

Today I want to examine the statements of Opposition Leader Dr Keith Rowley with respect to mass transit in response to the 2013/2014 National Budget. He made the following misstatements, originally perpetrated by MP Colm Imbert during his stint as Minister of Works and Transport, and commented upon several times by me since 2006 and more recently over the last three consecutive Thursday in this column. They are as follows:

(1) *“...many transport studies over the years have identified the need for the introduction of a commuter railway system in Trinidad, going as far back as the 1967 National Transportation Plan for Trinidad and Tobago.”*

(2) *“More recently, 16 years ago, in 1996, a study by international consultants, Cansult, justified the need for a rapid rail system.”*

(3) *“Specialist consultants from India came to the same conclusion some years later.”*

(4) *“...the introduction of a mass transit system is 10,000 persons per hour. Further, once traffic reaches 20,000 persons per hour, it is well established that a railway is the only effective mass transit solution because buses simply can't handle these traffic levels, nor do roadways exist in Trinidad to accommodate the thousands of buses that would be required to move people quickly and efficiently.”*

(5) *“Fifteen years ago, we crossed the traffic threshold for the introduction of a railway, and five years ago we had gone past this threshold by 50 percent.”*

Why was the \$24 million contract for the Comprehensive National Transportation Study (CNTS) awarded in 2005 not allowed to be completed before deciding that rapid rail was the way to go? Why was the very same consultant (or a branch of the firm)

contracted as project manager of the rapid rail project, while the CNTS study was going on? What recommendation did the authorities expect the CNTS consultant to come up with? Are we surprised that rapid rail was recommended. And why was the CNTS consultant fired before the study was completed – it was reported that they were paid \$10 million in fees. Why was the rapid rail project manager, also fired and replaced with another firm?

Imagine, the country had never had a proper transportation planning study since 1967, yet when given this long awaited opportunity to direct appropriate strategies for national transportation, somebody redirected this critical process because of narrow preconceived motives.

Every transportation planning study traditionally provides analysis of several alternative strategies, from which one is eventually selected. The country was never given that opportunity to know, or be part of, since it was projected that it was ‘obvious’ what was needed, and it was ‘common sense.’

Dr. Rowley stated that the rapid rail contract had prepared the legal framework for the new railway authority. Why don't we have (and have never had) an authority for public transport even now? Do we need the rapid rail experts to tell us that we need a transit authority? If you ask these experts they will tell you that Trinidad and Tobago is the first country where they have worked to developed transit and there is no transit authority in place to direct the planning process. They will tell you that the Ministry or its project management agency is not the transit authority.

Do we need a rapid rail expert to tell us that that there is need to create an overpass for the Priority Bus Route (PBR) at its intersection

with the Lady Young Road? Was that not seen in the 1967 study?

The Opposition Leader continued, *“upon our return to office we will immediately approach the IDB for a review of the current situation; all existing data and engineering work done to date.”* I wonder if the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) will approve of the way the rapid rail project has been handled? I have my doubts.

According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), *Transportation Planning Handbook, Third Edition (2009), p. 712 “Capital costs for rapid transit construction depends heavily on when the line was built and the method of achieving full separation. San Francisco's Colma-Airport line (opened in 2003) was constructed with high aerial structures and a long tunnel, resulting in construction costs of approximately US\$256 million per mile (US\$ 159 million per km). At the other extreme is San Francisco's Dublin (1997) line, which utilizes freeway median for much of its length. This line was constructed for US\$ 37 million per mile (US\$ 23 million per km). Typical values may be derived from Washington Metro's Green Line (2001) – 6.5 miles (10.5 km) at US\$ 139 million per mile (US\$ 85.7 million per km), and San Juan's Tren Urbano (2004) – 10.7 miles (17.2 km) at US\$ 112 million per mile (US\$ 69.8 million per km)...*

*“Because the rights of way are protected, rapid transit lines can achieve speeds of 50 to 62 mph (80 to 100 km/hr), with exceptional cases of 81 mph (130 km/hr) (San Francisco BART). Average speed, which includes the time at stops, would be lower. Line capacities on rapid transit systems can theoretically reach 60,000 spaces per hour, but typical maximum loads are about 40,000 persons per hour, although average loads on*

*most lines in the United States are much less...*

*“Metros [another name for rapid rail transit] serve more than 100 cities worldwide... Rapid transit stations represent major infrastructure investments, and they often have major effects on their surroundings. Several planning principles should be followed in their planning and design. These include:*

- Locating stations such that adequate area coverage is provided while maintaining sufficient spacing such that the line maintains desired operating speed...”*

Finally, Dr. Rowley reminded us *“when fully implemented, estimated at approximately TT\$10 billion.”* That is, for 110 km. That does not compute!

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