

Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 63

The long-awaited Comprehensive National Transport Study (CNTS) is now six (6) months overdue. At least \$US 4 million was committed to this project and there is no word to date on its status or when it will be completed. Its Terms of Reference (TOR) stated that “the study will form the basis for development of the transport sector over the next 20 yrs.” The Consultant, Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB), was to develop a coordinated programme comprising an immediate 2-year stage, two successive 5-year stages and a final 8-year stage.

The following are the salient points of the TOR, the analysis and recommendation of which would detail the strategies to be implemented:

- PB is supposed to evaluate and recommend land use and other strategies that affect the location of jobs, affordable housing and, travel patterns.
- It is to establish dedicated routes or lanes, for high occupancy vehicles (considering buses, maxi taxis, carpooling) or other specific modes of transport, in order to provide more reliable and faster travel times.
- Taxi and Maxi Taxi operations are to be addressed, including, stands, standards, regulations, associations, regularizations, etc.
- PB must consider and evaluate whether other modes of transport (e.g. use of pipelines, conveyors, rail etc.) are feasible alternatives to the improvement of the road transport system.
- PB must review the earlier strategy for conversion of abandoned railway reserves into highways and propose any new directions, especially if the analysis leads to the re-implementation of the railway system as a means of freight or mass transit.

- PB must include national security and national emergency considerations and provide for the continued movement of people and goods during and after natural disasters.
- PB must review and recommend policies, procedures and plans, which regulate and guide the transport of hazardous materials.
- PB must undertake feasibility studies to identify the needs for the establishment of a water-taxi service, including daily anticipated commuter traffic, the target areas or communities, commercial constraints and other input considerations which will be required.
- PB must estimate investment project costs and analyse alternatives, and develop a prioritizing methodology to establish priorities and timeframes for competing projects.
- For years the authorities have had to carry out traffic relief works in the absence of an up-to-date transportation policy and plan. PB is required to make an assessment of what improvement works should be undertaken with immediate effect, notwithstanding the much wider scope of the Study.

This is the first time that there is such a tremendous interest by the Government in public transport. They would have accepted that effective public transit is central to development, and for the vast majority of people, public transit is the only practical means to access employment, education, and public services. But traditional transit services carry a long-standing negative stigma regarding poor operational performance and inadequate customer service. In other words, “public transport” often brings with it the same connotation of unpleasantness as “public toilets.”

So Government wants to develop sophisticated infrastructure for a completely new technology with more complex maintenance processes, with a mass transit system that must be owned (or paid for) by Government, and must be heavily subsidised for it to work. And what is even more alarming is that the real cost of the rail subsidy and maintenance may not be known in under ten years, and we can be sure that it will not be smaller than that for roads, but in fact will be much higher. Government has stated that maxi-taxis are to be used as feeder services for the line haul train, but how will this operate and who will manage it? What will be the role for PTSC and their buses? Will there be a plan for taxis?

I believe that the next generation of transit for TnT should be a privately operated system through a system of competitively tendered concessions which can provide the right set of incentives for profit and customer service. This should be in conjunction with a strong oversight role by a public agency, so that this type of system can deliver a high-quality product to the customer. And typically, concessioned operators should be paid by the number of kilometres travelled rather than by the number of passengers, and this would greatly assist with introducing scheduling to their services. Further, operators would be penalised or awarded depending on their performance levels. Such incentives would do much to focus operator efforts on providing a quality service.

Taxis and maxi-taxis currently occupy terminals and stands that have out-grown the capability of holding the numbers required, resulting in spill-over. This cannot be sustained, and in many cases utilise valuable on-street parking space. Any plan for public transport

must provide off-street facilities in a reorganised fashion.

Concerning the Priority Bus Route (PBR), the Government was quite futuristic in 1973 in its seeking to develop this route as part of a bus rapid transit system. According to the CNTS, "the PBR appears to be currently realizing only about half of its potential in terms of person trips. ...

"The capital improvements needed to improve the PBR are the provision of bus lay-bys and shelters for waiting passengers at a number of locations along the facility.

"Approximately 40 percent of all vehicles on the PBR are cars, some with PBR passes and some without.

"The efficiency of PBR utilization could greatly improve, if enforcement against prohibited vehicles was increased, and small (12-seater) maxi taxis were replaced by larger public transport vehicles."

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