



Transportation, Public Policy and Change in New Providence, Bahamas

A Better Transportation System for a Better Life



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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| I. Introduction..... | 4 |
| II. Studies on New Providence Transport..... | 9 |
| III. The Road Traffic Act | 12 |
| IV. Research Findings..... | 14 |
| V. Recommendations | 23 |
| VI. Endnotes | 27 |



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The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of The College of The Bahamas.

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I. INTRODUCTION



A. What is the 1962 Foundation?

THE 1962 FOUNDATION is a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to deeper and broader participation in political governance, the protection of constitutional rights, social justice and equal opportunity for all. We are devoted to the continued strengthening and deepening of democracy in The Bahamas through critical engagement and ongoing reform. We seek to promote progressive changes in systems of governance nationally and locally by encouraging debate, promoting innovation and furnishing the wider public with valuable information that can assist them in forming reasoned views about public policy. Our intent is to make representative government more democratic, effective, responsive and

responsible. We are advocates for greater transparency and accountability in government. We believe that the direction of the nation is everyone's responsibility and our goal is to empower people of every walk of life to become agents of positive political change through dialogue, debate and consensus building. We believe an informed, critical public is the best safeguard of freedom and guarantor of equality and we believe that systems of government are meant to serve rather than stifle the citizenry. Ultimately, we seek to create systems that are best suited for our ways of life as island people with a peculiar history, facing peculiar challenges and given unique opportunities.

B. The Importance of Transportation to Development

A nation that ensures orderly, efficient and sustainable systems of public transportation for its citizens fosters national security, national economic growth, the conservation of resources, a cleaner, healthier environment, a lower cost of living, and a better quality of life. People all over the world and of all walks of life rely on public transport as an inexpensive means to get to work, to school, and to reach essential services.

The efficiency and effectiveness of transportation systems in a country are affected by the quality of government regulation, by the size and organization of roadways, by the volume of automobile ownership, by urban planning (the design of communities, commercial zones, school zones, pedestrian zones, bus lanes), the operation of traffic signals, and the management of bus or rail systems, among other factors. How safely, quickly and easily people get to work, school and recreational sites has tremendous impact on their sense of well being and their overall confidence in "the system." Transportation inefficiencies in a city or within a nation have a deleterious effect on economic productivity, on social relations and on public health, not to mention the cost of living.

As Heather Allen of the International Association of Public Transportation puts it

A transport system tells us a lot about the culture of a city or town; in fact it is a microscope on present day society. Traces of any city's complex historical development - economic, social, cultural, political, environmental - are usually also embedded in their transportation system, reflecting how a city feels about itself. Ride the public transport network anywhere and you will feel the pulse of a city - dynamic and optimistic, tired and dull - you will feel if the city is centred in itself and proud of its achievements or one that is still finding its way. The transport network in turn has the power to destabilise urban core communities if it does not serve the needs of the diversity of the citizens it serves: in this globalised world this extends to color, race, culture, gender, working, poor, young, elderly, able and disabled people.¹

C. The Cost of a Weak System

One of The Bahamas' most pressing problems is traffic congestion in the capital, Nassau and the island of New Providence generally. Without a doubt, capital cities the world over face congestion problems. However, over two third's of the country's population lives on New Providence and the quality of life on the island is deteriorating due to that overpopulation. Air and noise pollution, crimes against person and property, water shortages, litter, graffiti, delinquency and traffic congestion all make New Providence an increasingly unattractive place to live or visit. Traffic congestion contributes significantly to the



loss of working hours on the island, the wear and tear on motor vehicles, the consumption of gasoline, the increase in air pollution, and the stress and anxiety level of many citizens.

The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI)'s annual congestion report, the 2009 *Urban Mobility Report*, which studied 439 urban areas in the US, concluded that "public transportation saved 646 million hours in travel time and 398 million gallons of fuel" in the country.² In 2007 congestion was estimated to have cost \$87.2 billion dollars (in wasted time and fuel) in 439 urban areas. The *Report* also concluded that "Every year, 37 million metric tons of carbon emissions and 4.2 billion gallons of gasoline are saved due to U.S. public transportation use." According to the American Transportation Association, American households that "are likely to

use public transportation on a given day save over \$8,400 every year," and "Households that use public transportation and live with one less car can save on average \$9,000 every year."³

According to a July 2008 Bahamas Budget Communication, the number of registered vehicles in New Providence in 2002 was 111,184.⁴ By 2006 the number had increased to 156,480, representing an increase of 29%. According to The Bahamas Department of Statistics, in 2002 the estimated population in New Providence was 218,000. In 2006 New Providence was estimated to have a population of 233,000 inhabitants, roughly a 7% increase from 2002.⁵ On an overpopulated island, we have cars outpacing population growth by over 400%.

Most intersections on the is-



land were at or had exceeded maximum capacity in 1994 according to the *Dillon Report*, 16 years ago.⁶ In 2003 it was estimated that there were 1,125 cars per square mile in New Providence.² The Bahamas has welcomed a minimum of 3 million tourists annually since 1986 and most of these visitors have disembarked from planes and cruise ships in New Providence, further adding to the pressures on transportation infrastructure.

Advanced Logistics Group's *Urban Transportation Congestion Reduction Study and Strategic Plan*, commissioned by the Bahamas Government, reported that in 2005 a total of 1,043 hours were spent in congestion in the morning peak hour in New Providence at a cost of \$1.3 million dollars annually (measuring

the value of an hour's lost work at an average of about \$9).⁸ We question this figure however, because by our calculation, the report suggests that the average time in congestion for the 27,000 trips they measured was only 10 minutes.

This figure does not speak to lunch time traffic, 3pm school pick up or 5pm traffic. It does not address the cost of lost fuel or the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere due to congestion. Neither does this estimate factor in the impact of traffic jams on the mental and physical health of students, who constitute a large percentage of the individuals riding in the morning, or on the adults who do the driving. There is also the impact on respiratory health and on the level of obesity and cardio vascular disease

because of the widespread shift from walking to driving in the society. The level of tension created because of congestion negatively affects social relations as well. It also does not factor in the cost of traffic accidents in New Providence—their impact on the increased cost of automobile insurance, car repair, etc. There is also the administrative burden such accidents create on the justice system. Between 2007 and 2009 there were 151 traffic fatalities in The Bahamas, most of them in New Providence.² Over the same period there were over 15,000 traffic accidents in New Providence.¹⁰

We must also consider the macroeconomic impact of our current unsustainable lifestyle where transport is concerned: over-reliance on private vehicles guarantees our

small nation's continued severe dependence on fossil fuel from abroad. Year after year this deepens our growing trade imbalance and national debt.

