

Improved Road Conditions Coming for St. Thomas Residents

RESIDENTS OF St. Thomas are to see an improvement in conditions associated with the construction of the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP) as the pace of the work increases, says Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness.

He gave the commitment during a tour of sections of the parish on April 13, where he observed the progress of the project.

Pointing out that “in undertaking this kind of infrastructure, the dislocation is almost unavoidable”, the Prime Minister emphasised that the conditions with which residents have to contend can still be “made better”.

“For dust, we agreed that the contractor and the National Works Agency (NWA) will increase both the wetting and the supervision of wetting to ensure that the dust nuisance is controlled,” the Prime Minister informed.

Additionally, he said that instructions have been



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (left) walks along a paved section of the Grants Pen roadway during a tour of the St. Thomas leg of the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP) on April 13. He is accompanied by personnel from the National Works Agency (NWA) and China Harbour Engineering Company Limited (CHEC).

given that residents should be able to access their properties with “relative comfort”.

As it relates to the driving surface, Mr. Holness explained that “what I have

said to the NWA is that there should be at least one lane that is drivable and that means that the surface should be relatively smooth, and they are now going to be working on that.”

“Work is progressing; I am seeing the foundational infrastructure being put in... the culverts, the drains are being done and I am also seeing the impact on the traffic and the drivers,” he noted.

Funds Earmarked for Road Repairs in Westmoreland

SEVERAL ROADWAYS across Westmoreland are slated to be repaired and rehabilitated.

This was disclosed by Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Hon. Everal Warmington, following a tour of sections of the parish on April 12.

He said key among these will be rehabilitation of the main thoroughfare in the community of St. Paul's, for which approximately \$290 million has been allocated.

In addition, approximately \$20 million has been earmarked for repairs in the Gooden's River District, the Minister further indicated.

The day's tour took Mr. Warmington from Grange Hill to Glasgow, Little London to

Moreland Hill, Little Bay to Salmon Point, Retreat to Sheffield, and Whitehall, Negril.

He was accompanied by representatives of the National Works Agency (NWA), and Members of Parliament.

Mr. Warmington advised that the scope of works will include asphaltting, patching, and drainage improvement, among other critical repairs.

“Westmoreland is no longer a neglected parish. We have three Members of Parliament in Westmoreland who are aggressive in seeking alleviation of the different infrastructural problems. We recognise the needs... and the urgency of addressing [the] infrastructure here,” he pointed out.



Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Hon. Everal Warmington (left), makes a point to Member of Parliament for Westmoreland Western, Morland Wilson (centre), and National Works Agency (NWA) Regional Manager, Robert Francis, during a tour of sections of Westmoreland on April 12.

Mr. Warmington also toured sections of Hanover

on April 13. Among the areas he visited were Malcolm Heights, Richmond, Cacoon, and Davis Cove.

Business Path Being Cleared for Medicinal Cannabis Industry Players

THE MINISTRY of Industry, Investment and Commerce is moving to make doing business within the medicinal cannabis industry easier.

Speaking at a press conference, held at Jamaica House on April 13, Portfolio Minister, Senator the Hon. Aubyn Hill, said efforts will be made to ensure that the local sector is self-sufficient.

“We will seek to ensure that the Jamaican market has all the medicinal cannabis products that it needs and, therefore, not need to import any medicinal cannabis. We will continue,



Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Senator the Hon. Aubyn Hill

of course, to keep in line with our treaty obligations,” Senator Hill stated.

He stated that the Statistical Institute of Jamaica will be tasked to assist in determining the actual market size.

Senator Hill also informed that the Ministry has been working on phase two of the Alternative Development Programme.

“We've done a rough pilot before, but we are going back to Cabinet to have about 16 communities involved, including about 128 farmers. These are small-scale and traditional farmers,” Senator Hill said.

The Minister also mentioned the issue of high fees within the sector.

“I find them to be a disincentive. For the first two years, while you are planting and trying to get some money together and grow your plants... we're not going to charge you any fees for that.

“Those things we're looking at and making sure the Government can switch around what now is a disincentive, into removing it and making it much easier for people to come in,” he added.

Bustamante Hospital for Children Celebrates 60 Years



Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton (third left), unveils the logo for the 60th anniversary of the Bustamante Hospital for Children in St. Andrew, during the press launch held at the facility on April 13. Looking on are Senior Medical Officer, Bustamante Hospital for Children, Dr. Michelle-Ann Richards Dawson (left), Minister of State in the Ministry, Hon. Juliet Cuthbert Flynn (second right), and other officials.

Government Warns Against Risky Migration Practices



Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator the Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith

MINISTER OF Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator the Hon. Kamina Johnson Smith, has warned against the practice of persons engaging in illegal migration which exposes them to dangerous situations such as kidnapping, human trafficking and death.

The Minister was speaking at a post-Cabinet press briefing held on April 12 at Jamaica House, where she continued to implore Jamaicans not to attempt to enter a country illegally.

She noted that there are a “relatively small number” of Jamaicans who are pursuing unlawful migration by travelling through Mexico, Panama, and Belize.

The Minister said that data received from Mexico and Panama and validated by the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) show that 143 Jamaicans were refused entry in Mexico between

2018 and March 31 this year.

“In the case of Panama, for the same period, 2,167 Jamaicans were refused entry and 81 Jamaicans were deported,” she reported.

Minister Johnson Smith said that illegal entry affects the reputation of the Jamaican passport, despite the Government's efforts to increase its security to better facilitate citizens who want to exercise their right of freedom of movement.

“Decisions like this, they really do fight against the efforts of the Government, and they do affect the reputation of the passport, and the immigration experience of our lawful travellers,” she said.

She noted that the Government continues to consult at different levels with its partners in Belize, Mexico and Panama on the matter.

SLB to Disburse \$4.24 Billion in 2023/24

THE STUDENTS' Loan Bureau (SLB) is projecting disbursements of \$4.24 billion for fiscal year 2023/24.

This is \$312 million more than the programmed sum for 2022/23, according to the Jamaica Public Bodies Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending March 2024.

The document indicates that while an overall \$6.13 billion was budgeted for disbursement last year, the sum included arrears of \$2.2 billion for payment to institutions by the end of the period, on March 31, 2023.

Funds are disbursed to approved institutions by the SLB on behalf of eligible applicants, to finance their undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

The SLB has indicated that it will continue to provide funding to students attending 34 approved tertiary institutions through three loan products during 2023/24.

These, according to the Public Bodies Estimates, are Targeted Loans, Pay-As-You-Study (PAYS) loans, and Post Graduate (PG) loans.

Targeted Loans comprise approximately 99 per cent of the loan portfolio, with applicants benefiting from extended moratorium periods (in school years) before repayment.

The PAYS and PG products do not have the moratorium feature and are earmarked for growing the portfolio.

Meanwhile, the SLB plans to employ several initiatives to strengthen customer engagement strategies including loan management system implementation, and loans restructuring to facilitate lower monthly payments. Among the other strategies will be product offerings expansion, to include certification and online programmes.