

SECTORAL BUDGET PRESENTATION 2011-2012

HON. L. MICHAEL HENRY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2011

Mr. Speaker, after three and a half years at the helm of the Transport and Works Ministry, I am happy to be now reaping the levels of success that were envisioned from the start, which took creativity, grit and determination to accomplish.

With strategic application backed by in-depth analysis of the inherited positions, coupled with the national responsibility that comes with effective political transformation, a lot has been realised, all in the best interest of the country. These I will outline later, along with the continuing challenges.

It has certainly taken a lot of very hard work to deliver so much so far, with much more to come, all for the betterment of the country and Jamaicans at large. For this very big effort I must acknowledge the support of my various teams over the last few years.

Of critically importance has been the support and input of the leadership and general staff of the Ministry and the Agencies and Entities within the portfolio areas. Their collective energies have taken us to this point of relative success, which is far removed from lackluster results that were pretty much the norm before. This speaks to the levels of motivation and inspiration that have been generated all-round, in a concerted effort to simply get things right.

Appreciation must be extended to the Permanent Secretary, Dr. Alwin Hales, the Chief Technical Director, other team leaders, including retired Principal Finance Officer Altius Williams and my recently departed Executive Administrator, Minerva Cooke, and the general staff of the Ministry, for their continued support. To the Heads of Agencies and applicable Entities, their team members, the Board Chairpersons and Members, I thank you again for your invaluable service.

Very warm appreciation is, no doubt, in order for my wife, Dawn, and the rest of my family, along with my immediate support staff, for their dedicated input.

I must also again express appreciation to the Hon. Prime Minister for his continued confidence in me in the portfolio areas that I hold, and my Cabinet colleagues for their support and advice. Thanks also to you, Mr. Speaker, and the House staff, for continued assistance.

As usual, I wish to extend special gratitude to Central Clarendon, the constituency I have the honour of representing in this Honourable House. Thanks to my constituents for their trust and understanding, especially when my ministerial duties take me away from them for short periods of time.

Special respect to my Councillors/Caretaker, Melvin Jones, Trevor Morris, Inly Blake and Gary Douglas; the Constituency Executive, including Secretary Sharon Morgan; and the Constituency Workers, from PD Captains to Indoor Agents, Runners and Supporters in general, whose faith and loyalty have never been in doubt.

Our football team, Humble Lion, has had a rocky season, but managed to remain in the Digicel Premier League, offering a third opportunity to really make our presence felt. In demonstrating the fortitude for which we are noted in Central Clarendon, the team has become a source of great inspiration for the people of May Pen, Clarendon, where the potential for success through co-operation and determination has been clearly demonstrated. Very importantly too, the club provides employment for some 120 persons.

Likewise, we have the pleasure of a comprehensive basic school education programme, a plan for a dialysis centre; a HEART training school, a community music studio which has produced some top-line artistes so far; and continued progress on the long-term task of establishing the Herb McKenley Stadium.

All of that came out of a sustained programme of development at the constituency level, much like what has been demonstrated over the last three and a half years at the national level.

OPENING REMARKS

After three and a half years at the helm of the Ministry, I am happy to note the range of successes that have resulted from the positive outlook that has been taken with respect to the business of public administration. These successes have been achieved through highly focussed efforts centred around attracting private sector investment, embracing global success stories and best practices, and resuscitating discarded state assets. Critically in the mix too, have been our efforts to attract significant development assistance for the country's public infrastructure.

Chinese funding for the Jamaica Development Infrastructure Programme (JDIP) and possibly for highway expansions to come, along with investment in the Caribbean Aerospace College in the area of aeronautical training, are clear examples of the fulfillment of this investment thrust.

Guided by my 1-3-5-7-year programme of focus, the country has begun to reap the fruits of the Ministry's efforts, with many major successes emerging, including some which have defied the logics of long-time propaganda. Years one and two were about analysis and directions, with years three to five being about the initial major deliverables, such as are presently emerging.