The dramatic impact on cost of living for New Providence households cannot be overstated when we compare car ownership to using public transportation. The 1962 Foundation estimates that the cost of owning and operating a \$22,000 automobile for a New Providence family is \$7,284 a year or \$72,840 over 10 years. \$7,284 represents 15% of the average annual household income in New Providence.¹¹ The cost to a family of four of using public transportation for the year is only \$3,650 (7% of the average annual household income) or \$36,500 over 10 years. If a family of four chose not to borrow from a bank to own a \$22,000 automobile and took the bus instead they would save \$3,634 a year or \$36,340 over ten years.¹² It should be noted that transportation costs count for the second largest household expense in the developing world according to the World Bank.¹³

There are a number of factors contributing to traffic problems on the island, not just the fact that car ownership has outpaced population size. Bahamians drive with frequent disregard to the rules of the road. Most would agree that the traffic congestion is much greater during the school year than the summer months, which speaks to the obvious need for a comprehensive school

bus system. The current public bus system, which is comprised of individual franchise holders, bus owners and drivers, is often criticized for poor and unreliable service and for risky driving due to destructive competition.

The Government has also awarded too many franchises, leading to overcrowding. Profitable routes are oversubscribed and less profitable ones are poorly serviced. In an unpublished 2001 study of the No. 10 Bus, it was revealed



"A Transport system tells us a lot about the culture of a city or a town; in fact it is a microscope on present day society."

that 56% of time a rider needed two buses to complete the route because drivers would cut trips short due to low ridership.¹⁴ The bus system suffers from a negative public image and this discourages car owners from leaving their automobiles at home and taking mass transit. According to our research, most people we surveyed who never use the bus conceded that the buses are convenient (63%) but they felt that bus stops were unsafe (77%), the buses themselves were uncomfortable (83%) and the drivers did not drive safely (93%). Recent tragedies, near misses and violent incidents involving public buses do not help that image.¹⁵

Additionally urban sprawl and poor city planning in New Providence have increased congestion. There are no dedicated bicycle or bus lanes, streets in central Nassau are too narrow and cannot be expanded and many have no room for sidewalks. The traffic is also poorly regulated by the government and the roads on the island are too few to accommodate the volume of vehicles during peak hours.

D. Statement of Purpose

Vigilant Bahamians have many serious concerns about a variety of issues such as crime, educational achievement, economic diversification, environmental sustainability, energy independence, and so on. At this time however, we have elected to examine the matter of mass transportation in the capital, Nassau and the island of New Providence. We choose this issue for three reasons; 1) the problem is apparent to everyone, including the Government of The Bahamas, which has already invested in a number of consultants' studies with a mind toward improving the situation; 2) on the surface at least, the solutions are fairly "easy" to implement, highlighting the fact that this is an issue of poor governance; and 3) the benefits can be swiftly felt by Bahamians of all walks of life in New Providence, all of whom depend on the roadways.

We believe that transportation is a core issue that speaks to the very heart of national life; to matters of



governance, national planning, environmental preservation, quality of life, and economic growth and sustainability. To put it simply, mass transportation is a developmental challenge for our small nation. We are persuaded that the current model at work in the capital, from the regulation of the bus system, to the management and policing of traffic, to the planning of roads and communities, creates increasing disorder, frustration and waste. The disorder, frustration and waste exact an unacceptable economic, social, environmental and public health price. This report reflects our research and deliberations on the matter of mass transit in New Providence, inclusive of our recommendations for positive change.

The country cannot achieve orderly growth in the capital unless a new approach to transportation is adopted; a sustainable approach.¹⁶ And we cannot adopt a sustain-

able approach to motorized ground transportation without changing the prevailing culture/habits of our people. **This report recommends a transformation of the transportation system that will encourage more residents to leave their cars at home more often and eventually, own fewer cars. We see this as the only lasting solution to traffic problems in New Providence.** The Bahamas Living Conditions Survey of 2001 found that 74.5% of Bahamians in New Providence owned a private vehicle and it took 59.1% of them up to 30 minutes to get to an activity.¹⁷ By using cars less they will save money, consume less fuel, create less pollution, and experience community in new and better ways. This report seeks to encourage greater efficiency, conscientiousness and discipline in terms of our transportation system. We see the issue as not only being about the improvement of the system of motor-

ized ground transportation in New Providence but the improvement of national governance, the improvement of the quality of life in The Bahamas and the strengthening of our social and cultural fabric.¹⁸

E. Methodology

The group sought to gather as much information as possible about the current transportation system in the country. We read as many of the government commissioned studies as we were able to acquire. We also interviewed key stakeholders in the jitney bus industry as well as public officials regarding congestion and public transportation.

In an effort to gauge public perceptions of the current bus system we created a questionnaire which was administered to 635 persons in New Providence between April and July of 2009. This survey was administered at schools, colleges, food stores and shopping centres across the island. It gathered demographic information, information on transportation habits and perceptions of the bus system. Descriptive statistics was used for analysis.

This study sought to determine,

1. The current condition of the bus system on New Providence
2. Perception of people on New Providence of the current bus system
3. How the bus system on New Providence can be improved.



II. STUDIES ON TRANSPORTATION IN NEW PROVIDENCE



A. The 2005 IDB Report

The 2005 *Preferred Unification Model* report, an analytical study drawing heavily on the *Dillon Report*, focuses on the need to create a more efficient bus system by bringing all the buses operating on the streets of New Providence under a single, “unified” management structure. At the heart of the 2005 study is

the idea that the inefficiencies of the present bus system flow from the fragmented managerial system under which the bus system operates. The report further suggests that the fragmented control of the bus system stems from the fragmented nature of the present bus industry in New Providence.

Under the present system, the industry consists of franchise holders, owners, and operators. The problem that this presents from a unified managerial perspective is further complicated by the fact that (1) not all franchise owners own or operate a jitney; (2) some franchise owners are also bus owners, but not operators; (3) some franchise owners may be operators of buses but not owners of buses. As a result of this configuration, under the present system there are many owners and/or operators who are not franchise holders.

The 2005 study also implies that there exists a linkage between the fragmented nature of the bus industry in New Providence and a destructive form of competition that steers the industry, though the linkage is never clearly rationalized:

The jitney industry is controlled by individuals whose interests do not necessarily align well with those of the community. The emergence of destructive competition is compromising road safety and passenger safety, passenger patronage and the orderly development of the industry to aspire to its full potential.

In response to the fragmented state of the bus industry, the main recommendation of the 2005 study is that the management and ownership of the jitney industry be vested in a single company created by statute. Interests in active bus franchises and the buses themselves under the scheme would be paid for by the company through cash exchange or

the issuance of shares in the new company. To help accomplish the task of acquisition of the jitney industry, the study describes how the company would raise the necessary investment funds by securing loans and offering shares in the company.

Although the report proposes that the legal structure of the company would follow the organizational structure of a commercially-operated company, the report does not specify the mechanism for empowering specific individuals to serve in the capacity as Chief Executive Officer or Board Director of the company.

