

Engineers: Constitution to Blame for our Pot Hole Problems

The Barbados Association of Professional Engineers (BAPE) is fingering the Barbados Constitution as the root cause of multiple national issues that have been plaguing the country now for decades, including our bad roads.

After an exhaustive Town Hall Meeting - complete with expert presenters and a jury of engineers, the verdict is in, and it appears that there are no major technical, material or resource issues that account for our poor roads. The problem is almost exclusively tied to a national administrative structure that requires all national revenue to be deposited into the 'Consolidated Fund', and then calls on all users of funds to compete for access to working capital from the fund.

Section 107 of the Barbados Constitution says:

Consolidated Fund

107.

There shall be in and for Barbados a Consolidated Fund, into which, subject to the provisions of any law for the time being in force in Barbados, shall be paid all revenues of Barbados.

It is this outdated approach, bordering on madness, that places our critical national infrastructure such as our road network, water and sewerage plant, hospital and other emergency systems at very serious disadvantage and risk.

Our road network is one of the most critical of all national assets. Without it, nothing else is possible. After an emergency, road communications is a matter of national priority - as a prerequisite for everything else - including search and rescue, fire fighting, emergency supplies distribution etc.

Any administrative system which can allocate a mere \$3M per year to maintain and upkeep an extensive road network such as ours in 2017, is a recipe for potholes and for eventual system collapse.

No rational owner would risk the viability of their most critical business asset by sacrificing upkeep and maintenance in the name of extracting short term profits.

The solution to this problem is simple and easy to execute.

The road network enables and supports gross income consisting of the taxes and levies paid by all vehicle users of the network. For the purpose of section 107, the revenue should be defined as the excess of taxes and levies over and above the expenditures required to maintain and upkeep the road network is a state suitable for its designed purpose. This NET REVENUE can then be paid into the Consolidated Fund as stipulated in the constitution.

The Road network should then be managed and supervised by apolitical professionals - in accordance with international standards, and all expenditures and

income should be audited annually - and made public, along with an annual quality conformance report on the road system.

It is not difficult to see the political expediency of bringing gross revenues under central political control, however it is also obvious that such an approach will inevitably result in bias, degraded infrastructure, expensive failures and gross inefficiencies.

A quick review of the current issues with the **South Coast Sewerage Plant** shows the identical problem is at play there. There is NO WAY that technical managers should have to wait years for financing - to replace a broken pump in a sewerage system. Such engineered systems require routine, ongoing maintenance and replacement of parts as a routine matter of course if they are to continue in viable service. Such routine operations are impossible where technical managers must seek political authorisation every time that breakdown, or even routine maintenance, is required.

The BAPE is calling for the establishment of a **National Road Maintenance Fund** to be legislated in Barbados, where 60% of all vehicle registration fees are specifically allocated to ensure the proper upkeep and quality of our road infrastructure, Furthermore, BAPE calls for the establishment of an independent **National Transport Infrastructure Authority (NTIA)** to be established, and to be given full national responsibility for the transport network. This Authority will be allocated the use of these funds for the purpose specified. It should be apolitical, technical in structure, and report formally to the Governor General.

All NTIA Accounts must be audited annually and immediately presented to the public via the press.

The Authority should be comprised as follows:

- *The Chief Technical Officer - MTW*
- *Two Engineers nominated by the BAPE*
- *The Minister /PS - MTW representing the Cabinet*
- *Two Utility technical representatives (BL&P and BWA)*
- *One Chartered Quantity Surveyor representing BAQS*
- *One Chartered Accountant representing ICAB*
- *One Lawyer representing the Bar Association*
- *One member of the Chamber of Commerce*
- *One person representing the Commissioner of Police*

Each committee member will be critically reviewed annually by their nominating agencies and can be replaced at their pleasure. The chairman shall be a professional engineer.

Such a change will immediately bring a professional focus on this national asset, prioritise the existing problems, and use the allocated funds to bring the system up to international standards. This change is executable as a mere formality by government.

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