



## **Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure**

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### **Summary of Proceedings**

#### **Public Hearing Summary**

*Tuesday March 27, 2018 at 10:45 a.m.*

#### **Topic:**

An inquiry into the establishment of systems for the maintenance of drainage and roadways.

#### **Objectives of the Inquiry:**

- 1. To examine the current systems in place for the maintenance of drainage and roadways;**
- 2. To examine the programmes and initiatives geared towards the maintenance of drainage and roadways in order to determine whether they are adequate and effective; and**
- 3. To determine the challenges associated with the maintenance of drainage and roadways.**

**Venue:** The J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain.

#### **Committee Members:**

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr. Stephen Creese – Chairman
- Mr. Rushton Paray, MP – Vice Chairman
- Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP – Member
- Mr. Nigel De Freitas – Member

#### **WITNESSES WHO APPEARED:**

##### **➤ Officials from the Ministry of Works and Transport (MOWT):**

- Mrs. Sonia Francis-Yearwood - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Dhanmattee Ramdath - Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Mr. Parasram Ramlogan -Chief Technical Officer (Ag.)

- Mr. Marvin Gonzales -Director, Legal Services Unit
- Mr. Latiff Mohammed - Director, Construction Division
- Mr. Navin Ramsingh - Director, Highways Division (Ag.)
- Mr. Hayden Phillip - Programme Director, PURE
- Mr. Rabindranath Jogie - Director, Mechanical Services Division
- Mrs. Candice Gray-Bernard - Director, Coastal Protection Unit
- Mr. Kerry Sheppard - Chief Engineer, Maintenance & Construction
- Ms. Paula Webber - Director, Drainage Division
- Mr. Adande Piggott - Traffic Engineer

### **Key Issues Discussed:**

#### **The Public's Perception of the MOWT**

- i) The public gauges the performance of the MOWT by simple means for example through its ability to conduct timely repairs on potholes and by ensuring that grass is well maintained;
- ii) There appears to be no feedback given to the public when requests are made to the MOWT through its MEND hotline;
- iii) Despite resource challenges, the MOWT's Corporate Communications Unit has sought to undertake public awareness programmes;
- iv) The MOWT has been manning its phone lines to ensure calls are answered and has been responding to letters;
- v) The MOWT has not been publicising the quantum of work it gets done on a daily basis;
- vi) The MOWT has a clear understanding of the economic impact of what it does and takes this into account when trying to properly assign resources;
- vii) The MOWT continues to put mechanisms in place to monitor its activities to determine that it reaches its target audience and to ensure value for money in its activities; and
- viii) The MOWT is aware of the public's perception of its actions.

**The Measures Taken by the MOWT to obtain feedback from Members of the Public**

- ix) The current arrangement at the MOWT does not facilitate feedback from members of the public;
- x) A commitment was made to implement a mechanism to facilitate feedback;
- xi) Calls from members of the public are dealt with by the MOWT and in instances where issues fall outside the remit of the MOWT, the calls are redirected to the relevant entities; and
- xii) The MOWT responds to complaints once received and under its purview.

**The implications of using technology adopted by the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) to receive feedback from the public**

- xiii) The MOWT needs to implement technology to assist members of the public and receive feedback;
- xiv) The MOWT liaised with WASA concerning the application used to report potholes; and
- xv) The MOWT is considering application sharing with WASA.

**The need for a general complaints desk that would encompass all entities which deal with drainage and roadways**

- xvi) The suggestion to establish and implement Operational Level Agreements so that calls can be passed on to the respective entities and not dropped; and
- xvii) Feedback can assist with the public's perception of the performance of the MOWT.

**The number of watercourses that have been desilted under the Comprehensive Desilting of Watercourses Programme for fiscal 2017/2018**

- xviii) The number of watercourses to be desilted under the Comprehensive Desilting of Watercourses programme for fiscal 2017/2018 involves a process of identifying the watercourses that require desilting, seeking cabinet approval and funding;
- xix) The identified watercourses have received Cabinet's approval and the MOWT is awaiting funding to commence works;
- xx) The desilting projects have been programmed to begin in April/May, 2018;
- xxi) The MOWT has an annual programme for desilting works;

- xxii) Watercourses are prioritised across the country in four (4) areas particularly, those that are problematic during the rainy season;
- xxiii) The reason for the continuation of flooding particularly during the rainy season despite having a programme in place was attributed to the age of some drainage systems which are over 50 years old, limited funding and rainfall intensity in some areas where channels have been unable to hold large amounts of rainfall;
- xxiv) The MOWT also undertakes in-house desilting projects in instances where equipment cannot access certain areas; and
- xxv) Many more watercourses have been included under the Comprehensive Desilting of Watercourses Programme and the MOWT is awaiting funding to begin work.