The avoidance of this important governance issue is odd, given that the report proposes that the new company would be established by statute and that one of the main reasons for establishing the company by this means would be to create a non-commercial governance structure for the company.¹² The avoidance itself may suggest that the governance issue is one of the main sticking points towards the reform of the jitney industry in New Providence. It may also suggest a deeper problem in the report. On one hand, the report contemplates a more organised, less fragmented linkage between the management and ownership of the jitney industry through the creation of single company that would purportedly ‘unify’ the industry. And yet, the proposed involvement of the government in the establishment of the “unified system,” on the other hand, would also suggest that the

report contemplates some degree of severance of the linkage between the real beneficial ownership of the industry and its management structure, i.e., the involvement of the government in the governance of the management of the industry. If the latter is the case, then the report fails to justify why the establishment of a single company is thought to be a better way of organizing the existing industry than by the government simply exerting greater central authority (managerial oversight) over the existing industry. Support for



The bus system in New Providence, which has always been private, would seem to contradict the rule of thumb that privatization leads to better service.

this analysis, ironically, comes from the report itself when it makes the following recommendation:

Irrespective of whether the unification succeeds as proposed, it is imperative that the deficiencies in the current licensing system are fixed and an effectively [sic] and equitable regulatory system is established and fully enforced.

After some consideration is given in the 2005 report to the relative advantage of using a company over a cooperative business organisation as the means of creating a “unified” bus system, the report suggests a method for conducting a valuation of the assets of the New Providence bus system. The report then turns to

what it considers to be the second major problem confronting the jitney industry in New Providence: the existing bus route network.

Like the Dillon study, conducted ten-years earlier, the network routing recommendations of the 2005 report were developed based on two assumptions: (1) that increasing the efficiency of the bus routes would increase bus ridership; (2) that increased bus ridership would reduce urban transport congestion. While the first assumption is sound, the second is questionable.

Similar to the Dillon Report that preceded it, the 2005 Report describes and analyses many of the inefficiencies of the New Providence bus route network. The main problems summarised concern:

1. an abundance of single-direction routes;
2. a routing system that has not been responsive to demographic changes, the transport needs of the school system, or the new sites of work; thus, which does not meet bus ridership demand and/or need; and
3. a lack of direct origin-to-destination routes.

Like the 2005 report’s admission, through one of its recommendations, that the broken franchise system within the jitney industry could be possibly fixed by the government without the need for the establishment of a “unified bus system,” the report’s recommendations concerning New Providence’s bus network are not contingent upon the establishment of a completely reconfigured jitney industry. However, while it would appear that the 2005

report acknowledges the potential of the government to fix two pressing problems of the jitney industry without reconfiguring the industry's ownership structure, the report, when read as a whole, conveys the impression that its writers were of the view that the various problems of the industry would not get fixed without the ownership restructuring of the industry. **The question this raises concerns the relationship between successive governments' failure to reform the jitney industry and the ownership structure of the industry.**



B. The 2006 ALG Report

The ALG Report is much more expansive in its vision. It provides a comprehensive examination of traffic congestion in New Providence and devises strategic plans to help alleviate that congestion. Traffic is divided into its five most prevalent forms and a plan of action is created for each form: 1) private vehicles; 2) public transport (jitneys); 3) school transportation; 4) tourist transportation; 5) freight transportation.

Where private vehicular traffic is concerned the report advocates greater use of parking restrictions by zones and time, a reversible lanes network, Park and Ride facilities throughout the island, making Bay Street a pedestrian zone and synchronised traffic signals. The report also advocates stricter enforcement

of traffic laws and a more stringent licensing and inspection regime. The report consistently emphasizes the importance of public awareness campaigns for each of the five strategic approaches to congestion alleviation.

With respect to public transportation the report calls for a unified bus system with a restructured routes, express service between Park and Ride sites and central business districts, reversible and permanent bus lanes, renewal of the bus fleet, fare integration between routes, a free downtown bus circuit, bicycle facilities near bus stops, waterborne transportation to Paradise Island and again more stringent enforcement of laws and media campaigns to promote bus use.

Where school transport is concerned the *ALG Report* calls for

restructuring bus routes to serve schools, encouraging carpooling, coordinating school and work hours, encouraging flexi time programmes, introducing raised cross walks and developing school zone transport policy guidelines. The report also sees the creation of after school programmes as a measure that may alleviate the 3 o'clock bottlenecks.

Among the strategies recommended to address tourism transport was the designation of the downtown area as a pedestrian zone and designated tourist bus routes. As for freight transport the *ALG Report* speaks of creating a truck centre and developing a new port. Notably, it calls for restrictions by time, size and vehicle type where freight movement is concerned as well the designation of freight routes.

The report estimates that if

the strategies it recommends are implemented the volume of morning peak hour traffic in New Providence would drop by 59%. It breaks its recommendations into those that can be achieved in the short, medium and long term. Interestingly, the report asserts that the unification of the bus system, signal timing optimisation, raised crosswalks, time restrictions on distribution vehicles, the institution of reversible lanes and bus-only lanes, and making Bay Street a pedestrian zone can all take place within a two year period. The report makes no attempt to address the specifics of how the bus system is to be unified. Its analysis and recommendations are purely technical.



III. THE 1995 ROAD TRAFFIC ACT

There are a number of interesting clauses in the 1995 Road Traffic Act which are not in fact enforced by the government on a daily basis. We wish to draw special attention to the matter of transparency where omnibus franchises are concerned. It is commonly believed that the giving of franchises for taxis and buses has been tainted by political interference, even abuse. To put it simply, franchises have often been a reward for political

loyalty. It has been rumoured that even public servants own such franchises. The names of franchise holders may be requested in writing and by law the Traffic Controller is obligated to furnish an applicant with that list from his Register. The identity of franchise holders has not to our knowledge been made public and this of course, helps to perpetuate the unsatisfactory state of affairs.





According to Part 2 Section of the Road Traffic Act:

5. (1) For the purposes of this Act the Controller shall keep a register.

(2) The register shall contain a record of all of the following-

(a) the name and address of the registered owner and the registered number of all licensed motor vehicles and licensed public service vehicles;

(b) the name and address of the insured and the name and address of the insurer and the registered number of the motor vehicle in the case of every policy of third-party insurance or passenger and luggage insurance required to be shown to the Controller under this Act;

(c) the name and address of the holder and full particulars of every license to operate a livery car, self-drive vehicle or taxi-cab, and of every franchise to operate an omnibus, tour car, or self-drive vehicle.

(d) the name and address of the holder, and full particulars of every motor vehicle driver's license and public service vehicle driver's license

(3) The register may contain such other records and particulars as the Minister may from time to time determine.

(4) Upon payment of a fee of one dollar for each page any person shall be entitled to be given a typed copy of any of the information contained in the records referred to in subsection (2) of this section.

(5) A copy of any part of the register purporting to be certified by the Controller to be a true copy, shall be deemed to be such a true copy without proof unless the contrary is shown, and shall be received in evidence in any register or any license or other documents which would be evidence of the matter sought to be proved by such certified copy, and any person applying to the Controller shall be furnished with such a certified copy on payment of a fee of two dollars and fifty cents for each page.

On April 13th, 2010 the 1962 Foundation wrote to the Controller of Traffic, Mr. Philip Turner, requesting a copy of the Register of omnibus and taxi franchises. We await his reply.



IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. SURVEY RESULTS

1. ALL RESPONDENTS

i. Age

48.4% of persons surveyed were 18 and under; 25.2% were between 19 and 25; 12.1% were between 26 and 35; 9.7% were between 36 and 49, and 4.7% were 50 or above.

ii. Employment Status

38.1% were employed; 2.6% were unemployed; 1.7% were retired, and 57.6% were students.

iii. Main means of transportation

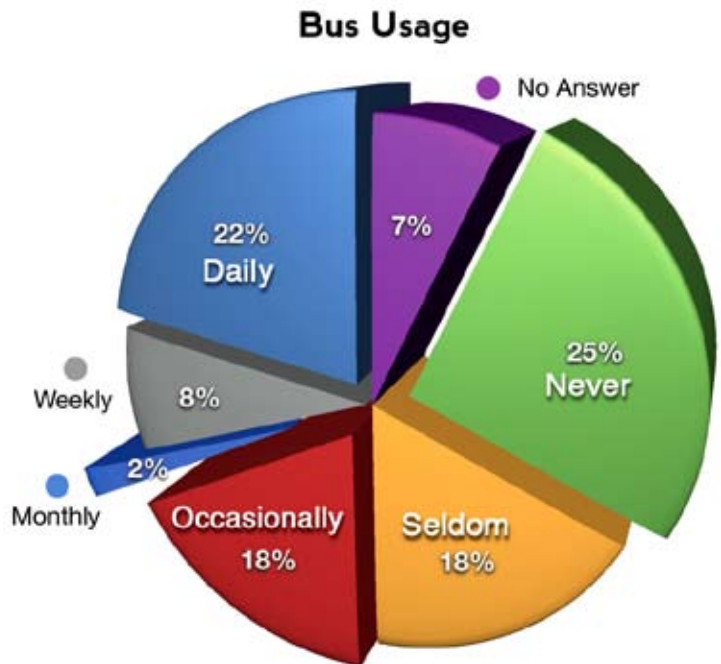
64.2% used cars; 19.6% used buses; 5.3% walked; 4.9% caught a ride; 2.5% took taxis; 1.9% carpooled; 1.2% rode motorcycles, and 0.4% rode bicycles.

iv. Students who took a bus

90.1% used public bus; 5.3% used private charter, and 4.6% used school buses

v. Bus Usage

The majority, 25% of the persons surveyed indicate that they never use the bus and 22% of persons use the bus daily.



2. THOSE THAT NEVER USE THE BUS

i. Gender

73% female and 27% male

ii. Age

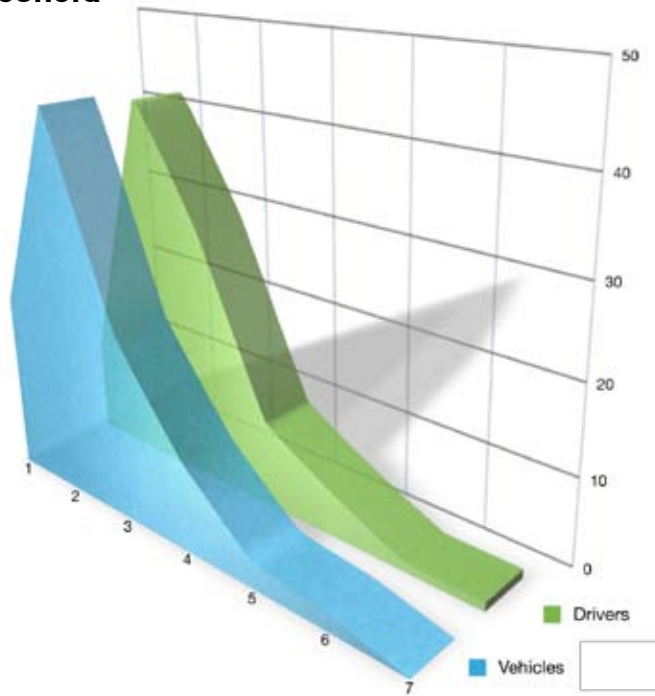
35% 18 and under; 25% 19 to 25; 19% 26-35; 16% 36-49, and 5% 50 and over.

iii. Car ownership

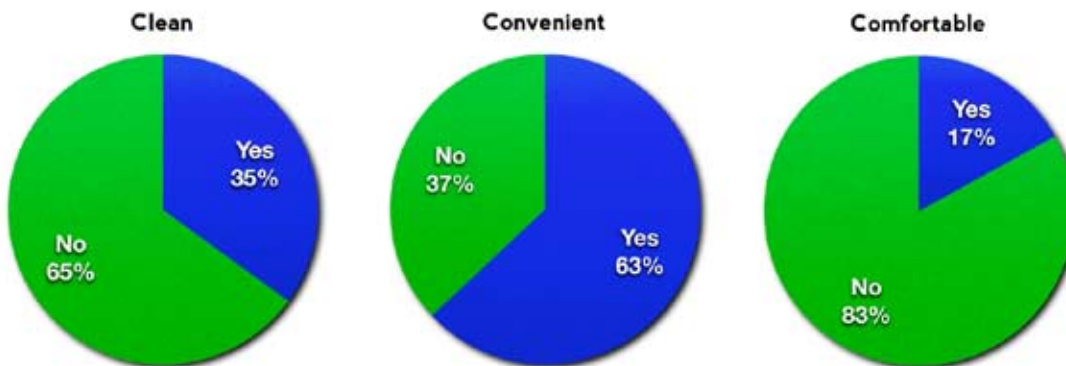
66% own and 34% do not own a car.

iv. Vehicles and Drivers per Household

Note the close correlation in the graph between the number of drivers per household and the number of vehicles.