Years five and beyond will coincide with the 2014 opening of the expanded Panama Canal and its huge transport possibilities, hence, the period up to then critically represents the time available to foster the development of our infrastructure to capitalise on the Panama development. I am therefore simply acknowledging the achievements while moving apace with the programme of work ahead.

My presentation today is simply about the facts surrounding the successes to date, the challenges that remain, and the plans in my pipeline that works, not about PNP/JLP bantering. When the facts are very strong, they should be presented simply and clearly so that all can see and judge for themselves what level of management has been and is at work on behalf of the people. This is within the context of good, participatory and consensus-oriented governance, providing fulfillment with due regard for accountability, transparency, public responsiveness, efficiency, equitability and inclusiveness with the people, within the ambit of the laws of the land.

So simplicity and clarity are what I am about this afternoon, not subdued in any way by any personal attacks being directed at my integrity, but more mellow on the job in delivering on the mandate from the Hon. Prime Minister. This comes automatically from the success that is being realised from the good old combination of very hard and purposeful work ,complemented by creativity and the vision of a new Jamaica.

THE DETAILS

In terms of that creativity, I will waste no time in pointing to examples of what we as a government have been able to achieve that were not even on the drawing board of the previous administration.

JUTC Asset Resuscitation Plan

Take the Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) as a case in point. With hundreds of out-of-service buses in its fleet, much of which were inherited as proposed scrap metal, a clear two-pronged approach had to be taken towards rebuilding the company's fleet over time. Hence, over the least two years, there has been a steady stream of new buses that have been acquired for the company under special arrangements with Belgium. That meant not only upgrading the service to general air-condition comfort as a means of raising the dignity of public transportation, but also introducing the first phase of the implementation of the Color-Coding Programme that has been developed by the Ministry to bring more order to the sector. Hence, as yellow as the sun, the future shines!

But buying new buses to bring back the JUTC fleet to the 700 units it once had was an extremely challenging proposition, as the cost involved was simply too much to be supported amidst the challenges of the ongoing global economic recession. So what did we do, simply left the bus service to decay like our predecessors did?

Definitely not! Amid the acquisition of hundreds of new, air-conditioned buses to convey average Jamaicans who need to understand and appreciate that the future could not be centred around sweaty and sub-standard transportation arrangements, the Government also sought to find a means of getting more units of the same standards without the prohibitive overall costs involved with new bus acquisition, to re-equip the JUTC to its desired fleet complement. The answer, after intense assessment, scrutiny and testing of the various options, has been the Brazilian rehabilitation model, which was successfully piloted in that country and is now scheduled to be implemented with PetroCaribe funding of US\$35 million, on an expanded basis, right here in Jamaica. The Brazilians are to come and bring some more of our once discarded JUTC buses to a state comparable to the very popular new, air-conditioned units under a programme that will gradually transfer the very important technology involved to local personnel, so that the initiative can be continued perennially by Jamaicans in Jamaica. That is what management is all about - willing the mind to find solutions, and having the grit and determination to bring those solutions to the fore. Oh, and there is the not too minor fact that each thoroughly rehabilitated bus, with air-conditioning capacity and all, will cost about a third of the cost for a new unit, although both will have virtually the same economic lifespan.

The initiative is poised to revolutionise heavy-duty automobile rehabilitation in Jamaica, where old units can be brought back to almost new, and hence generating significant job opportunities for technicians in the various auto refurbishing disciplines.

JRC Resuscitation

Over at the Jamaica Railway Corporation (JRC), the passenger train service has been out of business for almost two decades. Everybody who has been in charge of the ministry before, said they tried and essentially gave their best shot in this regard. But they all came to naught until someone began to get some straight answers about the volume of JRC assets across the country, and realised that with the existing budgetary constraints, the answer to the intense public desire for the resuscitation of the passenger rail service laid more in leveraging the corporation's wide asset base of well over \$1 billion in land and fixtures.