**The frequency of monitoring contractors to ensure that contractual obligations are fulfilled**

- xxvi) Contracts are monitored on a consistent basis by an Engineer assigned to the project according to the specifications identified in the contract by NIDCO or in-house through the Highways Division or the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE) Programme.

**The reason for incomplete work particularly in the area between San Souci and Monte Video**

- xxvii) The Toco Main Road, Blanchichusse Road, and Naparima Mayaro Road are in a state of disrepair;
- xxviii) The MOWT conducts work systematically on a portion of a road on an annual basis since most rural roads span 20 to 30 km and cost over a billion dollars to repair;
- xxix) The MOWT ran out of funds to complete the area identified at San Souci;
- xxx) The San Souci area was patched and works will re-commence as soon as funds become available;
- xxxi) The Grande Riviere Road is in a state of disrepair and although the areas does not have a large population, there is still cause for concern ; and
- xxxii) There were no roadworks contracts in the Grande Riviere Road area during the period 2015/2016.

**The status of funding for the Major River Clearing programme, Flood Mitigation Programme into 2018**

- xxxiii) The need for more attention to be paid on the cleaning and clearing of watercourses;
- xxxiv) The Flood Mitigation and River Clearing allocations are funded through the Inter-Development Fund and Consolidated Fund;
- xxxv) Once funding becomes available work can commence on watercourses because contactors used for these projects are bonded through the Central Tenders Board;
- xxxvi) The need for prioritisation to be made towards drainage which can assist in reducing the cost to replace furniture of flood victims; and
- xxxvii) The MOWT's Communications Unit has been sensitising the public about the dumping of furniture in watercourses due to the high cost involved in clearing watercourses.

**The use of embankments and levees as low cost initiatives to curb flooding so that communities remain accessible**

- xxxviii) The MOWT has held discussions regarding the utilisation of low cost measures such as levees and embankments to keep the road networks open during the rainy season and when flooding occurs; and
- xxxix) The MOWT engages in fill and embankments and imports fill when necessary to perform embankment works.

**The average timeframe before action is taken to remedy a landslip when reported**

- xl) The process followed before action is taken on a landslip involves forwarding the information to the District since the Director of Highways is the custodian for the road;
- xli) Based on the funding available and the size of a landslip, it can be repaired immediately;
- xlii) Larger landslips such as in Naparima Maryaro and Blanchisseuse Road are forwarded to the PURE Programme since it has the in-house resources for designs in order to perform the necessary works;
- xlili) Funding is the critical factor in the timeframe to fix a landslip;
- xliv) It is possible to complete a landslip project that has been referred to PURE within three (3) months where the geotechnical report has been generated; and
- xlvi) Programmes placed under the Bridges and Landslip Programme (BLT) take a longer time to complete.

### **The conditions that must exist for a landslide in its infant stage to be fixed**

- xlvi) The implications to temporarily fixing a landslide in its infant stage before it becomes worse; and
- xlvii) A landslide that can be fixed and save costs in the long run include those that are washed-out, sand filled drains or rubble drains.

### **The metrics used to determine the priority of landslide projects**

- xlviii) A landslide is classed as a project which is subject to an investigation and prioritisation;
- xliv) The first response to a landslide involves an examination and implementing temporary measures to prevent water from entering it while a temporary solution is developed;
- l) A total of fifteen (15) landslips were found in 2017/2018 of which eight (8) were critical and involved communities being cut-off;
- li) Temporary shoring works were done on the eight (8) critical landslips which involved the use of steel piles and steel sheets in an effort to keep the roads passible for the motoring public;
- lii) The process involved in a more permanent measure includes the conduct of a geotechnical investigation, the determination of the slip lane from the investigation and a solution from the report;
- liii) The MOWT has two approaches to dealing with landslips, the BLT and the PURE programmes;
- liv) The BLT programme which was approved by Cabinet is geared to specifically treat with the backlog of land slips;
- lv) Under BLT programme, consultants are procured to carry out designs after which, contractors are procured;
- lvi) Difficult landslips are forwarded to the PURE Programme due to its in-house engineering and design capabilities;
- lvii) The PURE programme took over the landslide case in Mayaro;
- lviii) Depending on the priority, some landslips that occur as of today will be dealt with next year under the BLT programme; and
- lix) There were one hundred and twenty-six (126) landslips where a section of the road was affected.

