

SECTORAL PRESENTATION

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TRANSPORT AND WORKS

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

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Introduction

Today, Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the state of the country's transport sector, covering land, sea and air as well as the infrastructure environment which supports the sector. I will also offer my comments on the condition of our roads, bridges and other infrastructure and how the mismanagement of major projects has caused hardship in the lives of residents all over the Jamaica, but particularly in the Corporate Area.

This presentation, Mr. Speaker, will focus on the current state of the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC), the non-existent transport policy, the Kingston Container Terminal (KCT) and the portfolio of Works.

Acknowledgement

However, before I begin, I would like to thank the people of North West Manchester, my constituency executive and management team for their continuing support and confidence bestowed on me as their Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, they are the reason why I am here, and I will continue to do everything possible to make them proud of my representation in this honourable house.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my parliamentary colleagues for their continued words of support and guidance; and to the Leader of the Opposition for his counsel, inspiration and leadership.

Last but by no means least is my rock and partner and wife of only a month, Shelley and my two touring partners, my two beautiful daughters Isabel and Gabriella.

Overview of the Transportation Sector

Mr. Speaker, you have heard me said this before and I will say it again; the development of the transport sector is integral to the country's ability to experience sustainable growth. The country cannot grow in a "chaka chaka system". We have been here before and we made the necessary investments and to fix the system and give our people a world-class transport system.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, we are going backwards. Despite the rosy picture painted by Minister of Transport, I will present evidence that the transport sector is now experiencing the worst of time and is on the verge of chaos.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to raise questions about the government's public transport changes. Every time the Minister speaks, it sounds as if he is announcing a different plan. Why is that so? The only answer is that there is no plan at all.

Earlier this year, he announced some operational changes in the public transportation sector. But, the real question to be asked of the Minister, is there a national transport policy and plan? And why is the minister announcing unconnected bits and pieces daily?

Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister throwing out piecemeal, uncoordinated, poorly thought out half-baked ideas in the public space without details of a coherent of a plan to move people efficiently, safely, and cost effectively.

So Mr. Speaker, I begin with the regulatory and enforcement environment which is managed by the Transport Authority, under the 1987 Act. There appears to be attempt by the Minister to devolve power to Regional Offices, without amendment of the Act. Further, in relation to the process for new public passenger (PPV) licences, the Minister said he does not need a board to do that and the Regional Managers will be given the power to determine who gets a PPV licence.

This mechanism would remove the approval power from the Board of the Transport Authority. Where is the legal authority for this?

What are the checks and balances to protect public interest against corruption and cronyism?

The Minister made another announcement that operators must install GPS tracker on their vehicles before they will be allowed to obtain a licence. How enforceable is this against the background of continuous violation of the existing laws?

So, again, Mr. Speaker, yet another announcement made without any idea of how it will be enforced, and how does it fit into the overall provisions of the Transport Authority Act, the present Road Traffic Act and other regulations?

Mr. Speaker, and when yuh think him did done! No, him jus' a come. He announces plans to open up the routes in the Kingston Metropolitan Region (KMTR), compelling the Jamaica Urban Transit Company to grant additional sub-franchises and further eroding the parlous financial state of the company.

In the end Mr. Speaker, we must face the reality that under this Minister's dribs and drabs transportation plan, things will get worse and the public should brace itself for more chaos on the roads, more vehicle collisions and worse, more road fatalities.

The Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC)

What is the state of the JUTC in this its 21st year of existence?

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight the frightening deterioration in the operations of the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC), and the overall management and movement of public passengers in the Kingston Metropolitan Transport Region (KMTR).

Mr. Speaker, last year during the sectoral debate, the new minister was still navigating the corridors of his portfolio. By his performance today, he is not yet fully up-to-speed.

On this side, Mr. Speaker, we continue to believe that the transport sector can do better; much better. There are missed opportunities in the sector. A lot more needs to be done to bring greater coordination and efficiency in the sector; and a lot more can be done to improve the overall transport experience for the travelling public and for those who invest in the sector.

