

Our Transportation System is in Crisis - VII

This is the seventh article in our analysis of the transport system in the country. This week we examine another mode option for public transport: ferry systems.

A ferry is a passenger-carrying marine vessel that provides short-distance service over a fixed route and on a published schedule between two or more ports. Ferry systems can be planned for passengers only, or passengers and vehicles.

Ferry systems can be integrated with existing highway and mass transit systems in such a way as to create the optimal inter-modal mix for mitigating the effects of traffic congestion, green house gases and pollution. Internationally, ferry service is beginning to divert significant amounts of traffic from overcrowded roads, bridges, and tunnels, offering travellers a more comfortable and environmentally sustainable mode of transportation.

It is clearly time for the transport industry and government to seriously consider the unique advantages of ferryboats. At a time when our highways are being stretched to their limits, the lower capital costs of ferries, as compared to road and bridge expansions, may be particularly attractive. Moreover, ferry services can adjust more easily than roads or bridges to changing traffic demand.

Riding on a ferry has other advantages. Ferry transit commuters may find themselves experiencing unexpectedly breathtaking views of magnificent vistas they never knew existed so near to where they live, work, and pass.

In his book "The Making of Port of Spain Volume 1," Michael Anthony stated that the Southern Steamer line plied right down the Gulf of Paria from POS to Icacos. The S. S. St Patrick and later the S. S. Belize steamed out of POS on a Thursday at 7:00am and reached San Fernando at about 8:00am. The

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vessel later called at more than a half-dozen places before reaching Icacos. The steamer service plied all around the island of Trinidad, and even called at Tobago, but this steamer service was withdrawn in 1929 after more than a century in operation. Its primary purpose then was for bringing produce to POS from the remote coastal villages, but later, its passenger traffic became one of its most important functions. George Alleyne in the *Newsday* Opinion of December 21, 2005, similarly noted that the rationale for the train service when introduced in 1874 was not for passenger service, but to haul sugar cane, molasses, and later petroleum products. The eventual primary function of passenger travel seemed an afterthought.

In his book, "Towns and Villages of Trinidad and Tobago," Michael Anthony, tells that one of the chief ports of call for the coastal steamer was Chaguanas, where trucks moved on a tramway to reach the wharf with molasses and cocoa. Also from 1859 a tramline ran between Princes Town and the San Fernando wharf until 1932, in order to connect with the coastal steamer, and this was initially a planter's line but later became a passenger line.

The feasibility of operating a waterborne intra-island ferry transit service focussed on the Gulf of Paria with routes to locations on the west coast of Trinidad would consider the existing inter-island Ferry Terminal in POS for use as its terminal station. In planning the ferry system, assessment may be given for passengers only, or passengers and vehicles.

A ferry linkage between POS and San Fernando may relieve significant demands for road traffic use. Some other important destinations to be considered may be Felicity in Chaguanas, Point Lisas, Claxton Bay, La Brea, and Point Fortin.

Planning and design of ferry terminals should be tied to the development of national transport, and would include the following functional elements: marshalling yards and approach lanes, passenger facilities, and ferry berths and ramps. Traffic forecasts would be prepared to provide information on: vehicles arriving at the terminals to board the ferry (if vehicles would also be transported by ferry), vehicles to deliver passengers to the ferry, and pedestrians to board the ferry. Forecasting of the passenger traffic involves the evaluation of traffic generation, and the determination of annual growth factors.

The objectives of a ferry service for the west coast of Trinidad should include: the need for considering the feasibility of operating a waterborne ferry transit service focussed on the Gulf of Paria; providing an alternative to road transport; improving transport of people and goods; diversifying the tourism product; and, creating business employment opportunities

The Vancouver sea-bus is specially designed for high-capacity passenger-only waterborne transit and has a capacity of 400 seated passengers. Six double rows of doors per side allow flow-through passengers loading and unloading, and minimise terminal times. Two ferries operating from specially designed terminals provide a capacity of 2,400 passengers per hour each way. Sea-bus vessels are fully symmetric bidirectional catamarans with the same dynamic performance in both directions.

Next week, we review issues discussed so far, and how they fit into our analysis of the transport system, and how we should approach the way forward. Happy New Year to you!

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