authority, that is, the equivalent of a Regulated Industries Commission (RIC), but for potential users of PTSC buses, maxis, taxis, and other modes to come including rail and water taxi. The Government has responded that in order to form a transit authority they would first have to close down the Port Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority. Can you believe that? Now, however, with the announcement of the rapid rail contract, the Government has stated that a railway authority will be introduced. So the vulnerable "car-less," particularly women and

teenage students who have no choice but to depend on unregulated, unscheduled, and unpredictable operations of taxis, maxis and PH taxis, and compounded by lack of amenities or safety provisions, would have to wait some time until the railway experts could incorporate alternative modal support service and regulations to facilitate train operations.

I reiterate that I am not against any of the mega-projects, provided the context of their utility could be presented and explained. Naturally, I would expect that their consideration would be predominantly on the basis of accessibility approaches. Further, there must be many local immediate urban-centre-based solutions to our transportation problems, and that could provide very effective reduction from our suffering.

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