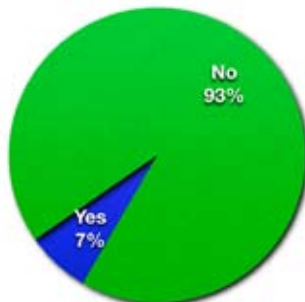


v. Perceptions of cleanliness and comfort

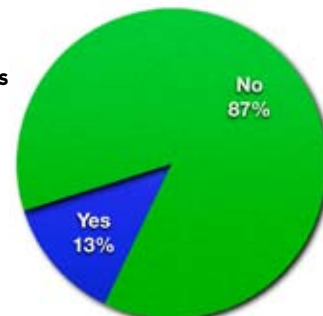


vi. Perceptions of drivers

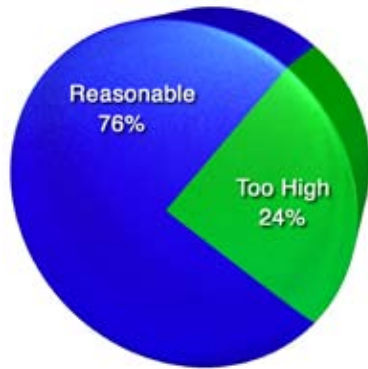
Think Bus Drivers Drive Safely



Think Bus Drivers are Courteous



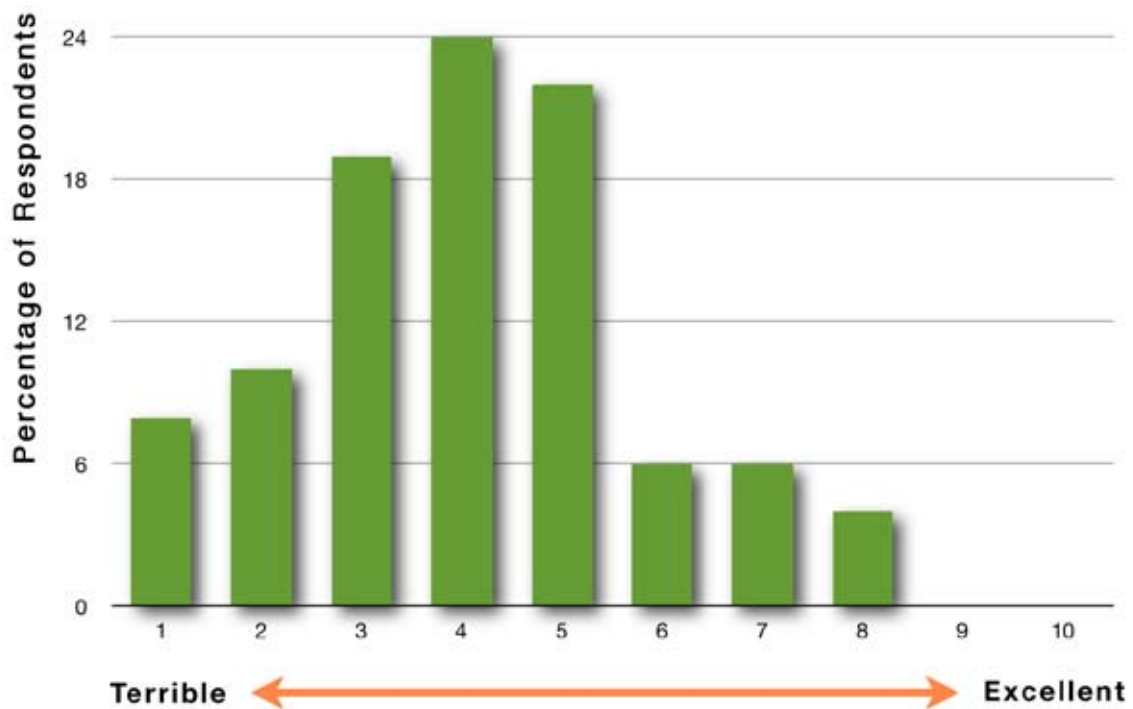
vii. Perceptions of bus fares



viii. Perceptions of conditions of Bus Stops

| Condition | Yes | No |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| Shaded | 24% | 76% |
| Safe | 28% | 72% |
| Clean | 23% | 77% |
| Equipped with seating | 51% | 49% |
| Marked by a sign | 28% | 72% |

ix. Overall Rating of Bus System.



3. DAILY BUS USERS

i. Gender

55% female and 45% male

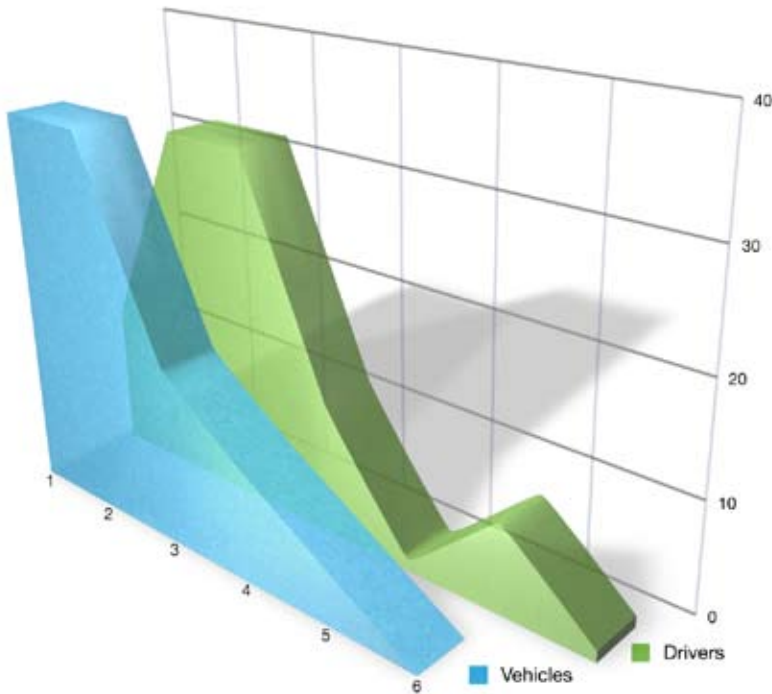
ii. Age

54%, 18 and under; 30%, 19 to 25; 11%, 26-35; 2%, 36-49, and 4%, 50 and over.

iii. Car ownership

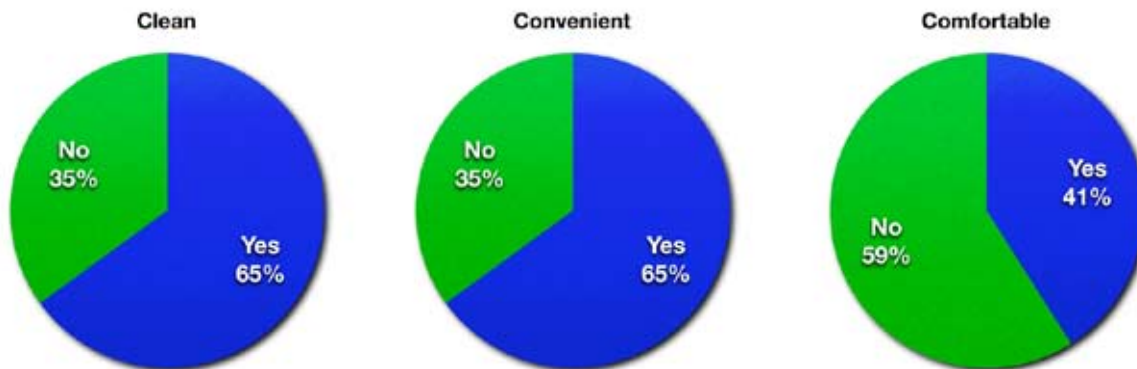
18% own and 82% do not own a car.

iv. Vehicles and Drivers per Household



Again note the close correlation between the number of drivers per household and the number of vehicles. While less households with regular bus users have drivers, basically every driver has access to their own household car.

