

## Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 44

This week I interrupt the second of two articles based on a paper I delivered recently at the monthly technical meeting of the Project Management Institute Southern Caribbean Chapter entitled "The Mass Transit Project: A Transportation Professional Project Management Perspective." I would like to comment on the issues raised by the Hon. Minister of Works and Transport during his presentation to the Senate on October 17, 2006. The Minister in his Senate contribution referred disparagingly to a "guy who writes in the newspaper every week" challenging the rapid rail project and he supported his case with quotations from two sources. The first was a report from RITES Ltd of India completed in November 2003 and the second source was a 2005 paper by Todd Litman an urban planner and Director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute.

The Minister did not identify the "guy" but as the only person publishing a weekly article on transportation, I have naturally assumed that he was referring to me.

My comments and analyses are based on specialist education and training to the doctoral level in traffic and transport engineering and more than 20 years of practice locally and regionally.

With respect to RITES, I am fully aware of the status of that company having tutored some of their engineers while I was a doctoral student in India. Further, in 2003 I met with engineers Sachdeva and Sharma of RITES on their visit to T&T and provided travel data on the east-west corridor. I had no further input into their study and only received an unofficial copy in 2004.

The important point is that the authors of the RITES report emphasized that their document was a concept paper and that a detailed

feasibility was required. Unfortunately, the report went on to make specific conclusions and recommendations which were not supported by analysis. In view of this I was a co-author of a formal written comment on the RITES paper to the Minister of Works and Transport in January 2005.

Regarding the paper on rail transit, Litman in a recent exchange with me stated and I quote "Although my study indicates that rail transit can provide significant benefits I think it is important to perform careful transportation and economic analysis to evaluate it in a particular situation. Its success depends on having supportive transportation and land use policies, including affordable fares, parking management, smart growth development policies, and improvements in walkability."

Clearly both RITES and Litman are saying that a detailed feasibility is required and my contention is that we are proceeding at full speed without evidence of any feasibility. A feasibility study will also provide construction and operating costs obviating the need for guessing or using cargo rail costs as a benchmark.

The fact is whatever the cost of the rapid rail being promoted, whenever the contract is signed it has to be completed, even if the eventual cost is found to be two times higher, as you cannot build half a rail line! Further, a rail system has to be in place for at least the next 200 years, so if it is found to be consuming too much of taxpayers' subsidy after five years, we cannot easily choose another mechanism for transport. Therefore, why not do first things first.

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