**The implications to fixing infant landslips to slow down the rate of deterioration which can result in cost savings;**

- lx) The reason why the MOWT does not have a programme to deal with infant slips with urgency to prevent them from growing into bigger slips;
- lxi) The implication that treating with landslips at its infant stage can save taxpayers money;
- lxii) The MOWT treats with landslips on various levels, particularly on a District Level and for immediate cases using in-house resources;
- lxiii) The studies required to treat with the backlog of landslips will take some time;
- lxiv) Given resources, the MOWT makes the decision to treat with landslips based on prioritisation and the selection of projects to be undertaken; and
- lxv) The recommendation to use low cost engineering solutions as temporary fixes to landslips such as bamboo to slow down the rate of deterioration.

**The Communities targeted for the Adopt a River Programme under the Water Resource Agency**

- lxvi) The Adopt a River Programme is in its infancy stage and involves targeting people in particular areas so that they will be responsible for their watercourses;
- lxvii) The programme has been approved by the Cabinet;
- lxviii) All communities across Trinidad have been targeted for attention by the Drainage Desilting Programme; and
- lxix) The MOWT has identified the communities and rivers for desilting and the communities to visit for discussions as it concerns drainage, coastal programmes and highways programmes.

**Issue with rogue developers**

- lxx) Unlike the Director of Highways who is given the authority to take administrative action against unlawful structures, the Director of Drainage does not have the legislative power to take action against rogue developers;

- lxxi) Previous research and a draft policy to grant the Director of Drainage the necessary power by legislation was transferred to the former Ministry with responsibility for the Drainage Division;
- lxxii) The MOWT plans by mid-year, 2018 to be at a stage to take the draft legislation to Cabinet for approval and through the other stages with the Law Review Commission and the Parliament;
- lxxiii) Based on research, other Commonwealth jurisdictions have a Drainage Authority as opposed to a Director of Drainage;
- lxxiv) The proposed policy to be put forward to the Cabinet includes two options, the establishment of a Drainage Authority that would be able to employ staff and manage its own affairs or empowering the Director of Drainage to take the necessary legal action against rogue developers;
- lxxv) In other Commonwealth jurisdictions, the Drainage Authority or Director of Drainage has the authority to serve notices, remove structures, engage in land acquisition and to do what is necessary to take action against developers to save a community from potential flooding;
- lxxvi) The proposed policy may require certain constitutional majorities to be passed;
- lxxvii) The Director of Drainage or the Drainage Authority requires the legislative teeth to take action and to be able to enter onto private lands; and
- lxxviii) The need to include in the legislation, provisions to empower the State to be able to act on behalf of communities that may have suffered losses as a result of being affected by the actions of illegal developers.

### **MOWT Closing Comments**

lxxix) The MOWT indicated that:

- it has been working with communities to make them aware of the measures that can be taken to mitigate flooding;
- it has been working with communities in Matelot in 2017 and Mayaro in 2018 in terms of river control and on wider scale costal erosions;
- it is seeking to ramp up its river clearing and desilting programmes in 2018 as was done in 2017 to mitigate flooding once funding permits;

- it acknowledges the need for constant and timely feedback and will be implementing the mechanism for feedback including the necessary technology;
- it has a mechanism for project selection and identification of resources;
- it is aware that the metrics for project selection may not be what is stated in theory; and
- it recognises the role it plays in terms of the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago.

**View the Hearing:**

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/MdxvE-GF5Fw>

**Contact Information:**

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at [jsclpi@tparliament.org](mailto:jsclpi@tparliament.org) or 624-7275 Ext. 2828.

*Committees Unit*

*March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018*