v. Condition of the Bus



vi. Perceptions of drivers

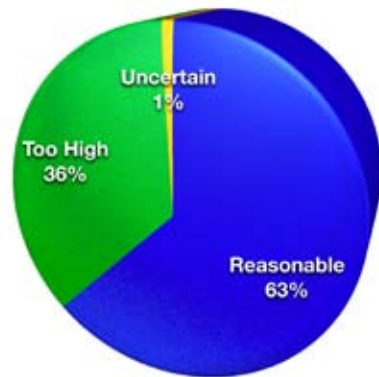
Think Bus Drivers Drive Safely



Think Bus Drivers are Courteous



vii. Perceptions of bus fares



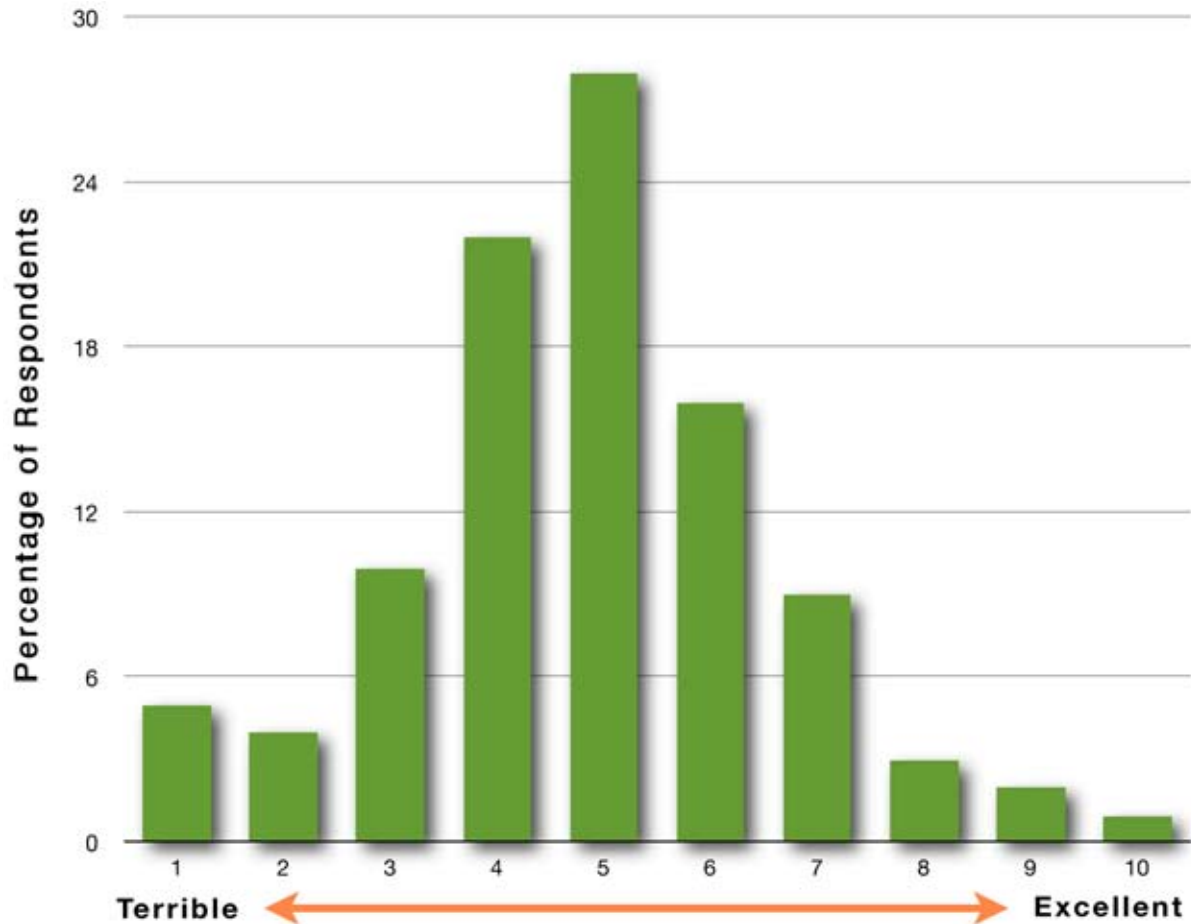
ix. Perceptions of Bus Stops

| Condition | Yes | No |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|
| Shaded | 25% | 75% |
| Safe | 29% | 71% |
| Clean | 34% | 66% |
| Equipped with seating | 39% | 61% |
| Marked by a sign | 39% | 61% |

x. Perceptions of Bus Driver Behaviour

| Condition | Always | Very Often | Often | Occasionally | Seldom | Never |
|---|--------|------------|-------|--------------|--------|-------|
| Taken a short cut | 30% | 26% | 17% | 13% | 8% | 5% |
| Failed to complete your route | 13% | 16% | 12% | 21% | 22% | 17% |
| Driven while drinking alcohol | 6% | 13% | 15% | 15% | 21% | 30% |
| Driven while talking on a cell phone | 14% | 21% | 17% | 31% | 14% | 3% |
| Driven while eating | 3% | 23% | 18% | 15% | 26% | 15% |
| Not stopped for passengers along the route | 14% | 17% | 18% | 19% | 19% | 14% |
| Dropped off and picked up passengers where there's no designated stop | 34% | 20% | 20% | 4% | 17% | 6% |
| Run the red light | 7% | 14% | 13% | 15% | 21% | 31% |
| Driven too fast | 22% | 29% | 14% | 22% | 9% | 5% |

xi. Overall Rating of Bus System



The survey conducted by the 1962 Foundation has revealed some very interesting data. Notably, 82% of those who use the bus on a daily basis have no car in their household, lending credence to the notion that those who have no other choice use the bus system most. 84% of those who identified as daily bus users were under the age of 25. 69% of daily users gave the bus system a rating of 5 or below out of 10, 10 being

excellent. 84% of those who never use the bus gave the system a rating of 5 or below out of 10. 59% of daily users said buses were uncomfortable. 77% of daily users said that bus drivers do not drive safely and 71% said drivers are not courteous. 44% said they frequently see bus drivers eating as they drive. 65% of daily users said buses are not clean and 65% also said buses are not convenient. 72% of daily users said bus stops

are not clean, 49% said they are not marked by signs and 77% said they are not safe. 34% of daily bus users said that they witness drivers drinking alcohol frequently, 15% said they witness it occasionally. 41% of daily users said bus drivers failed to complete their routes frequently, 21% said they do so occasionally. 52% of daily users say they frequently see bus drivers on the cell phone while driving.



B. INTERVIEWS

There remain serious divisions among those who make a living through the bus industry. The 1962 Foundation interviewed Reuben Rahming, head of the Public Transit Association of The Bahamas, PTAB, Harrison Moxey, head of the United Transportation Company, UTC, and Nicholas Jacques, former head of the now defunct Bahamas Omnibus Owners Association. The two existing organizations, PTAB and UTC, are essentially rivals. This is, of course, a major obstacle to bus owners and franchise holders presenting a unified front to the government or creating alternative proposals for the management and operation of the jitney system. Each group approaches the government with its own plans and suggestions. Many attempts to bring about changes from

the government's end have been met with protest from those within the bus industry. The industry has frequently accused the government of not consulting them.

Where both the UTC and PTAB agree is in their resistance to a wholesale takeover of the bus system by the government or a private concern. The feeling is that the government regulates the system poorly and herein lies the solution to many of the public's concerns. Both sides feel strongly that the government should tread carefully where creating a single bus corporation is concerned. They feel that people who gain their livelihoods from buses and who have built the industry over the last 40 years ought not to be pushed out summarily by the government or some large powerful

investor. They were also concerned that a buy out by government ought to be properly planned if attempted at all, to ensure that bus owners are not left facing hardship.