It now appears that we have a transport system which is now fast resembling the chaotic system of the 1980s, and which we all agreed should never return.

We have the subsidized government system, operated mainly by the JUTC, which, in turn, gives sub-franchises (licenses) to small operators to operate on specific routes in a support role. But the KMTR has now become a dog eat dog world, and everyone is fighting for their share of the transport dollar and in the process causing a fall in service quality and safety.

In the present atmosphere, the transportation revenue of the government is not protected. In fact, based on the numbers provided in the estimates of expenditure, it is getting smaller and smaller each year.

The route taxi system, designed for rural Jamaica, has taken over the KMTR. The bus routes are filled with rural stage carriage operators and hackney taxi operators running routes and converging in the town centers

mainly Half Way Tree and Down Town Kingston choking the roadways and fostering indiscipline.

Current estimates are that there is now an additional 40,000 seats in the KMTR being provided in this manner and destroying the financial viability of the JUTC, the exclusive franchise holder which has a license to provide 25,000 seats daily.

Mr. Speaker, there has to be a balance between mass transit and taxis. Every other city does that. The policy, as far as we can determine, is to just add seats - saturate the routes and the resulting problems will take care of themselves. Mr. Speaker, issuing additional licenses in a chaotic system is only going to multiply the chaos and indiscipline has fully taken root not only in the KMTR but in all our urban centers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say for those who have ears to hear. This situation has caused JUTC to be now a candidate for the ICU, Intensive Care Unit and unless the government changes course, its demise will be inevitable.

Performance Review

Mr. Speaker, the numbers tell the story about what is going on at the JUTC. When the PNP left office in 2016, the JUTC was in its healthiest financial and operational state in many years. There was also a serious effort to reclaim its trunk routes to increase fare-income and improve discipline. Sub-franchise units were colour coded and staff subject to JUTC crew standards.

Since then, it been three years of decline which must lead to the question; whose interest does a declining JUTC serve? Not the poor, nor the students, the children, the pensioners, the disabled and workers who cannot afford their own motor vehicles and are, therefore, transit dependent.

Since 2016/17, the JUTC has continued to experience a decline in its ridership from 59 million when we left office to 49 million in the year ending March 31, 2019. A whopping fall out of one sixth of its ridership in three years

In other words, Mr. Speaker, in three years this government has the JUTC brought it right back to the lowest ridership, right where it stood in 2008/09 under a JLP administration.

Mr. Speaker, passenger ridership is declining because the bus rollout is declining. In 2017/18 they projected a rollout of 452 units and did not achieve it. In 2018/19 the projected run out was 425 and this was also not achieved. In 2019/20 they are projecting 385, but the company is currently achieving less than 350 per day. So this year's target seems to be a pipe dream.

Mr. Speaker, as the buses and passengers decline, so too has the company's revenues. In March 2016, when we left office it was \$5.1 Billion and the last financial year ending March 2019, it had fallen to \$4 Billion, a drop-off of more than 20%. The company is in a free fall in March

2016- \$5.1b, March 2017- \$4.9b, March 2018- \$4.5b and March 2019 \$4.0 billion.

Consequently, Mr. Speaker, the government subsidy has had to be increased from \$2.7 billion in 2016/17 to \$5.1 billion in this financial. The tax payers are paying more and getting much less for their tax dollars and the commuters much less for the fares they pay.

Mr. Speaker, last year, I told the government and I restate the JUTC is in default as it is operating in breach of the exclusive license granted by the government under Public Passenger Transport (Corporate Area) Act.

But, Mr. Speaker, as serious as this breach may be, I want to draw attention to an even more urgent situation in relation to breaches of the maintenance and safety standards at the JUTC. I recently called for an audit, after the company had three fires in a week. The investigation

report has confirmed our worst fears and clearly shows the urgent need for both an operations and maintenance audit.

The report says the fires were caused by poor maintenance and improper practices, and the poor internal workmanship and laissez-faire attitude towards work. These practices include substitution of parts and fittings with makeshift material such as the use of a rag to tie a fuel line.