Again, intense vision and creativity were employed, in terms of using and leveraging the corporation's asset base, and on April 16 the first big sign of things to come was unfolded, and even earned the approval of my good friend and shadow

colleague. That kind of approval no doubt came with the acceptance that a virtual miracle had descended on the country, which was played out between May Pen and Linstead, which I guess I am allowed to remind the House, have long been the respective political bases of myself and my goodly colleague.

Of course, only a relatively few of us Jamaicans got in on that amazing train ride then, but before the end of the summer, we should all have the option, based on the success of the recent test run.

Vernamfield Resuscitation and Development

The same picture of abandonment of national assets also applies to Vernamfield, where the robust airstrips and other important logistical components were allowed to remain idle for far too long, when the global transportation sector has been busy positioning for the opportunities to come with the expanded Panama Canal. In seeking to develop Jamaica's overall transport policy along the lines of the model which Singapore used to revolutionise its transport sector, I have been forging the necessary linkages to effectively drive the model locally, and I have news for all who care to hear.

Mr. Speaker, I will say no more on the subject of lost opportunities by the previous administration at this point, except to remind Jamaicans that there is an ocean of difference between the philosophy of 'Mission Impossible', which was readily adopted back then, and the 'Mission is Possible' approach that I have consistently but realistically taken.

Other Major Successes

Having forcefully and creatively brought the relevance of my 1-3-5-7-year plan to the fore, it is becoming increasingly significant how many major national successes have been realised within the Transport and Works portfolios over the last three-and-a-half years, especially since last year. Additionally, as planned, there is so much more to come on stream to help justify the right decisions at the right time. I am referring to is my 1-3-5-7-year plan which called for the beginning of major deliverables by year three, running into years four and five, then kick-starting the deliverables in respect of the more technical, longer-term initiatives during years six and seven, obviously within the next term in office.

In keeping with my theme of generating growth and productive job opportunities and attracting investments to deliver on the commitments made, I will be focussed on the major initiatives, accomplishments, challenges and projections, instead of delving in great details on agency reports and so on. Those will be made available in a separate publication to be tabled in Parliament for the Sectoral Debate. For any member of the media who requires greater clarity in any

area than is mentioned today, an opportunity will be made available at a press briefing that is scheduled for tomorrow morning at the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, it should be understood that the Ministry's portfolio includes some 23 agencies, entities and boards, spanning the National Works Agency (NWA), the Road Maintenance Fund (RMF) and the National Road Operating and Constructing Company (NROCC) primarily on the works side, while the transport portfolio is comprised of rail, road, sea and land transportation involving a wide range of agencies and other organisations. From this overall network I will outline to this Honourable House, just some of the many major pluses that are either in the bag or well under way and in line for delivery quite soon.

Additionally, I will give an update on some of the longer-term initiatives, while visiting some of the challenges that continue to be with us, such as inadequate funding and the influence of some element of irresponsible Opposition politicking. From this overall picture, the country will know and can judge the stewardship of the Ministry and, by extension, the Government, which has noticeably gone into top gear in fulfilling the commitments that were made to the country.

The Works Portfolio

In looking at the Works portfolio, there is the now almost dreaded Jamaica Development Infrastructure Programme (JDIP), which the Opposition can't seem to know how to counter. Individually they write me asking for urgent attention to roads and other infrastructure in their constituencies in response to letters I sent to each and every MP, yet collectively, they have been making a nightmare of their periodic efforts to discredit the programme. My question is simple: If they are behaving like they are in response to the US\$400 million five-year-project now under way, how would they behave if I get the US\$2 billion that I really need to comprehensively address infrastructure needs across the island?

And very interestingly, the former administration failed to approve the Road Maintenance Master Plan which was completed back in 2005, even though the plan held great significance to external funding possibilities. Now in Opposition, they are clamouring for the Government to implement the same master plan almost overnight. Even more contradictory, out of fear of the electorate, the former administration refrained from applying any fuel tax to fund road rehabilitation, but is now clamouring for more road rehabilitation as the Opposition, while insisting on roll-backs in the gas tax which is funding the road rehabilitation programme.

