

Our Transportation System is in Crisis - 71

One of the reasons that the Minister of Works and Transport gave as to why a feasibility study was not being done to justify rapid rail is that several studies have been done over many years showing that there is a need for rapid rail. Last week I argued in the first of two articles that this is false, and I referred to several studies: the National Transportation Plan of 1967; the 1974 Priority Route Transit Study; and the National Physical Development Plan (NPDP) for Trinidad and Tobago prepared in 1981. Today I conclude with the other studies.

In April 1996 the Ministry of Works and Transport appoint a committee to develop a National Internal Transportation Policy. The committee consisted of 10 persons from both the public and private sector. In addition, 11 individuals were invited to participate from time to time from other government and non-government agencies. I was appointed chairman. The report was submitted to the Permanent Secretary in November 1996. As far as I am aware this policy document has never been formally adopted by Government. I plan to do a series on this policy document.

This is what the 1996 report had to say about new rapid rail and ferry (water taxi): "The Government's policy should be to encourage the development of new modes of transportation to supplement the existing road network. One example of this is the possibility of a Port of Spain to Chaguaramas ferry either as an alternative to or complementary with an improved Western Main Road. Similarly, contingent on an analysis of the characteristics of the freight and transportation systems and the future economic development of the country, it might be feasible to introduce a mixed rail transportation system."

It continued: "Apart from the potential Port of Spain to Chaguaramas ferry service and the existing water taxi services between Trinidad and the Five Islands there appears to be little scope for new ferry routes which would not need significant infrastructure improvement. In particular, the San Fernando harbour and wharf facilities would require extensive renovation and upgrading to accommodate a ferry service."

The 1996 Policy also stated that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should encourage the use of public transport over private transport and ensure that target groups, such as children, the elderly, low income residents, and the disabled have access to appropriate public transport services; and that the Government should encourage the private sector to provide public transport services.

The Consultant to the Comprehensive National Transport Study (CNTS), Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB), in their presentation of the Diagnostic Report of the CNTS stated that the Local Area Plan for Greater Port of Spain done by the Halcrow Group in 2000 had recommended rapid rail service to support the proposed waterfront redevelopment efforts in Port of Spain, as well as provide better mobility in the East-West Corridor to Arima and Sangre Grande. This is misleading as the document did not make recommendations, but presented a review of earlier studies undertaken in addition to discussions with representatives from Government, private sector organisations and local transport professionals, and this included a suggestion for light rail between POS and Sangre Grande. This is what Halcrow 2000 actually stated: "The following public transportation and highway schemes have been identified from the review of the available

documents and consultations with representatives of Government, private sector organisations and transport professionals in Trinidad [including]...Provision of a Light Rail Transit service between Port of Spain, Arima and Sangre Grande ...Ideally, a strategic transportation framework and detailed Transport Action plans for critical corridors or areas are required, to evaluate and rank each of the identified schemes based on their environmental, social, economic and financial costs and benefits."

Halcrow 2000 also reported on the need for shuttle bus services in downtown and around the Savannah, regulation of maxi taxis, introduction of ferry routes, traffic management measures for downtown, etc.

PB also reported in their Diagnostic Report of the CNTS reported that two studies were conducted for the East West Corridor by Cansult, one in 1997 and the other in 2005. Both studies recommended upgrading the Bus Priority Route to provide a higher level of public transport services. PB claimed that the "2005 East-West Corridor study pointed out that rapid transit was needed in the corridor in the future."

Here is what the Cansult 2005 report actually stated: "Long term East-West Corridor improvements [2010 – 2015 and beyond] and/or government initiatives which should be further investigated include (but are not limited to) the following:

(a) Preferred Options: (i) high order transit systems such as dedicated bus rapid transit or light rail transit system; (ii) increased support for bussing / maxi-taxis; (iii) introduction of High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on other roads in the East/West Corridor, UBH Corridor or greater Port-of-Spain to induce higher modal splits; (iv) transit-friendly land use polices; (v) network wide travel demand

policies (TDM); (vi) land use diversion strategy away from Port-of-Spain. (b) Other Options: (i) addition of another East-West Corridor road facility.”

I am not so naïve to believe that I could stop the rapid rail project, nor has it been my intention to do so. My issue has always been with the need for a scientific approach to its justification. I am convinced that the signing of the contract to plan and design rapid rail will be done, and that huge sums will be spent to complete the detailed designs and costing. But that is when the project will stop! When the Government Administration is faced with the actual cost to implement, they will then confirm that it is much too costly to build! And once again we would have wasted valuable resources in its design. ‘Nuff said!

e-mail: lfsystems@carib-link.net