



MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT & REGULATORY AFFAIRS

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

**SUBJECT: The State of Public
 Transportation Buses**

29 September 2017

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of the House I rise today to give a Statement on the situation regarding our public buses.

The Department of Public Transportation has had a high number of buses out of service in recent months. This has been a challenge for the Government since taking office on 18 July. We also recognize this has been challenging for commuters, school students and visitors to the island.

What has been going on with buses for some time now is not a secret. For this reason, the Government believes it is imperative to be open about the situation – what it is we are dealing with and the planned way forward.

The reasons for the buses being out of service are numerous and varied. Some of the issues relate to design. Some of them are as a result of the bus fleet simply being old.

With respect to age, the bus fleet has an average age of eleven (11) years, when the industry norm is seven (7) years. In fact, we have some buses that are twenty (20) years old. Although new buses were purchased in 2009 and 2014, this was insufficient to keep the average age of the fleet commensurate with best practice. To remedy this, more needs to be done to augment a fleet that is on the road 18 hours a day, almost every day of

the year. The newer buses are being utilised more often in the rotation, which, in turn, means they are aging faster. The remainder of the fleet is older and, with so many buses out of service, the Department of Public Transportation (DPT) is unable to carry out a programme of preventive maintenance, as it has done in the past.

However, I am pleased to report that, in addition to the four new buses already ordered and due on island at the end of the year, the Office of Project Management and Procurement is currently reviewing a Request for Proposal (RFP) prepared by the Department which seeks tenders for up to eight new buses. As stated in the Throne Speech, the Government will continue with this long overdue re-investment in the bus fleet.

Mr Speaker, with the new buses on order, DPT mechanics have used their knowledge to eliminate, as much as possible, design flaws that plague the existing fleet. For example, the engine compartment on the buses, as received from the manufacturer, is enclosed. However, in Bermuda's summer temperatures, this results in overheating of the vehicle, which puts it out of service. The new buses will have vented engine compartments to ensure sufficient air circulation around the engine.

Overheating, generally, can result in the bus being put out of service when air conditioning fails. If the bus does not have windows that open, then it is difficult to provide relief for passengers and bus operators. The new buses will have windows that open.

The proximity and proliferation of Bermuda's roadside vegetation is another issue. DPT has worked with the current bus manufacturer, MAN, to find a solution that addresses the infiltration of vegetation into the radiator, which is the main part of a bus's cooling system. This involves fitting a pan under the radiator to stop debris from being sucked in and causing overheating.

Also, buses with fabric seats are susceptible to spillage of drinks or to rainwater when windows are left open. Something as simple as wet seats can put a bus out of service. The new buses will not have fabric seats. This is possibly less comfortable but it will be easier to keep the buses clean and dry.

On the matter of cleanliness, I should point out that all buses have signage indicating "No food. No drink." This is to avoid food scraps being left behind as a bug infestation can put the bus out of service. This is an issue

of human behavior, and we can all help to make a difference by changing our individual behaviors on the bus.

Mr Speaker, no doubt Honourable Members will want to know what is being done now to reduce the level of buses out of service.

I can report that, with respect to the engines overheating, vents are being retrofit on the existing buses in the fleet. In addition, new radiators are being installed as well.

To address the high temperatures in the interior of the buses, an appropriately qualified bus operator was transferred to the maintenance division to assist with and hasten air conditioning repair. Also, DPT is working to ensure all buses have working fans and sun visors in the operator's compartment, in addition to seeking quotes to tint the driver's side window. These measures will reduce the likelihood of a bus being taken out of service due to temperatures that are too high. Remember: it is not necessarily 'engine problems' that cause a bus to be taken out of service.

Also, the Government supports the filling of funded, vacant posts in the Department of Public Transportation. With the age of the fleet and the difficulty of maintaining sufficient numbers of buses on the road, additional mechanics are being hired. Once their training on the bus systems is complete, they will bring much needed extra manpower to the maintenance division.

An important element of the maintenance process is the tracking, ordering and control of inventory. Fully functional online inventory tracking is not entirely available at present but the Government considers resolution of this matter to be a high priority. The Department will be working to achieve a more complete online inventory system.

All of this, **Mr Speaker**, provides some assurance that DPT is addressing the challenges encountered with the existing fleet of buses, to the best of its ability, plus taking steps to ensure the new buses do not start service in Bermuda with the current disadvantages.

For the travelling public, however, there remains the challenge of consistency with respect to the bus schedule. As announced previously, the Department of Public Transportation has hired minibuses to service the schools. However, until the level of buses out of service is consistently

below forty (40), it will continue to be extremely difficult to fulfill the promise of the published schedule for the general public.

To assist in supplying the travelling public with timely and, to the extent possible, accurate information on buses and bus routes, DPT is working with the Department of Communications to improve the flow of cancellation information. The existing process of notification is antiquated, cumbersome and fraught with difficulties. Not least, it is hampered by the sudden change in circumstances for each bus. Vehicles can be pulled out of service without any prior notice for any number of reasons. On many occasions, out of service buses have outstripped the number of in-service buses.

A re-vamped communications process will need to be more nimble and responsive to ever-changing circumstances, at least until such time as the bus fleet is stabilized.

Working together, the Departments of Communication and Public Transportation have already implemented a system of direct notification of bus cancellations to media outlets. We expect to see further improvements to the communications process shortly, and will continue to work towards additional enhancements where possible.

Mr Speaker, the difficult economic times encountered in recent years and decisions made on spending priorities have resulted in an overall lack of investment in material and human resources for the Department of Public Transportation. Most unfortunately, this means that DPT is unable to provide the published and expected bus service despite the hard-working efforts of its staff. Notwithstanding, DPT has, and will continue, to put into place short-term remedies while, at the same time, working towards long-term effective solutions. As such, the Government would like to acknowledge and thank the public for its patience at this time.

Looking ahead, **Mr Speaker**, three additional actions are in progress or will be shortly. First, DPT is seeking to fill existing vacancies within the Department, particularly in the maintenance division. Second, the Department is proceeding with development of a new strategic plan. This will help with respect to bus transportation system structure, direction and issues. The strategic plan will be valuable when looking at DPT's role as work commences on the third action: the Ministry's Green Paper on Transportation. The Green Paper will be a wide ranging review of Bermuda's transportation needs, desires and options. There will be extensive opportunities for the community to participate, contribute and learn. As recently as last week I attended a Town Hall meeting, with

Public Transportation representatives, organized by the Ministry of Health and the Disability Advisory Council on “Transportation Services for Persons with Accessibility Challenges.” This clearly demonstrated the need for further dialogue, and highlighted the many viewpoints that ought to be integrated into the debate. As work on the Green Paper progresses, I anticipate a lively and enlightening discussion, along with the development of innovative and workable solutions.

Thank you, **Mr Speaker.**