They also talked about selection of roads under the JDIP and we gave them the selection criteria and process, which cannot be reasonably questioned. Then it

was sub-contracting under the project, which I have no input into, as the Government relates to only one contractor on the project – China Harbour Construction – as part and parcel of the loan agreement requirements with the China Exim Bank. Only in seeking for as many Jamaicans as possible to benefit from the programme did we ask the contractors to sub-contract as much as possible, resulting in China Harbour doing only a few of the major projects themselves, have I, as the portfolio Minister, had any real reference to the sub-contracting process, hence there is not much more that can be said about that criticism. The preferential buyers' credit loan agreement behind the funding of the programme speaks clearly about the strict terms and conditions of the agreement.

The clear and present reality is that the JDIP, as the most extensive infrastructure rehabilitation programme in the history of the country, came out of a very creative engagement of the fuel cess that was fought for and directed to the Road Maintenance Master Plan, to leverage the sort of funding to make a meaningful assault on infrastructure island-wide. That we put in the success column, no doubt, and the Opposition's determination to discredit the programme tells all and sundry how scared they are of this big road repair programme that just suddenly appeared before them.

To better streamline the development of the infrastructure generally, the Government, in fulfillment of another commitment to the people, has been striving to establish a Single Road Authority to ensure that there is one base of responsibility for the state of all public roads. That effort continues and the approach is already being taken in respect of the broad integration of parochial, housing scheme and farm roads on the JDIP schedule. Again this speaks to a Government that is about accountability, not one contented to shift the blame for particular road conditions from one arm of Government to another. Hence, another major plus this is for the present administration.

In respect of the maintenance of bridges, of the 736 on inventory, 134 are listed as being somewhat defective. However, this figure has been trending down, as a year or so ago, the defective listing was comprised of 146 bridges. Some 42 bridges are slated for replacement over the five-year duration of the JDIP, including 11 within the first year of the programme.

Traffic Management

Additionally, the NWA has been robust in developing its traffic management apparatus, with places like Montego Bay's town centre and the Elegant Corridor linking Trelawny with the Second City, being prime examples of the new features at work.

Also equipped or to be shortly equipped with the new traffic management technology are the following areas:

- Old Harbour, St. Catherine
- St. Ann's Bay to Trelawny on the Northern Coastal Highway
- Parade in Downtown Kingston
- Cross Roads, St. Andrew
- Spanish Town, St. Catherine
- Industrial Terrace, Kingston
- Waterloo/Old Church Road, St. Andrew
- Montego Bay Convention Centre
- Bogue Road in Montego Bay
- Harbour View, St. Andrew
- Dunrobin Avenue, St. Andrew

Some of the traffic signals are to include public surveillance systems, similar to what are already in place in a number of areas, with off-site control of the mechanisms.

Toll Road

In respect of the toll network, after taking some time to analyse the arrangements that the previous administration had left in place for the expansion of the network, we have finally been able to get Segment 1B1 going, between Sandy Bay and May Pen in Clarendon, which will later be extended to Williamsfield in Manchester. The period of delay involved critical looks at the high-cost funding approach that had been employed by the past government, and also at some very strange alignments for some segments of the highway. However, after all the challenges brought on by the unnecessary logistical considerations, Segment 1B1 is now under way, thanks to funding of US\$105 million at realistic interest rates. Mr. Speaker, that means infrastructure development, economic empowerment and, very importantly, more of the productive jobs, jobs, jobs that are needed. It is another success story for the Government in getting better terms and conditions for the project, which beckons much possibilities for the south central region of the island.

Air Transportation

In air transportation, the Norman Manley International Airport (NMIA) expansion has continued apace, with the face of the facility being entirely transformed and the service delivery, generally, being vastly improved. This is reflective of the responsibility that comes with transfer of governance from one administration to another. Now the expansion focus is on the runway, although this may have to be considered more thoroughly, as the Port Authority has expressed some concerns about possible hindrances to perspective port developments from runway expansion over certain stipulations.

However, the vast improvements at NMIA have positioned the facility for privatisation, which is a central plank of the air transportation plans.

