

Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 399

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

The Minister of Works and Transport responded to questions in the Senate on July 3, 2007 that “*the final report [Comprehensive National Transport Study] was sent back to the consultants [Parsons Brinckerhoff] because the ministry was not satisfied with the quality of the report. The firm of Parsons Brinckerhoff was giving us an undertaking to remedy the defects in the report. The time period given was a period of 90 days which would elapse in approximately 30 days from now. We are awaiting the remedying of the defects in the report.*” So after nearly two and a half years of international developed-country experts studying our nation’s transportation planning, there was nothing to show.

On July 17, 2007, Senator Basharat Ali asked the Minister that “*With the termination of the contract related to the Mass Transit Study System in October 2006, what steps if any have been taken to provide advisory services for the Rapid Rail Procurement process?*” And, “*...what is the scientific basis for proceeding to commit this country to another contract based on rapid rail?*”

The Minister replied that “*The National Infrastructure Development Company [NIDCO] has engaged the engineering and project management firm of Marshall Macklin and Monaghan, better known as MMM of Canada and the law firm of White and Case of the United Kingdom to provide advisory services for the procurement process for the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project... I have made it clear that the experience has indicated that once the traffic on a corridor exceeds 20,000 persons per hour per direction a rail based*

solution is inescapable and we are now at over 30,000 persons per hour per direction at peak hours and therefore, common-sense dictates that a rail solution is the solution.” Again, that misquotation, explained last two week ago.

Mr Imbert continued, “*In terms of the economics, there have been many studies on the economics of bus based mass transit versus rail based mass transit, and in many countries it has been found that once you get up to these numbers—and this is why I am saying, and this is why the information is, that a rail-based solution is inescapable—30,000 persons per hour, the railway solution is far more economical than the bus solution... For these reasons the Government is of the view that it has a responsibility to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to proceed with the Rapid Rail Project.*” Another misrepresentation, explained last week.

Senator Ali then asked another question: “*Could the Minister say what other country has had a similar kind of problem to which he can relate the findings of consultants like Cansult?*”

The Minister then replied: “*That is a very difficult supplemental, but I do not have an encyclopedia in my head. However, India is implementing rapid railway system as we speak. China has examined the feasibility of a bus based mass transit system as compared to a rail based mass transit system and is implementing a rail-based mass transit system after having done all the studies. Several Latin American countries are doing this. Railway is the preferred mode of mass transit in Europe. In fact, it has overtaken air transport as the preferred mode of mass transit. There are many countries, Senator, where those studies have shown that a rail based solution is far superior to a bus solution.*”

The Senate was simply trying to receive some scientific basis for the decisions being made, and these are the types of responses, hence, my reporting verbatim. So instead, we continue to receive a series of anecdotal evidence. Where are the studies relevant to our particular situation?

In his letter to the Editor in the Sunday Guardian dated September 2, 2007, Minister Imbert said it would “*be foolish to proceed with an investment in a project of this magnitude [the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project (TRRP)] without first doing the design work.*” Well, that is obvious! The common man knows that a major building must be designed before it is built. What is more critical in public mega-projects is the need for public involvement in the process of determining its feasibility. And feasibility simply means what problem the mega-project is expected to solve, how it is expected to solve it and its effectiveness, what it would cost, and how it would be paid for and sustained over its life; and all of this before the investment is made, so that detailed planning and design would not be incurred.

He states that “*contrary to the rhetoric and innuendo of the various obstructionists, the Government took its time to thoroughly examine... [and] select the tender that provides the best value for money with the least risk.*”

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