

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 188

Today I continue my 100-day plan for traffic and transportation for consideration by the new Government Administration.

The Priority Bus Route (PBR)

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. It 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. In other words, the PBR should be given priority for High Occupancy Transit Vehicles, such as PTSC Buses and Maxi-Taxis, with a heavy emphasis on very large buses such as articulated, accordion-types.

Traffic signals would be coordinated along the PBR to emphasise its priority. This would be the beginning of the functioning of the PBR as a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System. A BRT system provides a high quality of service along dedicated or close-to-dedicated routes, with increased service frequency, capacity and speed.

High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes

With the additional lanes being constructed on the CRH, Uriah Butler Highway (UBH), and also proposed for the Solomon Hochoy Highway, there is an opportunity to create High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) facilities. HOV facilities are lanes or roadways that are designed and/or operated to provide priority treatment to buses, other transit vehicles, carpools, and other eligible vehicles. Most current facilities use a two-plus-person per vehicle (2+) occupancy designation. I suggest three-plus-person per vehicle (3+) operations here.

HOV facilities are usually found in heavily congested corridors where the physical and financial feasibility of expanding the roadway is limited. The travel time savings and improved trip time reliability offered by HOV lanes provide incentives for individuals to change from driving alone to taking transit, or carpooling. HOV projects typically focus on meeting objectives related to increasing the average number of persons per vehicle, maximizing the person-carrying capacity of a congested roadway, and enhancing transit operations.

It is suggested that the innermost lane of each carriageway (right lane) be used exclusively for vehicles with two-or-more persons and all transit vehicles (provided that they have two-or-more persons). All other vehicles with a single occupant, as well as all trucks and other commercial vehicles must use the other two lanes only.

How will these HOV lanes be enforced? London, England, recognized that manual enforcement of HOV lanes is costly and only partially effective, and that it would be prohibitively expensive to employ the number of enforcement officers necessary to patrol HOV lane network. Instead, they turned to video enforcement using digital cameras. This can be undertaken with CCTV cameras strategically located for monitoring, such as on dedicated poles 15m high placed along the route. The image data can be sent electronically to a central computer for analysis, archiving and storage. Data analysis of the enforcement images also can be automated, with software culling the images of infractions to reduce the number of images that must be reviewed manually. To allay privacy concerns, software can be programmed to obscure the images of surrounding vehicles' license plates and occupants.

There are other tweaking issues, such as how do the HOV vehicles make a left-turn? This would have to be carefully considered in the traffic signage and markings. These and other matters must be studied as part of the planning process. Nevertheless the HOV lane idea is currently serving many urban areas internationally as a major tool in travel demand management.

Transit Authority

We still do not have any management of public transport in this country. No administration has ever taken the time to articulate and accept a defined transport policy or introduce an authority for public transportation. There is need for a Transit Authority to serve the needs of all patrons of public transport and to administer a well-organised transit system that delivers high quality passenger transport services in a safe, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner.

The Transit Authority would assess the long-term requirements for the development of the public transport services. Planning and analysis would be specific to transit development. It would set standards for service and maintenance, and would regulate the operators (public and private) of public transport systems to ensure that services are safe, reliable and comfortable. It would licence public service vehicles, including all types of buses, maxi-taxis, taxis, and rental vehicles. It would also licence the drivers of private buses, excursion buses and school buses, and regulate their conduct.

Transit Authority functions would also include approving transit routes, regulating transit service standards, and approving fares for scheduled transit services.

The Transit Authority would arrange through the PTSC for the contracting and management of Maxi-Taxis as part of the overall bus system to provide proper

schedules, location of stops, amenities at terminals, and information on routes and schedules.

The Transit Authority would include as part of its portfolio the PBR and HOV lanes described above.

Dedicated School Bus Transport

A dedicated school bus transport service would ensure safe, efficient and reliable transport is available for students. School children would benefit from educational opportunities and social, sporting and cultural activities through easy accessibility to public transport. These buses may consist of a mix of PTSC-owned buses and contracted maxi-taxis, all managed by an upgraded PTSC on behalf of the Transit Authority.

The drivers of these school buses would be known by the members of the community and school staff within which they operate. They would know the students and may also function as additional overseers in the development of these children.

A special emphasis would be made to assist the tertiary-level students in their mobility needs, including night-time travel.

Final part next week.

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