This is, however, within the context of concerns about inadequate in-transit arrangements at both airports.

Open Skies Policy

Also pivotal within the air transport sector has been the Open Skies Policy, which has seen the realisation of direct air traffic linkages with 17 countries since March 2010. Only last week we signed off with Nigeria, and we are looking to do so with Ghana very soon, to ensure that there is a direct link with Africa, the motherland, by next year when we will celebrate our 50th Anniversary as a nation.

The list of Open Skies agreements achieved since the Government took office includes:

- Brazil
- Chile
- India
- Kuwait
- Singapore
- The United Kingdom
- United Arab Emirates
- China

The Open Skies policy approach speaks to the kinds of international logistic arrangements that are being forged as part of the broad Multi-Modal Transport Programme within the Ministry, which is another howling success for the Government on the global stage.

Boscobel Airport

The expansion of, and re-opening of the Ian Fleming Airport as the third international port of call by air, was another big plus for the Government. From both the high-end tourism and air transportation perspectives, the airport has held significance to a number of very important public policies, and has certainly reinforced the logics behind the Multi-Modal Transport Policy being unfolded.

Very soon we are to welcome a celebrated airline executive, the President of Net Jets at the airport, which signals the increasing global recognition of the logic behind the development of the facility. Need I inform this Honourable House of the excitement which was generated at the air show at the airport over the recent Easter weekend?

Vernamfield Development

Last, but of the greatest logistical significance in the area of air transportation is the Vernamfield development, which, for the very first time, is among the budget allocations. Hence, the myth is disappearing, as the initiative, which has implications as far-reaching as the resuscitation of the rail service, nears implementation on a phased basis. The facility, with its planned direct connectivity to the rail service, the toll network and the Port of Kingston, is the centre-piece of the Multi-Modal Transport Programme, and is the next major shock in store for the Opposition, which toyed with the idea for a long time before losing the opportunity to make good of it. Sorry to say, but with the railway coming back, the bauxite sector doing likewise, the tourism and agricultural sectors holding strong, and Vernamfield now firmly on the horizon, things are suddenly not looking too bright on the Opposition side, with all the excitement now in Government. For my part, you can all blame it on 1-3-5-7.

MARINE TRANSPORTATION

Cargo Shipping

On the marine transport side, there are plans to continue the expansion of the Port of Kingston, with the development of the Tinson Pen Logistic Centre fitted into the mix, connecting, of course, to Vernamfield by air, sea, rail and road in true inter-modal style.

The development plans for the Port of Kingston will include dredging of the Port, development of increased berthing facilities and the necessary infrastructure to support these developments, including the installation of the most modern cargo handling equipment and support technology.

In respect of our vision for the next five years, the Port Authority will be focussing on three critical Business Drivers which will have a significant impact on the Port's business strategies for future operations. These are:-

1. The Era of Mega Container Ships

By 2014, there will be 149 ultra-large container carriers on the seas, compared to the current 39 in operation worldwide. Shipping lines are clearly endeavouring to reap economies of scale by utilising these larger ships. These ships will certainly have a tremendous impact on world trade and ports, and what is quite evident is that only a few ports will be able to accommodate these mega liners.

Based on these changes in the shipping landscape, it is anticipated that shipping service patterns will be restructured, with greater emphasis on transshipment. It is believed that ultimately, there will be some five to six global hub ports, where mega container carriers will call as part of an equatorial round-the-world route. One of the hubs will be here in Kingston, representing the region and serving the US East Coast, Central and South America, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.

2) The Panama Canal Expansion

The Panama Canal expansion programme will enable 12,000 TEU vessels to traverse the Canal. It is this expansion of the Canal that is a major factor driving the increase in orders for the larger vessels, especially for cargo destined for the Americas.

3. Re-alignment of Trade Routes

Approximately 60% of the re-alignment of trade routes serving the North American markets includes cargo destined for the US East Coast and Mid-West. Traditionally, most of these cargo were off-loaded at ports located on the West Coast, mainly Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Shipping experts are of the view that upon completion of the Panama Canal expansion, a large portion of that cargo which is now transported overland to the East Coast and Mid-West, will no longer be shipped to the West Coast ports, due to several factors, such as congestion, inefficiencies and higher transportation cost.