It is totally perplexing that instead of accepting the findings, the Managing Director claims that there are “internal and external” efforts to undermine the company’s operations. Mr. Speaker, the JUTC management cannot leave the charges there. They must provide a complete report on those allegations to the public.

The report has raised to three serious questions. Firstly, the availability of adequate amount of spares; secondly, the training of mechanics, and thirdly, the competence and role of supervision and maintenance management in overall process at the company.

Mr. Speaker of the \$3 billion needed for spare parts and maintenance, only \$1.3 billion has been provided in the budget. It must mean cutting corners and dispatching unsafe units on the roads. This is a dangerous situation and the risk to passenger safety must be at an all-time high. In fact, the company's "defect returns" is now at a record 15%.

What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that when the company dispatches the 350 buses in the mornings, 50 of them will have to return to the depots or be recovered by wrecking service during the course of the operating day for mechanical or other defects.

So, Mr. Speaker, the assurances given by the management in a recent newspaper interview are empty and remain a comfort to a fool.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the lack of parts which includes brake pads and discs and other critical parts, in the past 30 months, the company has lost six top maintenance professionals, including the Deputy Managing

Director in charge of Engineering, the Chief Mechanic and four Depot Maintenance Managers, most victimized to make way for political appointments and dilettantes. So much so that the fire report has cited “poor workmanship” as a cause of the fires.

I warn, Mr. Speaker, that the JUTC is on a collision course with destruction and passenger safety must now be taken as a serious issue by the government.

I also want to use this opportunity to ask about the status of the LNG pilot project. It was announced with much fanfare that the company would be acquiring twenty LNG capable buses; it was then reduced to five and they have been here for almost a year sitting in an in warehouse bonded facility and nothing further. What is the situation Minister?

Montego Bay Metro

Mr. Speaker, the Montego Bay Metro is experiencing similar issues to the JUTC. Almost a half of its 17 units are now out of service. This has seriously compromised the service for commuters in Western Jamaica, particularly

for students coming into Montego Bay from Trelawny and Hanover for school and business. The company, which had been performing well, is on the verge of ruin because of the lack of attention and a clear policy on its future.

Portmore Hub

I want to raise the important issue of the Portmore Transport Hub Project. It is again missing from the Ministry of Transport and Mining's budget for 2019-20. The Portmore Hub is a crucial investment in providing an efficient transport service for the ever expanding Portmore communities, which is a dormitory municipality. This would reduce some expenses that both the JUTC and Portmore residents incur day after day, such as the toll which this year will cost the company over \$400 million. What is the plan Minister?

Shipping Industry Challenges

Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring your attention now to the Kingston Container Terminal and some of the challenges in the shipping industry.

As you know, the Port Authority of Jamaica (PAJ) divested the Kingston Container Terminal through a 35-year concession agreement with the CMA Terminals' Jamaican subsidiary – Kingston Freeport Terminal Limited.

Mr. Speaker, the deal is done and no doubt there will be benefits to the maritime sector and the economy in general, but the following questions remain:

- Did Jamaica receive the best deal available?
- Why is the concession agreement protected by the “Official Secrecy Act”, never to be disclosed to the Jamaican people? What is it that they are hiding from the Jamaican people?
- Since the signing of the agreement, the concessionaire had demonstrated an unwillingness to share information even with the Port Authority of Jamaica, which has a vested interest in obtaining such data both for its own internal accounting purposes as well as to fulfill its role as regulator over the shipping industry.

Mr. Speaker, members, let me give you a little background which may help you to understand the seriousness of the situation in which we have found ourselves.

The PAJ's agreement with KFTL includes a share in the profits made by the Terminal and it has to rely on being provided with timely and reliable information in order to process its revenues. In addition, as the agency managing the International Ship and Port Security Code (ISPS) modalities at ports around Jamaica, the PAJ imposed a security tariff on vessels and cargo passing over ports around Jamaica. The PAJ has been unable to collect associated revenues from KFTL since the concession agreement came into force, which is compromising the capacity of the PAJ to provide the required oversight on the nation's port security.