The gentlemen alleged that there are serious problems within the system, such as public officials holding bus franchises, illegal immigrants driving public buses, drivers with major traffic violations getting their licenses renewed, the chaotic problem of excess franchises, bribery and so on. They also complained of the capricious nature of traffic law enforcement. In other words, they feel there is no consistency in terms of traffic wardens and traffic police ensuring that the laws of the road are followed by bus drivers and ordinary citizens alike.

Unity between PTAB and the UTC could bring about a more efficient, comprehensive, transparent and accountable management structure for the industry. But they cannot succeed at this entirely without government assistance and regulation. As it stands, however, their best efforts to date have not translated into public confidence and satisfaction with the bus system. Most people we surveyed gave the bus system an unfavourable evaluation. The owner associations would no doubt argue that this state of affairs is not entirely the fault of the bus/franchise owners and drivers and we agree. Nonetheless, there exists a climate of disorder on the roads of New Providence and the buses contribute significantly to that climate.

C. ANALYSIS

I. WHY HASN'T THE GOVERNMENT ACTED MORE DECISIVELY?

Governments the world over argue that privatization will produce greater efficiency, better service and greater productivity. The bus system in New Providence, which has always been private, would seem to contradict that rule of thumb. The reason: poor regulation. Successful governments, one could argue, have little incentive to improve the current transport system. They fear political fallout, public backlash and industrial unrest if they wrest ownership of the bus system out of the

hands of the current owners of the industry and are unable to make accommodations that satisfy the key players. Given that the two owners associations frequently disagree it's no surprise the government is reluctant; however, the public suffers from this case of political expediency or rather cowardice.

The government also does not face public pressure to improve the bus system because those who use it most frequently are working class women and school children: the least vocal members of society and the least influential. Nor have governments faced serious public pressure to find lasting solutions to traffic flow problems because people have not yet reached a point of frustration that is beyond bearing. Gov-

ernments invest minimally in policing the system but gain significant sums of money from taxes. Indeed, transport related duty and stamp taxes contributed over 139 million dollars to the country's treasury in the 2007-2008 fiscal year. One could argue that the revenue generated for the importation of automobiles, automobile parts and fuel is a major disincentive to addressing traffic congestion.

Lastly, both major political parties stick to the dogma that road improvement, road expansion and new road creation makes transportation better (despite the fact that it does not alleviate congestion).²⁰ There are also the political rewards that come with road construction and repair and from awarding taxi and omni-





bus franchises. These are a major disincentive to change. The political parties see no political reward in taking on the bus owners, drivers and franchise holders (among whom are no doubt their own supporters) for the sake of the public good.

II. WILL A UNIFIED BUS SYSTEM OR MORE EFFICIENT USE OF ROADS SOLVE CONGESTION?

Even if all public buses are reorganized under a single corporation that can pay drivers salaries and pay investors dividends, even if that bus system runs perfectly on schedule and has extended hours, and even if the buses are perfectly safe and service is excellent, there will still be a

congestion problem in New Providence. The fact is that the car is a Bahamian status symbol and unless we make it difficult, too costly or impossible for households to own so many cars or we re-educate Bahamians to see the personal and public benefit of conservation and sustainability, even the best bus system will go under utilized. Our research revealed a telling correlation between the number of drivers in a household and the number of automobiles in a household, which suggests that few adults share their car with another relative.

Even if the government reorganizes streets in such a manner as to better accommodate traffic flow during peak hours, by creating reversible one way traffic, for instance, on the most important corridors,

this increase in efficiency will in the long term have the effect of encouraging more car use rather than less and we will again approach a capacity threshold. Traffic experts know that more roads attract more traffic rather than alleviate congestion.²⁴ Likewise, greater efficiency will reward and encourage car ownership, when in fact uncontrolled car ownership coupled with unplanned growth, (which induces so many to drive in order to receive essential services), are principal features of our unsustainable system. Car ownership is the variable that we can control in that equation.

New Providence residents will note also that during the summer months traffic is significantly less congested during the peak hours. This is due to the fact that parents are not dropping and picking up their children from schools all across the island (they are going to and from private schools primarily, which do not have restrictions on attendance based on proximity of residence like public schools do). A dedicated, safe school bus system could attract private school children and could significantly reduce peak hour congestion, particularly in the short term, but it again faces the cultural bias towards car use. In the long term, even were school buses extremely successful at attracting private school students, the amount of car use would remain a national threat to public health, public prosperity and quality of life.



V. RECOMMENDATIONS



1. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Each of us has a part to play as a resident and consumer in promoting a more sustainable solution to our transportation challenges. We must try to use our cars less and walk, ride the

bus, carpool or use bicycles when ever feasible. We can also help by driving more fuel efficient vehicles and making sure our vehicles meet good emissions standards.

2. HOW WE USE TAXES

We feel there should be a more meaningful linkage between the tax revenue gleaned from transportation and the actual regulation of the system, in particular the gasoline tax, car licensing and inspection fees and fines for traffic violations. According to the 2007 Budget Communication, the Department of Road Traffic was run on merely \$6,962,170. However, the Department received \$39 million in 2008 for vehicle licensing and inspection and taxi and bus franchise fees according to the Department of Statistics. Perhaps we should increase fuel taxes with revenue going directly to support the public transit system and infrastructure. This will have the additional benefit of discouraging car use, encouraging the purchase of high-efficiency vehicles and promoting cheaper modes of transport such as bus use, mopeds or bicycle use.

3. PUBLIC HEALTH

Studies are needed in The Bahamas to learn more about the impact of car emissions on respiratory health. Also, we believe our choice of transportation modes affects the likelihood of developing cardiovascular disease and of becoming obese.²²

4. GAS GUZZLERS

The government should dis-



courage the importation of low efficiency vehicles by increasing tariffs on these vehicles and lowering tariffs on high efficiency ones.

5. MOPEDS

The government should reduce the taxes on the importation of mopeds which now stands at 70% to encourage the use of this more fuel efficient means of transport. (We do not advocate tax cuts on the importation of high powered motorcycles because of the number of serious accidents that have taken place involving these over the years and the public nuisance these have become.)

6. SOCIAL STATUS

Work must be done to combat the cultural stigma attached to rid-

ing the bus. At present those who use the bus typically have no other choice. Our survey revealed that 77% of those who never use the bus actually have a bus route running within 5-10 minutes of their school or place of employment. We would like to see Nassau and New Providence become places where riding the bus or using a bicycle as the principal means of getting to work or to school are no longer seen as signs of low social status. This goal obviously requires campaigns in media and in schools.

7. REORGANIZING TRAFFIC FLOW

The recommendations regarding reversible and dedicated one way traffic flow along the major cor-

ridors of the island of New Providence ought to be attempted as soon as possible. Through trial and error a workable, fair, more efficient approach can be devised to address peak time traffic congestion.

The recent discord created by the creation of one way traffic north on Baillou Hill Road and south on Market Street ought not to discourage the government from attempting further changes to assist traffic flow. The problems that have arisen since the end of March 2010 by the changes on these streets highlight the need for the proper dissemination of information, for consensus building and for contingency planning. The government must be agile and be prepared to assist communities as much as possible during transitions. The government must also be

prepared to adjust plans when good suggestions are made that can better ensure efficiency and fairness. A tolerance for experimentation must be cultivated in the people.²³

8. SECURITY

CC TV should be required on all buses and major bus stops to improve the security of the general public.

