

SPEAKING NOTES FOR
PRIME MINISTER
RT. HON. P.J. PATTERSON
AT
OFFICIAL OPENING
OF
SPANISH TOWN BUS DEPOT
ON
WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2000

Salutations

Today's opening, marks yet another milestone on the long and arduous road towards the keeping of a promise by the administration.

In our election manifesto we promised to provide the Metropolitan area with a first class transportation system, in which the citizens can have confidence. One which could satisfy their needs for a safe, reliable and affordable means of getting about their daily lives.

Such a system is essential, because of the importance of public transportation to the social and economic life of the country.

It is also important, because the efficiency and decorum of a modern transportation system, sets the tone for the level of organisation and civility, in all other aspects of the social, communal and productive aspects of our existence.

Indeed, it is an inescapable requirement, if we are to achieve our aim of building the quality society and operate in an environment, which fosters civility and gentleness; to show consideration one towards the other.

For us in the Administration, therefore this is a critical undertaking at which we dare not fail.

With respect to ground transportation we undertook to:

- Complete the administrative re-organisation of the public transportation system and the maintenance of an appropriate fleet structure
- Create the required number of depots to support the system
- Ease the traffic congestion in the Corporate Area by widening select roads, installing traffic lights, introducing additional one-way systems, and increasing the number of bus bays;
- Continue the training of personnel to ensure the delivery of quality service in accordance with established performance standards.

No one would deny that we have made forward strides with respect to each of these undertakings.

We continue to examine how we can resuscitate the railway and explore the building of a ferry system.

The opening of this depot, adds one more building block to the structure which is being erected, to ensure that not only do we reach our goal, but that we are able to sustain a proper system, well into the future.

A depot is an essential requirement for any modern bus operation. It is needed for:

- Off street parking of buses when buses are not in operation
- Repair and maintenance of sophisticated engines and transmissions
- Washing and cleaning of buses
- Dispatching of buses and crews
- The welfare of employees (shower, meals, restroom)
- Management facilities to ensure smooth operation.

This depot is the largest and most modern depot in the Caribbean with a capacity of 120 buses on 8.7 acres of land owned by the Ministry of Housing.

It has two canteens as well as modern shower and bathroom facilities for the convenience of staff.

As part of the bus purchase loan agreement between the Government of Jamaica, Volvo of Sweden and Jonckheere of Belgium, the Belgians agreed to construct the administrative and maintenance buildings.

The administration and maintenance buildings were constructed by the Belgian Government at a cost of J\$226.1million.

What we are attempting to do requires vast resources.

We have been providing these resources and are prepared to go the distance, until we reach our ultimate objective.

It will be of interest to note that expenditure on depots to date, totals 834 Million Dollars, and over the last two years some \$2 Billion has been spent to purchase 380 buses.

In addition, substantial amounts have been invested in settlement of claims by franchise holders, technological applications, training and public education.

These sums represent commitment and belief.

They also represent investments by the Jamaican tax-payer, in a system from which they expect and deserve to derive commensurate benefits.

Buses and depots, do not by themselves a proper transportation system make.

The other crucial elements are, trained personnel, first class service delivery and a co-operative, respectful, appreciative and understanding attitude by the commuters who use the system.

The JUTC has invested, and continues to invest heavily in training and deportment of its crews, and already members of the commuting public are beneficiaries of a new look, new approach, more courteous service.

They will need to be vigilant in insisting on maintaining the standards they have set and removing from their ranks, those persons who demonstrate either an unwillingness or the inability to live up to their responsibilities.

Even with all of these elements in place -- depots, buses, better roads, improved traffic management, technological advances, trained bus crews -- the system we are endeavouring to put in place, will be impossible without the disciplined co-operation and improved behaviour pattern of the commuters.

We cannot allow the system to fall apart because of a failure by those for whom it is intended, to play their proper role.

The system is financed and operated by Government, but it is not for the benefit of Government.

It is for the people.

I implore the traveling public to nurture and care for the new "criss" and comfortable buses on which they now commute.

Dissuade those who would seek to destroy and deface them.

Protect them as if they were your own, because indeed they are.

I look to the drivers, conductors, and maintenance crews to take good care of the buses.

I appeal for good driving habits and excellent displays of road discipline.

It is my hope and expectation that the new look, more efficient bus system, will prove to be a motivational force, in returning to levels of civility which have been absent from the society for some time.

There remains an urgent need for Jamaicans to be more civil towards each other and for a refinement in our person to person contacts.

A good transportation system by itself will not bring about this change.

But, it can certainly contribute in a meaningful way.

Government's commitment to proper public transportation is unshakable.

We are well aware of the needs and aspirations of the people.

I am satisfied, that if we can forge a strong government-people alliance, we can create a public transportation system of which we can all be proud.