- Consequently, Mr Speaker, the absence of transparency with regard to the concession agreement makes it impossible for stakeholders to understand the basis on which such practices have become the norm since CMA-CGM assumed control of KCT.
- It is to be observed that the Concession Agreement for Highway 2000 is a public document that has been available on the regulator's website for years.

Delays

Mr. Speaker, since KFTL has taken over KCT, the country has had to contend with a less than stellar performance, marked by a fall in productivity from as high as 36 containers moves per hour to the current average of 24 moves per hour.

Mr Speaker, the effect is that to avoid delays in the working of vessels, resources are concentrated dockside to the detriment of operations that serve the local import/export trade. There have been at least two strikes

by truckers who suffered huge delays and consequent losses, while seeking to collect and deliver containers at KFTL.

The situation at the KCT is not healthy because there is a quiet atmosphere of animosity among the big players, and until the issues I raised earlier are resolved, the condition deteriorates.

Towage Services – Kingston Harbour

Mr Speaker, here is another situation. In June 2018, the Port Authority of Jamaica (PAJ) and the Canada-based maritime company - Ocean, have signed a 10-year concession agreement to improve towage services at the Port of Kingston.

The agreement resulted in **three** of the latest generation of tugboats being deployed from Ocean's fleet in the Kingston Harbour at the end of June 2018. The deal with Ocean came about after the abrupt termination of a bidding process, which included Ocean. However, the process continued with direct negotiation with Ocean.

Mr Speaker, Ocean placed three tugboats in Kingston and started offering its services to the trade in similar terms of the previous supplier of towage services. However, on 31 January 2019, just over six months after the concession began, Ocean emailed all its customers in Kingston and announced a 21% increase in towage rates, effective the following day.

Naturally, Mr. Speaker, this was resisted by all shipping lines. After several weeks of negotiation, Ocean's response was to reverse the 21% increase, reduce the number of tugs from the three required in the agreement to two and introduced a special call-out charge to cover instances where a third tugboat is required.

Mr. Speaker, if the Port Authority of Jamaica has taken a position in this matter, it has done so privately because no public intervention has been forthcoming.

Again, in this instance, the concession agreement is deemed a private document and hence the public has no indication of whether increases of

the type announced by Ocean Towing are permitted in the concession and, if so, at what intervals.

Port Royal

Mr Speaker, the Port Authority and the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) have joint responsibility for the various components of the development of Port Royal.

However, the local private industry is finding it challenging to obtain information about how it may participate in the projects that form part of the development. And this stonewalling has prompted the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ), the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC) and the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) to write to the Prime Minister of Jamaica seeking his intercession to enable dialogue between these government agencies and the private sector.

I hope that the Most Honourable Prime Minister has seen it fit to respond to the concerns and if he has not, may I ask why not? Mr. Speaker as the member from East Kingston and Port Royal said in his contribution to this

debate neither he nor members of the Port Royal community have been consulted, which itself raises serious questions.

General lack of meaningful engagement

While the current leadership of the Port Authority of Jamaica attends meetings with representatives of the shipping industry and other stakeholders, the engagement is superficial and guarded; commitments are largely avoided and where given, they are seldom kept.

No Board Chairman – Port Authority of Jamaica

Mr. Speaker, it has been one year since the present Minister of Finance vacated the seat of the Chairman of the Port Authority of Jamaica and the government has not yet seen it appropriate to name a new chairman; and I do not believe it is necessary to remind the government of the importance of the Port Authority and the critical role it plays in maintaining the efficiency and competitiveness of our ports to world-class standards. At present, anybody can sit in the chair. In fact, I have been informed that they have resorted to the rotation of the chairmanship,

which does not emit confidence and organizational strength which is the hallmark of the Port Authority.

