

Letter to the Editor

THE EDITOR: Please permit me to comment on the “common sense” suggestion for relieving traffic gridlock in POS by Mr. Lloyd Carter as reported in *Newsday Business Day* dated Thursday November 17, 2005 that “clearly the answer is to make the Western Main Road from George Cabral Street, to Green Corner, one-way east; and Ariapita Avenue, one-way west; with Colville, French, Richmond Streets, and Maraval Road one-way north, and Edward Street, one-way south. That would take a lot of stress from Wrightson Road, and smooth ribbons that are currently snarled.”

Morning peak hour volumes into Port-of-Spain from the west are about 2,500 vehicles per hour. For westbound traffic into POS there are effectively four lanes to accommodate vehicles: two lanes of Park Street (directional capacity of about 2,000 vph), and Wrightson Road (directional capacity of about 2400 vph), giving a total roadway capacity of about 4,400 vph. Therefore, theoretically, there is sufficient ability to accommodate the vehicular traffic demand with a satisfactory level of service. However, severe delays are caused primarily by heavy turning movements at intersections, poor traffic signal control, inconsiderate stopping, and motorists seeking to park or unpark.

It is a fact that one-way schemes can create major increases in capacity and speed on roadways.

However, there may be negative impacts as well. Public transport operations and patronage may be adversely affected, as walking distances to the nearest stop for desired travel may increase. Some motorists must travel extra distances to reach their destinations. Goods delivery and vehicle routing may also be impacted. Some motorists may resent having to travel extra distances to reach their destinations.

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There may be concerns by businesses that “the character” of the street will change due to higher traffic speeds. While there may be fewer turning movements at particular intersections due to the one-way scheme, the overall number of turns would increase due to more circuitous paths to destinations. There may also be increased severity of accidents due to higher speeds.

The traffic engineer should consider the above, including whether the layout of the street system can operate a one-way system on a practical basis. She would consider the primary and secondary functions of the street, whether the roadway is to be used primarily for traffic movement or for access to premises. And then, depending on the function of the roadway, she would give appropriate priority to the competing demands of the varied users and stakeholders of the same road space.

Therefore, careful analysis must be conducted, and not simply by a motorist who proposes solutions from the perspective of his vehicle in order to maximize traffic flow in passing through the urban area.

I will close with an example. Coffee Street in San Fernando was the subject of controversy on traffic and retail trade matters for many years. Coffee Street is a three-lane wide road, approximately one kilometre in length. In 1982, because of complaints from the public of congestion and traffic accidents, about half of the street was converted from two-way traffic into a one-way system. The business sector protested that sales were reduced because of the conversion, to the point that several of them went out of business, and the downturn of this heavily petroleum-based economy of the mid-eighties did not assist either. In 1987, the traffic system was re-

examined, and the entire street was made one-way. Protests revived in 1996, which then saw the reinstatement of the former half of the street for two-way traffic, for particular periods of the day; then in 1997, the time-based arrangement was removed.

Can you imagine the speeds of vehicles on a one-way westbound Ariapita. Can you imagine the traffic build up on a one-way southbound Edward Street, after French Street, Colville Street and Richmond have been made one-way northbound?

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Chaguanas**