

# Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 195

I cannot bear to listen or read the news in the media about the land grabbers in Cashew Gardens in Chaguanas. I am so disgusted with the behaviour of these lawless people. It is as though we have regressed to the Wild West. The law appears to have become optional. But, I am also disappointed with the response by the State. Why is the State negotiating with the land grabbers? They should be forcibly dealt with.

It seems to me that we are rapidly becoming ungovernable. It is very difficult for a pedestrian to pass on the sidewalks on the Chaguanas Main Road, as illegal vendors continue to block these sidewalks, and pedestrians are forced to walk on the road and so conflict with and delay vehicle traffic. When these illegal vendors are removed they cry out that the State is against them trying to make an honest dollar.

Illegal PH operators refuse to get a taxi license, as the young owners want to “lime” with their vehicle in the night and they do not want an “H” license on it. Others find it difficult to get a certificate of good character, which is a requirement for a taxi badge.

Maxi taxi operators want to stop anywhere on the road, even just after the traffic light turns green (and not on the extreme left of the road). Many taxi operators prefer to wait for passengers outside of their taxi stand, and it is usually not easy to distinguish a taxi from a regular car, other than by viewing the number plate.

In discussions with colleagues on these matters I have been advised that our country has always had “disregarders of the law,” and that this happens when it is “convenient” to do so. So people are prepared to do whatever they can get away with. So, why are they getting away with so much? It is as though there is no consequence for

their illegal actions. Why is it so convenient to disregard the law?

When a situation has reached crisis proportions, then crisis responses are required. This means that there must be immediate and rigorous traffic enforcement for all road users who break the law. I recall in Grand Rapids, Michigan a few years ago, my friend Earl and I were walking on the sidewalk downtown when we saw a vehicle make a U-turn on the roadway right beside us. Earl remarked, “That fella driving like a Trini!” We immediately heard the sound of a siren, and a police car appeared from nowhere and pulled up behind the U-turner. We recognised the offender as a friend of ours from Port of Spain. Needless to say, he was charged. Mobile traffic police was almost immediately present to charge this brazen offender.

Why can't we have regular patrols at all times, to keep the potential lawless and thoughtless on guard, and to reduce the frustration of the law abiding road users?

A reader, DJ, sent me the following suggestion. *“A driver should only be allowed to park on his left side on any street—and never on his right side. I am sure you are aware that this is how it's done in North America (in which case of course they park on their right side). If this is introduced, a vehicle moving out from such a parking spot will interrupt only the traffic going in its direction. If however one parks on one's right side you also interrupt the oncoming traffic flow. This will definitely help speed up traffic flow on busy streets.”* I agree, and added to this, there should be no U-turns on all two-way roads.

A recent letter to editor in the Guardian made some good suggestions which included, (a) *“Make it mandatory that both buses and taxis stop only at designated bus stops for passengers.* (b) *Ensure*

*that policemen are empowered to issue tickets to any offenders.* (c) *Erect railings 100 metres either side of the entrance to zebra crossings.* (d) *Enforce jay-walking laws and empower policemen to issue tickets to offenders.”*

In nearby Grenada, along the roads which are two-way routes, spots are painted about the size of two minibuses, and the minibuses are not permitted to stop outside of these markings to drop off or pick up passengers – the penalty is EC\$100 while the fare is EC\$2.50, and the Police Officer is very likely to appear – so it is not worth it, and there is adherence.

We have been struggling to get a Roads Authority for the last twelve years or so. Jamaica has a transport authority, traffic authority, roads authority, Toll road authority, vehicle overloading weigh scale monitoring, etc. They also have a National Transport Policy. Information on these agencies and the transport policy is readily available on the Internet.

And while we should begin a serious crackdown on all law breakers, there are some very simple transportation measures that will bring immense relief to road users. I will give one example today. There is a long, narrow road bridge over the Caroni River in St. Helena Village. After a pedestrian has made a decision to enter the bridge, it is frightening to share the limited space available with vehicles. There is no exclusive facility for pedestrians, nor is there another route that pedestrians may use. Therefore, a non-motorist makes an unsafe decision every-time he risks crossing this bridge. This bridge is in a local community, but it seems that pedestrians who use this bridge have been forgotten. A simple steel pedestrian railing could easily be constructed on the outside of the existing bridge to give safety and protection to the

many children and other pedestrians who must pass there several times per day. Auto drivers often cannot see these problems, as they are busy seeking ways to make the car pass faster.

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