Mr Speaker, we on this side have taken notice of the billions of dollars spent by the Port Authority in building-out BPO floor space to attract investors to this sector, but at the same time, we are confused that the same focus is not given to near port logistic facilities to provide additional space to solidify our perch as a main logistic centre in the Western Hemisphere.

From our vantage point, it seems, Mr. Speaker, that the government is playing lip service in making Jamaica a main logistic hub in the region.

What about the vision? What has gone wrong with the grand plan; was it all fantasy?

From the beginning, we told them that there was no need to go back to the drawing board to “hype-up” a new plan. There was a roadmap of several developments and expansion activities which was left by the last PNP administration; and these plans, Mr Speaker, was the end product of

multiple discussions with stakeholders. The plans are there, if they have not been shredded.

Works and the National Works Agency

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to Works and the National Works Agency but my remarks will be brief because my colleague, Member of Parliament from Clarendon North West, Mr. Richard Azan, with whom I share the Works portfolio, will present an assessment, and share our comments on the state of our roads and bridges; and the lack of commitment to maintain and upgrade of our critical interior road network and other infrastructure.

Routine Maintenance of Roads and Bridges

The routine maintenance of the road infrastructure remains an issue. When you look at the overall picture, it would appear that some parts of the country are totally forgotten.

The only time we have seen any maintenance activity is the work which was funded by the constituency allocation of \$1.0m by the NWA. This is less than adequate to do required works. Mr. Speaker, rural parishes have become the forgotten part of our beloved country.

We have talked about this maintenance issue before, and we have all concluded that it is a good thing if it is routine and continuous, not ad-hoc which is what it is it now.

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive routine maintenance policy would guide us in our approach to road maintenance. As it stands now, some roads are repaired several times while others remain listed, given priority status and are yet to see an inch of asphalt.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we have to find a new approach to the de-bushing exercise of our thoroughfares on a regular basis. It cannot be an activity reserved for implementation only during by-elections or when there is a national election, as we have observed with this administration.

Major Construction Projects

Mr Speaker, I want to express our concern about the multiple road construction taking place across the Kingston Metropolitan Transport

Region (KMTR). Throughout the course of the year, thus far, we have expressed our concerns by way of releases to the media on various aspects of the major projects that have caused disruptions in the livelihood of thousands of residents. We are aware also that our utility companies and major telephone carriers have made complaints on behalf of their customer-base of the many breakages in their telecommunication infrastructure, causing interruptions to the service provided to customers, both residential and commercial.

Mr. Speaker, you would have heard of the hardship of many residents and business people along the corridors of construction activities across the KMTR. I am also certain that many of my colleagues have driven into or close enough to the construction zone and have seen for themselves the level of chaos and confusion that exist and how it has affected business activities.

Mr. Speaker, the people are crying out for help. We are hoping that the government takes the initiative to meet with the affected businesspeople to find ways to resuscitate their businesses. Some businesses have closed entirely because they could not survive the road closure, no access to their premises, lack of water, interruption in the telecommunication network and the dust pollution.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that there could very well be a legitimate cause of action against the contractor of these projects. So we urge the government not to ignore their appeal and miss the opportunity to take the first step in offering some kind of settlement with these aggrieved persons.

South Coast Highway Project

The South Coast Highway project, Mr. Speaker, has not started as yet, but there is every indication that it will soon begin. Our information is that the government intends to use 'limited tender' as the means by which contractors are procured. We strongly advise against this move and are

recommending that the open tender system be used as was the case with MIDP.

Limited tenders encourage corruption and some who are lining up are the same ones who worked in East Portland for free. The Opposition urges fairness and transparency in the contract awards process.

Mr. Speaker, we know what is going on; we know who is interfering and on whose behalf, and we are warning them to cease. Don't go there. Stop what you are doing now because we are prepared to expose the level of collusion and complicity that is taking place to give the project to the politically connected.

The Island Traffic Authority

Minister, the last time you spoke in the Sectoral Debate, you announced that the government was moving towards upgrading the offices of the Island Traffic Authority, including its digital platform and database.

