

## Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 394

This is the third article on the historical diary of the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project (TRRP). It started on October 22, 2015.

At the meeting for the TRRP at Crowne Plaza (now called Radisson Hotel), POS on March 14, 2006 by the Ministry of Works and Transport (MoWT) to brief contractors prior to their submission, Minister Colm Imbert indicated to all in attendance that the meeting would not discuss the feasibility of the project. So the project was a given. He said *“the current rapid rail design, build, operate, and maintain (DBOM) project intends to procure one contractor for the entire 15-plus billion dollar project. The selection process will be based primarily based upon the contractor’s qualifications and will consist of two steps. First, contractors have been asked to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) to indicate their intent to participate. The original deadline for this LOI was Carnival Tuesday February 28, 2006, but this date has been extended to March 31, 2006. Second, contractors have to submit a Statement of Qualifications following receipt of qualifications forms and instructions.”*

The Minister stated that *“the Government has decided that the preferred mode of mass transit is rapid rail as it is appropriate at this time to re-introduce rail...and Government believes this ... and is committed to fast-track the rapid rail project.”*

The Minister then went on to tell the audience that he was viewing the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs earlier in the morning and found that 70 percent of workers commute by trains in Japan.

I am reminded that up until 1996, 60 percent of workers in Trinidad travelled by public transit that is still almost exclusively unsubsidized, unsupported, and totally unmanaged by Government, at that! Anywhere else in the world

the government would have been proud of such a transit usage. Currently, less than 40 percent use public transit, aided by Government policy which continues to favour private car ownership. The best current values in developed countries for public transport ranges between 30 and 50 percent; and the acceptable range for developing countries is 50 to 70 percent.

At the meeting, the rapid rail project goals and technology were explained by Mr. Paul T. Bakas, PB’s Technical Specialist. He stated that *“the Government wishes to implement a rapid rail system to alleviate traffic congestion due to the predicted growth in traffic.”* According to him the project goals were: Minimize time to project award; Fast and frequent rail service; Reasonable project cost; Alleviate growth of traffic congestion on highways; Minimize disruption during construction; Aesthetically pleasing system; Minimize environmental and noise impact; Safe and secure system; Technology transfer; Landmark station in Port of Spain; Efficient and affordable system for users.

Imagine the primary goal was to have a rapid award! He then went on to state that the procurement goal was to minimize the time to the project award. The procurement approach was also to secure the services of a Design-Build-Operate-Maintain Contractor (DBOM) with focus on DBOM qualifications.

The technology goals were to: (a) alleviate congestion due to growth of traffic on the highways, and the rapid rail system must be attractive to automobile users; and (b) reasonable project cost and efficient and affordable system for users, the emphasis would be to build at-grade as much as possible, to reduce costs.

Mr. Bakas added that the rapid rail transit should be made attractive to automobile users through (i) Fast

and frequent rail service – Trains on each line between 5 and 10 minutes during peak hours; Space stations reasonably far apart; High speed service (80 -100 kmph) (ii) Easy access to stations – ample parking; Easy drop off areas; Maxi-Taxi provisions; weather protection where possible (iii) Safe and secure system – Security for parked cars; sense of safety in the stations; sense of safety on the trains; and (iv) Pleasant Experience – Attractive stations; Comfortable cars; Secondary distribution.

Other key goals stated were: minimize disruption during construction; Technology transfer; and, Landmark stations.

The rail technology requirements were: rail car technology will be open; operate on exclusive Right of Way (ROW); and, avoid-at-grade road crossings.

What if the Government were to give the same priority and requirements for exclusive ROW or busways for a well-developed bus rapid transit, including elevated crossings at intersections, and a well-administered and technology supported public transport authority, wouldn’t the nation be able to have the appropriate level of transit efficiency, satisfaction and attractiveness within a very small fraction of the cost and time to implement a completely new system as rapid rail?

Why is system justification being rigidly avoided?

Next week: rapid rail informational meeting continued.

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