

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis - XV

March 15, 2005 has been set by Minister Imbert for the Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago (APETT) to host a breakfast seminar for Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) to present the rapid rail project to Trinidad and Tobago. The venue and time are to be confirmed.

In order to facilitate preparation of PB's clarification, I have summarised some of my primary concerns, in no order of priority:

(a) We know that PB was awarded a contract to conduct a national transport study, and that their contract was later expanded to include investigating the feasibility of light rail transit. PB is now the Assistant Procurement Manager for Rapid Rail. What is PB's contractual role in all of this, and more particularly in the design, build, operate, and maintain (DBOM) contract for the entire rapid rail project worth 15-plus billion dollars.

(b) Has rapid rail been found feasible? Is there any document available for public viewing? Also, the project must have already been planned, thus producing defined routes, types of train cars, elevated and subway segments, locations of rail transit terminals, interchanges to be built to connect transit terminals, lands to be acquired to facilitate terminals and routes, etc?

(c) Has the on-going national transport study completed any analyses and recommendations? What is the context in which rapid rail fits into the overall traffic and transport improvement strategy from now to the long-term.

(d) The rapid rail ad stated that the proposed rail system will "relieve existing traffic congestion, reduce traffic delays..." While rail transit has the capability for moving volumes of people in short periods of time, it does not ease traffic congestion, except if penalties are imposed on the private car users to

coerce them to change their mode of transport. Congestion is only relieved when the numbers of vehicles in the traffic stream are reduced drastically. Does PB plan to recommend congestion charging is coming (such as road tolls, road user taxes, etc), and if not, how does PB propose to encourage drivers to leave their cars?

(e) PB's approach to project development in USA and TnT are worlds apart. In the USA there are context sensitive strategies and public involvement. Is there a separate overseas method of operation? Or, has Government dictated the strategy to be applied?

(f) The Priority Bus Route (PBR) was recreated from a railway to an extensive 26-km busway. This means it was reconceived as dedicating its two lanes for the exclusive use of buses and other high capacity vehicles. Is PB recommending reconverting to a railway? If so, then why?

(g) A rail system for major corridor usage takes significant time for planning and construction, and training of the operators for the system. Our commuters have problems right now that cannot wait for years to come. Further, rapid rail cannot connect all communities and up to now most still do not have access to regular, dependable public transport. How will the rapid rail solution assist?

(h) What type of contract will the Government negotiate with the successful bidder to complete the design, construct and commission of the rail systems and facilities, and the training of supervisors, operators and maintenance staff?

(i) How will these risks be shared between Government and the DBOM Contractor? What is likely to be Government's monthly rail transit subsidy for the 15 to 35 years of the contractor's operations? Or will train consumers eventually be asked to pay a premium fare?

(j) Will road users be asked to pay the "real" price for fuel?

(k) I have never heard about the investment of such a major transit facility without even the consideration of a transit authority to manage and regulate the sector, or any input from the expertise of this transit authority. Who will be Government's technical and project management advisor? And, what will be the institutional structure required, and when will it function?

(l) I have heard the Minister speak about maxi-taxis being used as feeder services for the line haul train, but how will this operate and who will manage it? What will be the role for PTSC and their buses? Will there be a plan for taxis?

(m) Will there be any funds for further public investments in other aspects of traffic and transport solutions, particularly within urban areas such as POS, San Fernando, Chaguanas, and Arima? What is the ratio of rail investment to other transport investment measures in the USA? How will congestion within towns and cities (which is sometimes worse than highway delays) benefit from rapid rail?

There has been increasing demand for transparency and accountability in public procedures. In the USA, a formal public involvement process has been required by the federal planning regulations since 1975.

A project prioritization procedure usually consists of several evaluation criteria and associated measures, of a mix of subjective and objective type. Key factors to guide the process of developing a prioritization procedure include: the extent to which proposed projects are tied to particular funding sources, the degree to which each evaluation measure is objective or subjective, and whether emphasis should be placed on relative-merit approaches or stand-alone scores.

The following is an example of project evaluation criteria for a major road improvement project used in USA, giving evaluation criterion, measure, and weight,

(i) Congestion; ratio of project person volume-capacity ratio to highest among projects considered; 20%

(ii) Public safety; ratio of three-year average accident rate of project location to highest among projects considered; 20%

(iii) Economic development, location within designated revitalization, redevelopment, or key development areas; 10%

(iv) Infill development; location within designated infill areas; 15%

(v) Cost; ratio of lowest cost among projects considered to cost of project being considered; 5%

(vi) Deliverability or Readiness; status of environmental determination and feasibility study; 5%

(vii) Volume; ratio of existing annual daily traffic to highest among projects considered; 7%

(viii) Gap closure; status of potential of various transport systems; 8%

(ix) Alternate Modes; relative to bus or rail transit routes, 10%

While decisions on selecting and prioritizing proposed improvements are made by people and not by the procedure itself, the use of such a procedure can assist in demystifying and making apolitical the process by which these decisions are made.

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