9. QUIET

Buses should play no music at all. It is important to set an orderly, calm and safe tone on public transit if it is to gain wider ridership. Loud music sets an undesirable tone and disturbs many who are essentially in a public space.

10. BICYCLES

Where possible dedicated bus and bicycle lanes should be established on the island. Bicycle storage facilities should be installed outside all major public institutions, and the private sector should likewise be encouraged to facilitate parking for bicycles.

11. FLEXI-TIME AND CARPOOLS

Government ministries, quasi government corporations and large private companies should introduce flexi-time as well as help organize shuttle service and carpooling for personnel. The government should explore creating incentives for large

companies to provide such services for their employees.

12. TERMINALS OR BUS STATIONS

Studies have already pointed out the benefits of creating bus terminals at crucial points on the island of New Providence to reorganize bus activity and provide shelter as well as serve as an opportunity



How safely, quickly and easily people get to work, school and recreational sites has tremendous impact on their sense of well being.

for entrepreneurs, small and large. These need not require tax dollars alone; it can serve as an investment opportunity.

13. PARK AND RIDE

The *ALG Report* recommended a system of Park and Ride sites at strategic points on the island and we believe this suggestion is an excellent one. Ideally, parking lots should stand adjacent to bus terminals so that drivers can be encouraged to leave the cars. In the case of downtown (and perhaps Palmdale) a paid parking lot and free shuttle service might work best.

14. NEW FLEET

The country needs a new fleet of

buses. These buses should be larger, to accommodate more passengers and improve rider comfort. They should be able to accommodate wheelchairs and have special seating for the elderly and handicapped. We can reduce crime and violence by introducing buses that only allow access at the very front, with electronic token or ticket machines for entry.²⁴ The new fleet should also have doors near the rear of the bus for smoother exiting.

15. WALKING

The Government ought to encourage pedestrian lifestyles, not just by creating sidewalks but also by planting trees that can provide shade along busy streets as well as in government subdivisions.

16. CAR OWNERSHIP

The government of The Bahamas must contemplate putting serious limits on the number of vehicles that can be owned by any given household. The government of Bermuda stipulated that there could be only one vehicle owned per residence on that island in its Motor Car Act of 1951. Since then Bermuda's government has sought to find more and more effective ways of regulating and restricting the number of vehicles owned by citizens and to penalize those who violate the law. It should also be noted that the size of vehicles in Bermuda has been dictated since the Motor Car Act of 1951 but there is no restriction on

the number of mopeds citizens may own.²⁵ The 1962 Foundation recommends limiting the number of vehicles to 2 per residence where there are 3 or more licensed drivers and to 1 per residence where there are 2 or fewer licensed drivers. Alternatively, the government should tax multi car households

17. SCHOOL BUSES

A large percentage of bus ridership is already made up of students (public school students mostly). A dedicated bus system where students could ride free of charge, servicing public and private schools, could be subsidized in part by the government and in part the schools themselves. If properly promoted and managed this could help reduce traffic congestion.

18. EMISSIONS

In the interest of public health the government should include emissions testing to the vehicle inspection and licensing process.

19. EXPRESS BUSES

Some buses ought to run from hub to hub, particularly during peak hours. This will shorten trip time and encourage increased ridership.

20. TRAFFIC LIGHTS

The synchronisation of lights in New Providence is a must and ought to have been accomplished a long, long time ago. Additionally though,

the process of managing and maintaining the traffic lights needs serious review and simplification.

21. ELECTRIC AND HYBRID CARS

Efforts should be made to introduce these highly efficient vehicles to our country as quickly and as cheaply as possible.



“We cannot adopt a sustainable approach to motorized transportation without changing the prevailing culture/habits of our people.”

22. THE BUS SYSTEM

Finally, we come to the matter of bus system unification. The members of our organization were not unanimously in favour of a government take over or a public-private partnership leading to a single bus company. Some of the members still feel that solutions can be arrived at by stricter regulation of the system, transparency and accountability in the awarding of franchises, and a greater investment of transportation-derived taxes into the transportation system. With government subsidy it is conceivable that buses can remain privately owned and drivers draw a set salary, which should eliminate the destructive competition on the streets to reach

quotas. Drivers could then also have the 40 hour work week mandated by law. The government has the power to mandate any number of changes to bring uniformity, it must simply have the appetite for enforcement.

Others of us support a unification of bus ownership through public private partnership. Individual bus and franchise owners can be bought out or given shares in a company as advocated in the IDB Report of 2005. The implementation of higher standards for drivers and buses, the introduction of schedules and of a new fleet, of required infrastructure, as well as the establishment of a single management team that can better meet consumer needs and make adjustments, all seem more likely under a bus corporation. The problem, of course, is how to create this entity without causing protest and civil disobedience from the current owners of the industry who could be marginalized or disenfranchised. However, public transportation is an essential service and the public ought not to be held hostage by vested interests. We should note that, even if a bus corporation or company is created, it may not in fact be profitable or break even for that matter. Bahamians may find that serving the public good requires a quasi-government bus corporation that functions at an annual net loss, unlike the current inefficient, dangerous and disorderly, profit-making, wholly private-owned industry.



VI. ENDNOTES

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12. We arrive at this by estimating that a family owns a \$22,000 automobile for 10 years and pays for the car over 5 years at 12% interest after putting down 20% (\$4,400). If we assume the family pays \$2,920 a year for gasoline (2 gallons a day at \$4 a gallon), \$1,000 for maintenance a year and anywhere from 900 to 400 a year for car insurance you get an average of \$7284 a year as an overall cost. We estimate that the family of four, with each person paying \$2.50 a day, would pay \$912.50 per person per year and \$3650 total a year. ↗
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15. "Jitney Overturns, 26 Injured," November 28, 2003, <http://www.bahamasb2b.com/news/wmview.php?ArtID=2801>; "Bus Smashes, Kills Man," November 18, 2008, <http://www.jonesbahamas.com/news/45/ARTICLE/18679/2008-11-18.html>; "Girl Struck, Killed by Bus," March 10, 2006 <http://www.jonesbahamas.com/news/45/ARTICLE/7981/2006-03-10.html> ↗
16. A sustainable transportation system is defined as one that "Allows the basic access needs of individuals and societies to be met safely and in a manner consistent with human and ecosystem health, and with equity within and between generations." It also is "affordable, operates efficiently, offers choice of transport mode and supports a vibrant economy" (<http://www.centreforsustainabletransportation.org/>). ↗
17. Bahamas Living Conditions Survey 2001, Bahamas Department of Statistics, pg. 126. ↗
18. <http://www.vtppi.org/cohesion.pdf> ↗
19. The governance of a commercially-operated company is normally organized in a way to create a strong linkage between the owners of equity in the company and the company's management structure. ↗
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25. http://www.commonlii.org/bm/legis/consol_act/mca1951116/ ↗



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