In order to ensure that the Port of Kingston is fully equipped to handle the mega container vessels, the Port Authority plans to undertake:

- Dredging of the channel and turning basin to approximately 17 metres by 2014;
- Expanding the Port into Fort Augusta to provide additional berthing of 1,500 metres;
- Developing yard space of 70 hectares (173 acres); and
- Developing value-added logistics capabilities.

Based on industry projections, it is estimated that by 2020, the Port of Kingston will grow from the present 1.7 million TEU's per annum to approximately 5 million TEU's per annum, hence the focus on development of the facility.

Cruise Shipping

In terms of cruise shipping, let me pause to thank former Mayor of Falmouth, Jonathan Bartley, who from years back was advocating for the development of a cruise port in Falmouth. Having had the call heeded by the previous administration in terms of preliminary planning, the Good Lord, it seemed, determined that the Labour Party was right for the implementation stage, which we have taken from the drawing boards to the country at large and, indeed, the world!

Having completed the first phase of the mega project, the Falmouth Port went into operation in mid-February and has since welcomed an amazing total of just over 100,000 visitors. That extremely impressive figure stands as testimony to the fact that the new port which was developed by the Port Authority of Jamaica in partnership with Royal Caribbean Cruises Limited, has become recognised as a clear leader in the region and across the world, with industry authorities noting some of the highest ever visitor ratings and approval globally. This is due to the huge impact of the ongoing development of the town along nostalgic Georgian architectural lines in sync with the portside development, resulting in a broad community experience for the visitors, in contrast to regular ports of call.

Even the lame pretence of a threat to the cruise business in neighbouring Montego Bay and Ocho Rios has gone silent in the face of the awesome success in Trelawny, from where visitors have been regularly visiting both Ocho Rios and Montego Bay, along with other areas on the North Coast. No doubt, my friend Dr. McNeill should be okay by now, as everybody is now getting a piece of the action from the cruise business flowing weekly into Falmouth, which represents a huge accomplishment for the Government, especially within the context of the many efforts that were made to hinder progress on the project.

The development of the Falmouth Port produced hundreds of construction jobs, and is geared to generate at least 1,000 long-term jobs within the town and

wider parish. Already the new facility has been spurring huge investments in the tourism sector across the northern and north western coastlines, and property owners there are benefitting from the skyrocketing value of their real estate. There we go again, generating growth and positive job opportunities in fulfillment of commitments made.

But going back to the Montego Bay/Ocho Rios situation that Dr. McNeill raised as an issue, if there was even any merit to the concerns, rest assured that the Port Authority is geared at developing those cruise ports to make the Jamaican cruise sector even more competitive all-round.

Caribbean Maritime Institute

And still in the maritime sector, don't forget the continued development of the Caribbean Maritime Institute, where we have taken the enrollment from just over 200 to almost 1,000, with plans in place to increase that number to 3,000 in the near future, based on the volume of high-end job opportunities in existence globally, within the maritime sector. Of note is that pretty much all the qualified graduates from the institution over recent years, have secured jobs in mostly very lucrative positions, including within the very rewarding yachting industry. That again speaks to the fulfillment of the jobs, jobs, jobs commitment, which, in this case, is being generated through purposeful provision of educational opportunities geared at tapping into the global workforce.

LAND TRANSPORTATION

The JUTC

On the land transport side of the equation, the JUTC, as mentioned before, continues to raise its standards through the acquisition of new, high-quality buses and the boost to come from the planned rehabilitation of more of its old and out-of-use buses to virtually the standards of the new units.

In seeking to reform and organise the public transportation system generally, the critical question of proper designation of the various modes of buses and taxis has emerged. One of the sadly lacking factors within the system has been the absence of uniformity and standards like what the JUTC has brought to the sector over recent years, with the new, air-conditioned buses.

