



Tobago's Public Transportation Service

A Proposal for the Enhancement of the
Public Transportation Service in Tobago

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BUS SERVICE IN TOBAGO

Introduction and Discussion of Issues

As with most essential services in Tobago (such as the air bridge, the ferry and PTSC) that are head quartered in Trinidad, there are gaps in service and efficiencies that need to be addressed. You can gauge the level of frustration of Tobagonians about the lack of resources, money, etc. by reading the local newspaper or listening to the Tobago centric shows on the radio. The issue being discussed at the moment is full internal self-government. Tobagonians have come to the realization that in order to obtain the quality of services we deserve we must provide them ourselves.

The Public Transport Service (PTSC) in Tobago is currently the responsibility of the national government of Trinidad and Tobago. Despite the cries of Tobagonians and promises from the central government, the quality of service has deteriorated over the years to the point where there is no bus terminal, no central location to buy tickets and very few buses running. The System is inefficient, unorganized and unreliable. Oftentimes you can find yourself waiting for a bus that may never come. This occurs because buses are old and break down frequently, and when service on routes gets canceled there is no way for customers to know this unless they are physically at the main terminal. You can call the PTSC contact number but no one answers. This results in the use of an alternative transport system that becomes too expensive for the average citizen.

Recognizing the importance of a well designed and functioning public transport system to the island, the THA has decided to setup its own transportation service ([read here](#)). For an island the size of Tobago both in its square footage and population, an effective, reliable and efficient bus service would be a game changer. This will have a major impact on the various sectors of the island. Some examples are the environment, as people will have less reason to use their cars; the tourist industry, as visitors will be able to explore the island very inexpensively; and on the daily lives of residents in terms of reduced costs, reduced commuting time and reduced stress.

Ever since I can remember I always liked taking the bus and each time I visited Tobago it was no different. It allowed me to relax and take in the beautiful scenery outside the window, talk to other riders and the driver on the way to my destination. A typical bus ride would be a trip to Mt Irvine Beach where I would spend the day. But in my attempt to return to the Scarborough terminal I had to ask folks at the beach facilities for an approximate time the bus would be passing since there was no place I could get that information. Every time I would stand by the roadside in the scorching heat for about 15 -20 minutes before I would flag down a car since I had no idea when the bus would arrive. I am sure my experience is not unique but in fact is a very common experience for many people forcing them to use alternative and more expensive forms of transport.

Proposed Solution

This document is a framework for enhancing and adding value to the new Public Transportation Service (PTS) that the THA is planning for Tobago. It will serve to answer the question “Where is the bus?” I propose a system be setup to track the buses. Such a system will consist of a GPS enabled bus, software/server that collects/stores bus data (location, speed, route, direction, etc.) and software/application to access/display bus data.

Why a tracking system? The tracking system will allow the users of the PTS to find out where any bus is currently located and when it will arrive at its destination. They would do this either via a web application (mobile or PC), SMS message or a call to THA’s 211 service. This tracking system will also instill confidence in consumers using the PTS since actual arrival times of buses will be readily available and service will be reliable.

On the Administrative side, a real-time tracking system will provide the PTS dispatchers and managers with the buses’ location at all times and this will enable them to create a more efficient service to the public. For example, buses can be managed so that they don’t follow each other too closely along the route; or if there is a road blockage of some sort dispatchers can alert drivers on the route to make the necessary detours, which would minimize inconvenience to customers.

Another huge benefit of having this system is the information collected which can be used in conjunction with a yearly customer survey to be analyzed for further improvement of the PTS. The data collected will be invaluable and will reveal trends that will inform decisions about the future growth and management of the service.

The tracking system does not have to be as sophisticated, complex or expensive as those in larger urban centers like New York or London, but will provide similar benefits such as reduced waiting times and uncertainty, and increased ridership. Providing a new fleet of buses is the perfect time to introduce this system to protect and enhance this investment while gaining enormous benefits in service to riders and efficiencies to management.

The tracking system I am proposing will be:

1. Simple to use by both riders and PTS employees
2. Customized for use in Tobago
3. Inexpensive and flexible
4. Accessible via the web, text and THA’s 211 system

The system will be hosted in the cloud and use open source software. This reduces costs due to the elimination of hardware, software and associated licenses. It also gives the flexibility of changing vendors when desired, adding new features and upgrading to newest versions.

With my experience and technical skills, as well as my working relationship with the tracking software developers, I can create an application that is designed specifically for Tobago. In addition, the THA will not be dependent on outside consultants for technical support and training but on someone who not only lives and works on the island but who also uses the system.