

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 135

Taxi driving is one of the most dangerous business enterprises in TnT! Fifteen taxi drivers (including PH drivers) have been murdered this year. What will also be interesting is how many persons have been robbed, raped, (or attempted to be robbed or raped) and murdered through awaiting public transport or as a passenger – the acts being committed by the taxi or PH driver or by other passengers. What percent of these victims have actually reported these incidents to the Police? So both taxi drivers and their patrons are vulnerable to crime. The risks are especially high at nights.

Also some destinations are viewed as more dangerous than others. One newspaper reported that some taxi drivers are refusing to enter certain areas, and it is often the PH taxis who are taking the risk.

The taxi fare between POS and Chaguanas just went up from \$7 to \$9. Their taxi association said the hike could not be delayed any further, and the reasons for increasing the fare were the high cost of living and the recent increase in premium gasoline. However, Government Ministers said the increase in premium gasoline prices was no reason for taxi drivers to increase their fares.

Housing communities are being established all over the country with no consideration being given to creating formal transportation links for work needs, schooling needs, shopping needs, public service needs, etc in the urban centres. The result is that informal taxi and PH operations are introduced by “locals” to meet the demands. In addition, primary and secondary schools have been built with apparently similar neglect for transport linkages. So that ad hoc public transport develops in all these areas.

I am using the terms public transport and transit interchangeably.

Where am I going with all of this? Transit is not only the provision of increased numbers of buses; or the introduction of increasing numbers and frequency of ferries to link waterfront centres; or the introduction of grandest form of mass transit, namely the Rapid Rail.

The existing transit modes are (1) publicly-owned and publicly-operated: the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC); (2) privately-owned and publicly-operated: maxi-taxis, taxis, and PH (illegal). It is critical to not only understand these modes, but more significantly, to coordinate these modes to produce an integrated transit system operation. This must be done now, long before any new multimodal operations are considered, so as to assess existing deficiencies and constraints, and thereby determine improvements required.

But this assessment has never been publicly presented, and there has not yet been a desire to indicate publicly the context within which the new multi-modes are to be operated.

The second category of existing transit modes in TnT (maxis, taxis and PH) is also called paratransit. Paratransit modes also include private school vans, rented cars, and dial-a-ride taxis (such as, airport taxis, and hotel taxis). Paratransit modes are less regulated than transit modes (PTSC) and vary from strict controls and high quality services to very little control with low standards of service quality and even basic traffic safety. In other words, the Government-owned PTSC is one component of the existing national transit system.

In fact, in 2004 there were 24,980 taxis, including airport and hotel taxis, 4,522 maxi taxis, and

150 PTSC buses. It has been estimated in various studies by others that there are more than 6,000 PH (illegal) taxis operating. All PTSC terminals (stands) are off-street. Three maxi taxi stands are off-street, the balance are on-street. All taxi stands, legal and illegal are on-street. The on-street stands have no amenities provided. Thus there is always competition for the limited road space (and conflict) between moving vehicles, pedestrians, and parked transit vehicles.

Typical advantages of paratransit include the following: (a) Very frequent service wherever high demand exists, such as between major urban centres; (b) Stopping only when requested, so they could travel faster than transit vehicles serving many stops; (c) Some paratransit services distribute passengers to a wide range of destinations; (d) Operating with little or no Government subsidies.

Typical disadvantages of paratransit include the following: (a) When travel demand is low, paratransit services are infrequent and unreliable; the same occurs when there is heavy traffic congestion without preferential treatment for transit or paratransit is nonexistent, and turnaround time is very long; (b) Safety standards are low and liability insurance for passengers is often nonexistent; (c) In some cases, overcrowding causes poor riding conditions, especially during peak hours; (d) Since competing services are not integrated, passengers have great inconvenience in getting information on destinations and stands, especially because there are no schedules and maps; (e) Their use by non-regular users is very difficult; (f) as a result of poor traffic enforcement, they greatly contribute to chaotic traffic conditions; (g) They are not obligated to provide their services, so that when operating conditions

become unfavourable (such as in higher than usual traffic congestion when it rains or on a Friday during evening peak periods), they abandon their responsibility leaving the urban areas without services; and, (h) since fares are not regulated, operators may overcharge passengers; there are also no transfer arrangements, so passenger pay an additional fare for every vehicle they enter.

In summary, paratransit is a collection of independent services, rather than a system that can be readily planned and controlled. According to Prof. Vukan Vuchic, because paratransit has limited regulations, planning of transit is extremely difficult because there are no data on the number of operators, passenger volumes and origin-destination patterns, etc., and without information and data about existing conditions, it is not possible to perform any planning, and it is difficult to implement any changes.

So can transit and paratransit in TnT be integrated and coordinated? This is the subject of my article next week.

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