Defining a Taxi

In this regard, we have been seeking to determine what type of unit best suits the designation of a taxi, whether a four-seater Toyota Corolla or a nine-seater Mercedes Benz, for example. This ties into the Government's focus on making the import duty structure on vehicles work in favour of national development. Hence, we have the technical people conducting research to determine the best choices for us to work with. This relates to route taxis and taxis for hire generally. Of some concern has been the latter group, which is designated as hackney carriages, because some of the operators in that category tend to create problems by infiltrating the ranks of the route taxi operators.

With an appropriate definition of a taxi unit, including some offering wheelchair-carrying capacity, the appropriate duty regime will bring both uniformity and much improved standards to the public transport sector, much like the JUTC has been doing with its new yellow buses over recent years. In essence, with the right incentives in place, we will be able to separate the sheep from the goats, the serious people from the pretenders, sending the robots out of business or into conformity, as without this, they will not be able to compete with the legitimate operators, all colour-coded like the JUTC buses.

Rural/Urban Transport Plan

Similarly, with increasing focus on rural/urban transport planning and connectivity, the question of the ideal size buses for this purpose has been put into the mix for technical consideration. At this point, indications are that smaller type buses than those mostly within the JUTC's fleet will more appropriately serve the rural/urban transportation needs, for which a structured programme is being developed, including transportation for school children. This will be piloted in western Jamaica out of Montego Bay Metro, along with Ocho Rios, Santa Cruz and May Pen.

After listening to some of the absolutely filthy lyrics that were on CDs that were taken from the ill-fated bus that crashed in the Christiana area, resulting in the death of three students from Holmwood Technical, I am convinced that the conscience of the country at large is at stake if nothing is done over time to remedy much of the conditions under which school children are being transported daily, especially in rural Jamaica. For those in the media who can stomach it, the CD by one of Jamaica's most prominent recording artists, will be played at tomorrow morning's post-Budget presentation press conference at the Ministry, for all to understand the gravity of the problem which we face in this regard.

Back on the positive note, with new buses all around, plus older buses like new, colourful passenger trains back on track, uniformity among taxis, smaller and more compact buses for the Rural/Urban Transport Programme, mega cruise liners in Falmouth weekly and smaller liners across Montego Bay, Ocho Rios and Port Antonio, and Air Services Agreements producing direct flights to and from many

more countries and regions of the world, just what will the Opposition have to sell their case when the time comes around? Again, blame it on 1-3-5-7!

Buses for the Disabled Community

Oh, Mr. Speaker, please permit me to also inform this Honourable House that amidst the acquisition of buses for the JUTC, we have secured some special units to boost the complement of buses within the service that are designated and specially equipped to serve the special needs of members of the disabled community, including wheelchair-riding commuters. These units are to be rolled out into service at tomorrow's press briefing. These are smaller than the existing Special Services buses within the JUTC, which offers much more flexibility in terms of handling special circumstances and needs, and also in relation to handling group events among the physically-challenged community.

Other Land Transport Initiative

Add the expansion of the fleet and area of coverage by Montego Bay Metro bus company in western Jamaica, the continued examination of the public transportation arrangements for the second city, the pending introduction of a licence plate tracking system, and the creation of a Land Transport Authority, and we are beginning to understand and appreciate that for a change, the political directorate is on the ball within the Ministry of Transport and Works, in spite of the fact that for over two years now I have not had the benefit of a Junior Minister.

Jamaica Ultimate Tyre Company

Here again, I must pause to make special mention of a particular entity within the transport portfolio that has been directed along a path that demonstrates the scope of possibilities from good and efficient management. Jamaica Ultimate Tyre Company, a subsidiary of the JUTC, has over the last two years produced almost astounding improvements in its operational results. From a deficit position in 2008/2009, the company realised a significant profit the next year, and kept on that positive trend since then.

For that I must publicly laud the company's board, led by Chairman Dennis Chung, working in tandem with Paul Abrahams and Calvin Samuels; and its management under the direction of General Manager Kenry Jackson.