You further indicated that a new synergy will be formed with other agencies to deal with traffic infractions and remove the illegal drivers' off our streets. Mr. Speaker, he also announced that the Driver's License application process would be fully automated. Minister, where are we with this or was this another announcement? This is an important areas to be addressed if we are to clean up the system, by removing the possibility of someone buying a licence and then create mayhem on the roads.

Generally speaking, offending motorists are still ignoring the ticketing system; and while there are efforts to reduce the backlog through incentives, some people still believe that they can "beat the system".

We fully support the efforts of the State to apply the available technologies in this area; and to integrate the relevant government agencies to increase the effectiveness of the points system.

The New Road Traffic Act

Mr. Speaker, I am using this forum once again to call on the government, to begin the promised consultations and public education programme on the provisions of the new Road Traffic Act (RTA).

The regulations have also not been completed as promised and government had deferred the approval of the Bill in November 2018 to facilitate consulting with sector groups and a public education campaign.

Minister, let us have the consultations with the stakeholders. No further delays.

Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA)

Mr. Speaker, on March 14, 2019, Jamaica joined the global ban of the Boeing 737-Max 800 jets following a deadly crash in Ethiopia. In its public announcement, the JCAA said the ban, which included restrictions on the use of the country's sovereign airspace, would remain in effect until further notice.

On May 7, 2019, an American Airlines (AA) plane, flight 2370 from Kingston made an emergency landing in Miami International Airport due to hydraulic problems. I was happy that all the passengers and crew landed safely.

However, Mr. Speaker, I was astonished to know that it was a Boeing 737-Max 800 aircraft, which was involved in the incident.

I am not aware that Jamaica had lifted the ban on the Max 800 aircraft entering our airspace or being allowed to land at any of the country's two international airports.

My interest here, Mr. Speaker, is to invite the JCAA to update the country on the decision.

The Port Security Corps

Mr. Speaker, there is an atmosphere of disquiet within the rank of the Port Security Corps. All is not well there. There are reports that the workers are not being paid on time and overtime payments are sporadic at best.

A number of Port Security Corps guards who provided security services at the recent filming of a motion picture (movie) at the Ken Jones Airdrome recently are yet to receive payment, including the reimbursement for traveling and other incidentals.

Minister, pay attention, all is not well at the Port Security Corps Limited.

Ian Flemming Airport

Mr. Speaker, in 2018, the Minister of Transport announced that a new air traffic tower would be constructed at the Ian Flemming International Airport at Boscobel. We have not heard anything since that time. We would like to know the present status of this new Boscobel traffic tower.

Mr. Speaker, this current Minister, as was the case of his predecessor made an announcement that a contract would be signed to bring larger aircraft to the Ian Flemming Airport. Three years on and nothing has happened.

However, notwithstanding the above-mentioned, the potential of the Ian Flemming Airport is huge and we must pay attention to how it can be leveraged to bring value and economic and social opportunities to the parish and to all the people of that region of the country.

Vernamfield Field Development

Mr. Speaker, we need a proper update on the Vernamfield project. In particular the country should be told about the works which have been initiated and completed with the funds provided in the estimates.

In the 2018/19 budget, \$300 million out of \$1.05B for aerodromes was provided for Vernamfield. We want to know what work has been undertaken there.

This year, \$502 million is provided for aerodromes. I am asking the Minister provide the House with an update, including the status of the project and whether it is still alive.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Speaker, I have used my time here today to layout and highlight our concerns in the Transport and Works portfolio. Even more important, I reminded the government of its announcements of which we have heard nothing further.

Opportunities are being missed and the government has an obligation to honour commitments and to spend the people's money prudently.

Mr. Speaker we cannot go on missing the many opportunities in the transport sector if Jamaica's intends to provide a transport infrastructure and system to support an economy which has been expanding since 2014, albeit not at a satisfactory pace.

Missed opportunities do not always return and Jamaica cannot afford, therefore, to miss them.

Thank you.