

Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 32

What do you get when you multiply First World Developed Country Status preaching by Third World Developing Country Status action and behaviour? You get one-third of a reasonable solution. How else can you explain the rationale behind Government's bullish drive to implement the extremely costly and highly difficult to sustain the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project and their current construction of the massive 1,600-vehicle multilevel parking garage in downtown Port-of-Spain, known as the Parkade?

These two Government projects would normally be applied as part of very different parking management strategies. The former is known as the regional intercept parking model, which seeks to intercept parkers far away from the city centre and relies upon a transportation system that offers convenient and fast access from the parking facilities directly into the core in very close proximity to the ultimate destination. This approach would provide parking for short-term and residential parking needs closer to their destinations in the city; while longer-term employee-type parking would be intercepted outside the city at locations along the transit corridors.

The Parkade would normally be used in the central focus parking model. This model provides parking in a large parking reservoir in the activity centre of the city. It provides for both short- and long-term parkers within the core of the city. The key to this type of facility is having good vehicular access, otherwise bringing this large number of vehicles within and out of the centralized parking facility would encourage traffic congestion.

Someone said, "The Architect who designed the Parkade should be sent to Architects Anonymous for treatment and recovery! Imagine that this monstrosity is the largest building in the entire Caribbean and

this part of the World, and is for cars, and is located in downtown of the capital city!"

The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDECOTT), creator of the Parkade, might say that they are responsible for urban revitalisation, and it is the Ministry of Works and Transport (MWT) who is responsible for traffic matters, and that MWT would have approved the function of the Parkade and its associated traffic management strategy.

This is just one example of Government's inconsistent transport policy, and that may have occurred by default. One transport policy which continues to find favour with all our Administrations is the support for private car ownership. According to the Central Statistical Office, between 1965 and 1995, the average annual increase in private cars was over 3,300 vehicles per year. Since that time to now the average annual increase in private cars has been about 15,000 vehicles per year, with an annual growth rate of about 9 percent.

While I would not prescribe a transport policy that encourages private ownership of automobiles, I would argue that if Government intends to continue to pursue such, then it is mandatory that parking be provided, not necessarily free of charge, but to meet the demand. The demand for parking all over Trinidad and Tobago is huge. In POS it is impossible to get an off-street parking space or a legal on-street park during the daytime, and extremely difficult even for an illegal on-street parking space. I have argued recently that POS currently needs about 3,000 spaces (now less 1,600).

Many of us do not realise that, when addressing traffic congestion problems, vehicle parking issues are more significant contributors than traffic volumes. The rate at which

traffic flows on a roadway is ultimately dependent upon the ability of the parking facilities (on-street or off-street) to absorb vehicles that are being fed from the roadway system, and includes the availability of parking spaces.

In general, for a person to own a car there has to be one parking place at both residence and work. Also, there needs to be additional parking spaces for other purposes, such as shopping, etc. If we apply a standard of 50 sq. m. of land space to accommodate each person who owns a car (used by Washington State Dept of Transportation), we would require at least 1,250 Ha (3,089 Acres) of space in TnT to accommodate only private cars. This excludes parking spaces for trucks, buses, maxi-taxis, and taxis.

When we have decided to attend a function such as a business meeting, wedding, funeral, sporting or cultural activity, one of the very first things we usually consider is where we would park, and this determines how early we leave home or office. And all of us have experienced the confusion caused by inconsiderate latecomers who, instead of parking some distance away as space permits, choose to double park or park so as to interrupt the smooth flow of traffic. This frustration is a common feature everyday at both primary and secondary schools during the morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up.

Those of us without a reserved park at work must plan to reach ahead of the competitors for a suitable parking space. We are effectively taking our car to work.

Seeing that the legal on-street and off-street parking facilities are just about filled, parkers are now seeking out areas without parking regulations, resulting in a wider coverage of the aesthetically unappealing intrusion on-street of

freely parked cars into the suburban and residential areas.

There is not nearly enough parking provision in any of our urban centres. This must be addressed as part of the overall transportation strategy. Next week we examine the traffic problems in Chaguanas, and propose some solutions.

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