



OFFICIAL OPENING: NORTH-SOUTH HIGHWAY KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Andrew Holness – Prime Minister

Salutations:

Thank you, master of ceremonies Miss Fae Ellington

The Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller
Leader of the Opposition

Honourable Dr. Horace Chang
Minister without Portfolio, Office of the Prime Minister

Honorable Daryl Vaz
Honorable Mike Henry
Minister of Transport and Mining

Other Members of the Cabinet and Parliament

His Excellency Mr. Niu Qingbao
Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Jamaica

Mr Ziyu Sun
Vice President, China Communications Construction Company Ltd

Permanent Secretaries

His Worship the Mayor Councillor Norman Scott
Mayor of Spanish Town

Reverend the Honourable Jeffrey McKenzie
Custos Rotulorum for St. Catherine

Mr. Yichong Lin
President of China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC)

Mr. Yingtao Shi
Vice President, of China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC)

Mr. Xiaofeng Wang
General Manager, Jamaica North South Highway Co. Ltd

Mr. Ivan Anderson
Managing Director, National Road Operating & Construction Co. (NROCC)

Councillors

Heads of Departments and Agencies

Members of the Private Sector

Community Representatives

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Remarks:

I am very pleased to be opening today, the North-South Link of Highway 2000.

In any country, the sheer magnitude of this infrastructure development, in construction undertaking, civil engineering complexity, investment size US\$600m, distance covered 67km (approx 41) and potential for transformation, would be considered significant, indeed a feat to be accomplished.

Jamaica, in partnership with our friends, China Harbour Engineering Company and their parent company China Communication and Construction Company, and with the blessing and active support of the Government of China, we have achieved this feat.

This road also represents the success of Partnership between the Government of Jamaica and Government of China, but moreso in a real sense, a partnership between the people of Jamaica and the people of China, in a real way, the workers of Jamaica and the workers of China, who undoubtedly had to overcome language and culture obstacles, to complete the highway on time and in budget.

This highway is a testimony to the industry and ingenuity of the Jamaican and Chinese labour and skills.

I also want to acknowledge the work of the first developers of the road, Bouygues Construction Limited. For a time, it seemed that this would be a road that was going nowhere. Technical and financial difficulties halted works.

Minister Mike Henry and Minister Audley Shaw, both should be commended for the work they did in engaging the Chinese Government, China Communications Construction Company, and China Harbour Engineering and Construction Company, to invest in this project, take over and complete construction.

On June 21, 2012, a fifty year (50) Concession Agreement for the construction of the Highway 2000 – North-South Link from Caymanas to Ocho Rios (Mammee Bay) was signed between the National Road Operating and Constructing Company Limited (NROCC), an Agency of the Government of Jamaica (GOJ), as the Grantor, and the Jamaica North South Highway Company (JNSHC), as the Developer. The Contractor being China Harbour Engineering Company Limited (CHEC).

Over the life of this North-South Highway project, we have seen obstacles as high as the hills and gaps like valleys. However, with vision, determination and partnership we have cut down the mountains and used them to fill the gaps in the valleys – the very foundation of this admirable piece of roadway. And quite fittingly, instead of the challenges encountered along the way, our minds are now transfixed on the opportunities and new possibilities that lie ahead of us.

We must grasp these opportunities with both hands. We must take advantage of the new possibilities because they are critical to our nation's development.

While it has been said several times over, I must use the opportunity this morning to reiterate that the main focus of this administration in developing this country of ours is to generate economic growth and create jobs.

The highway itself does not guarantee economic growth. We have seen the curious paradox many large investments in Jamaica but very little if any impact on economic growth.

There are lessons to be learned from our past experience with investments of this magnitude. It is the ongoing interconnectivity and utilization of the highway that will determine the robustness of economic growth it generates. The road to development only starts with the road. Our government must go further to have the corridor along the highway developed to maximize the opportunities in tourism, sports, recreation, agriculture, light manufacturing, and ICTs.

It is with that in mind that I have charged the Government I lead to build on the investment. We must treat this roadway as a runway for other investment projects to take off and secure a brighter more prosperous future for Jamaica.

We will be seeking to establish further partnerships with the Government of China, China Communication Construction Company and China Harbour Engineering Company, to develop the opportunities along the highway.

As a sign of the value of our Partnership on both sides, the confidence that CCCC has in Jamaica and the commitment of my Government to secure the best interest of Jamaica while honoring our

commitments, we have negotiated with our friends from CCCC and China Harbour for a 25% discounted toll rate. We will continue our discussions to reach a final equilibrium toll in the months to come.

Let me take this opportunity to remind the public that notwithstanding the development of this Highway, the traditional routes are, and will always be in place and available for public use. Those roadways remain public thoroughfares and do not attract a toll.

Let me also advise that provisions have been made by NROCC for some of the vendors at Faith's Pen to conduct business in a designated area along this highway.

As we celebrate the completion of this highway, I was brought to a point of reflection by a statement made by our friend, Vice President of CCCC, Mr. Ziyu Sun.

He observed that Jamaica has a limited time to take advantage of the opportunities that exist globally to drive growth here.

It is a profound point. The global environment is cyclical. Oil prices won't be low forever, the expanded Panama Canal will soon open, there are other ports being constructed in countries nearby and there are other highways being built that will open up investment opportunities which will be just as attractive to international investors.