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Sectoral Presentation 2017

Mr. Speaker, Jamaica's transportation system is in deep crisis. We have more illegal taxis than we can count, many operated by criminals. We operate a system that lacks proper order and regulation. Our students are in danger, it is a miracle that more of us don't end up on road death statistics as too many drivers create lanes where they don't exist, the levels of speeding and even the threat to pedestrians and passengers are of great concern. We cannot grow and make Jamaica a place to live, work and raise our families with this level of disorder.

The Transport Authority has opened up 7000 new licences for taxi operators islandwide. In the midst of this chaos, it would be useful to know if an Impact Assessment of the sector had been done before the issuing of these new licences.

JUTC

Mr. Speaker, the effective and efficient operation of the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) is critical in the basic everyday life of the people of this Kingston Metropolitan Region. Our students, our workers, our retirees all depend on the buses on a daily basis. In fact, one can easily tell a country that is backward in vision and not serious about growth and development by how it manages its major transportation system.

The JUTC is an organization on life support it is like a patient receiving bitter medicine to deliberately speed up its death. Any day now, it could be pronounced dead right before our very eyes.

This government expects to collect \$6.1 billion in fares from the JUTC, some \$2.4 billion is being provided as grants. When combined the \$8.5 billion is only a portion of the operating expenses of the entity which is estimated at \$9.97 billion.

When you add the provision for depreciation of \$1.8 billion the company will make a record loss of \$5 billion this financial year, compared to the estimated losses of \$2.9 billion in 2016/17.

By doubling the loss of the JUTC, commuters must expect double hardships in service delivery by the entity, or someone, somewhere will have to cough up the additional funding to keep the existing operation in the state it is.

But, Mr. Speaker, this government further plans to heap more hardship on commuters by itemising an increased increased fare box of \$1.14 billion, that is an increase of 20% over the previous financial year. WHERE WILL THIS COME FROM?

Remember Mr. Speaker, our commuters are mainly students, workers who are already hard pressed under stringent austerity measures, they are our fire fighters, our nurses, our household workers and gardeners, our disabled, our pensioners. WHO WILL THIS UNCARING GOVERNMENT ASK TO FOOT THE BILL FOR THIS SHORTFALL CAUSED BY LACK OF PROPER PLANNING AND LACK OF BASIC HUMAN COMPASSION?

Furthermore Mr. Speaker, the JUTC has an aging fleet. Some of these buses are over 20 years. The daily roll out of buses have increased from 370 buses to approximately 415 during peak hours. Up to February 2016, the daily roll out would need to be 450, it was intended to bring the fleet up to 480 buses by the end of financial year 2016-17. This administration has taken the decision not to purchase any new buses until 2020.

I remember the old JOS bus system, the patty pans, how people were crammed into them tighter than sardine cans. I remember how people travelled on the buses with more of their bodies outside than inside. If this government plans to earn more money from fewer buses, I shudder at the very thought that our people could once again be forced into the mega indignity of Jolly bus travel.

I would like to think that this government would want to put back into service 200 buses parked for lack of spare parts or maintenance up to December 2016. But no Mr. Speaker, that is not to be so, as the \$1.3 billion budgeted for parts is a reduction from the \$1.5 billion that was actually spent in the last financial year.

Mr. Speaker; the two main components that would secure the JUTC's survival are proper regulatory and enforcement environment. Secondly, adequate funding to carry out its mandate.

Mr. Speaker, every well-thinking Jamaican is concerned about the number of illegal taxis plying our roadways. In fact, there are several stories about crime being committed especially against our women by

some the hooligans operating robot taxis. In addition to this crisis, there are licenced taxis operating contrary to their license in a free for all system on most if not ALL JUTC BUS ROUTES. The JUTC's fare box suffers serious loss in revenue on account of these things.

Mr. Speaker, no orderly public transport system, in any progressive country, can operate this way.

And Mr. Speaker, we have a concern that there are no provisions made in the budget for damages to third party. This is a national disgrace as all other users of the public thoroughfare must have insurance to do so, but the government's own public system is outside of this rule. Is this saying that judgements against the JUTC will not be paid?

The JUTC was recently in the news for not owning up to its commitments in this regard, and it is unclear if the Government has any intention to pay any of these outstanding amounts.

Mr. Speaker, the JUTC must be pulled from this critical mess and be restored to at least some semblance of order as it was in previous years.

Even in Opposition, the Peoples National Party remains a willing and able ally in the development of our country. To that end I invite the Minister to sit down with us and work on a comprehensive transport system that will benefit all commuters, especially our students, disabled brothers and sisters and our elderly. We will not leave out our students in the rural parts of our nation.....

ROAD TRAFFIC ACT

It was just last year in the Throne speech that the Government prioritize the retabling of the RTA. After one year we are no where nearer than we were this last year.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition is concerned at the slow pace in which the government is moving to enact this important piece of legislation.

IAN FLEMING INT'L AIRPORT

Mr. Speaker, questions asked and answers received thus far from the Minister on the IFIA still leaves many gaps to be filled.

One thing that we do know is that this government plans to spend \$1 billion on the expansion of the IFIA in this budget year. With an overall project cost of \$2 billion.

Mr. Speaker, still fresh in our memories, this Minister of Transport in 2010 spent \$450 million, a spend of \$150 million above the budgeted amount to do refurbishing work at the IFIA.

In 2010 the Minister told the country that the work being done would bring increased passenger load and open the North eastern side of the island. We warned the minister then that he was ill advised, as the scope of work to be done would not achieve the outcome.

Mr. Speaker the average operating loss to the Ian Fleming Airport is averaging between \$50- \$70 million per year. With 2700 landings with only 200 of that sum being foreign aircrafts. The Government has now come back to the country, less than a year in office to do more expansion work on the airport. To extend the existing runway by 700 feet, some improvements to the terminal building etc.

Mr. Speaker even after this \$2 billion spend, the largest planes that will be able to land at the Ian Fleming International Airport will be regional carriers, 90 seater planes.

We on this side believe that the Minister is being ill advised again. Not that we are totally against the development of the airport, but not at this time.

The airport Authority had set a completion date of February 2018. It is our fear that all costs for this project have not been taken into consideration, and will be much higher than the \$2 billion that has been budgeted.

Mr. Speaker, we do not think it is possible for the Airport authority to complete the expansion project for February 2018, the minister owes it to the country to give an update on the cost and scope of work to be carried out with some timelines set.

Seeing that the completion date was set for February 2018, I am interested to find out if the Airport authority or the Minister has any Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or any signed contracts with any carriers to bring flights to the IFIA.

Will the expenditure budgeted bring the airport to meet International Civil Aviation (ICAO) and Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA) standards, in particular all safety standards.

Will the revenue be able to take care of the airports operational expenses, can the Airport Authority be able to recoup its investment.

This is not a project that the Minister should feel pressured to do, take your time and do the proper due diligence.

Mr. Speaker, our recommendation is for the government to approach the hoteliers and other private investors and package the Ian Fleming International Airport for divestment.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, The Ministry of Transport has a critical role to play in the growth of our country.

Mr. Speaker, the trumpet has sounded! Answer the call.

We owe it to every citizen to provide them with a safe and reliable, properly regulated public transportation service, modern airports and trans-shipment ports.

We need to be reminded that road safety is everyone's business.

We have come a far way but still have further to go.

God bless the people of Jamaica land we love.

