



**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

*Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities
(including the THA)*

Held on Wednesday April 27th, 2016

[10:15a.m. to 1:12p.m.]

Subject matter: Inquiry into the administration and operations of the Tobago House of Assembly in relation to Financial Allocations, Tourism, Agriculture and Transport.

Objectives of the inquiry

The objectives of the inquiry are:

Sufficiency and management of allocations

- To assess the sufficiency of the annual budget allocation and the management of its resources.

Tourism

- To determine the current condition of the sector
- To assess the THA's strategies for attracting domestic, regional and international visitors.
- To determine the status of initiatives/projects aimed at improving Tobago's marketability as a Tourist destination

Agriculture

- To determine the level of participation within the agriculture sector.
- To determine the hindrances to the expansion of the Agriculture sector and the solutions/strategies that are being implemented.
- To assess the extent to which productive linkages have been established between the agriculture and tourism industries.

Transportation

- To assess the current state of inter-island transportation services.
- To assess the reliability of the public transport system in Tobago, particularly in rural areas.

Venue: The Victor E. Bruce Financial Complex, 6-10 Post Office Street, Scarborough, Tobago.

Committee members

The following committee members were present:

- i. Mr. H. R. Ian Roach (Chairman)
- ii. Ms. Ramona Ramdial, MP (Vice-Chairman)
- iii. Mr. Darryl Smith, MP
- iv. Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus
- v. Mr. Nigel De Freitas
- vi. Mr. Daniel Solomon

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the THA appeared before the Committee:

- i. Mr. Raye Sandy, Chief Administrator, THA;
- ii. Ms. Jacqueline Job, Administrator, Finance and Enterprise Development;
- iii. Ms. Esther Pilgrim-Soanes, Director of Finance, Finance and Enterprise Development;
- iv. Ms. Shelly Trim, Budget Analyst IV, Finance and Enterprise Development;
- v. Mrs. Petal-Ann Roberts, Senior Financial Analyst, Finance and Enterprise Development;
- vi. Ms. Cheryl-Ann Solomon, Administrator, Tourism and Transportation;
- vii. Mrs. Frederica Brooks-Adams, Director Tourism, Tourism and Transportation;
- viii. Mr. Samuel Henry, Transportation Coordinator, Tourism and Transportation;
- ix. Ms. Gwen Toppin, Management Accountant, Tourism and Transportation;
- x. Ms. Nevlín Renwick, Administrator, Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment;
- xi. Ms. Ruby Warner, Technical Officer, Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment;
- xii. Mr. Carl Murray, Agricultural Officer II, Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment;
- xiii. Mr. Abdallah Chadband, Specialist Engineer, Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment;

- xiv. Ms. Karen Shaw, Agro Investment Specialist, Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment;
- xv. Ms. Wendy Guy-Hernandez, Administrator, Infrastructure and Public Utilities;
- xvi. Mr. Henry Cook, Assistant Deputy General Manager Operations, Infrastructure and Public Utilities;
- xvii. Ms. Sherrilyn Paul, Project Officer II, Infrastructure and Public Utilities;
- xviii. Mrs. Patricia Clarke, Assistant Operations Manager, Public Transport Service Commission;
- xix. Mr. Barry-lee Graham, Supervisor, Mechanical Engineering, Public Transport Service Commission;

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issued discussed during the hearing:

Issues raised with officials of the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development

- Whether the THA has identified other streams of revenue outside the tourism sector;
- The prospect of sport tourism as a potential revenue earner stream and whether the THA has developed a sports policy.
- The last Report of the Auditor General on the Audited Financial Statements of the THA to be submitted to Parliament was for the financial year ending 2007.
- The THA has submitted audited financial statements to the Auditor General for the years 2008-2013.
- The justification(s) for the increase in financial resources o the THA since 2012.

Issues raised with officials of the Division of Tourism and Transport

- The amount of money the THA has spent on eradicating sargassum seaweed and whether these fund were derived from a Disaster Relief Fund;
- The underperformance of Studley Park Quarry and its potential to generate revenue;
- Possible projects to earn foreign exchange other than in Tourism;
- Whether there are specific Marketing campaigns that target domestic tourist visiting Tobago from Trinidad;
- The capacity and reliability of air transportation between Tobago and Trinidad;
- The strategies in place to identify and plan for peak periods on the air bridge;
- The lack of accommodation suitable to meet the needs of disabled persons in Hotels and Guest Houses;
- The lucrative niche in Tourism that the THA is focusing on;

- The amount the amount spent on the acquisition and renovation of the Manta Lodge and Sanctuary;
- The inability of the Tourism Division to generate profits from the Tobago Jazz Festival 2016;
- The inability of Tobago officials to distinguish domestic tourists from those within the Caribbean region;
- The reasons for a Marina in Tobago;
- Factors affecting Foreign Direct Investment in Tobago;
- The reasons for the decline of tourists visiting to Tobago;
- The inadequate number of Public Transportation Service Commission (PTSC) buses available in Tobago;
- The challenges experienced in providing a reliable bus service in Tobago due to the small fleet;
- The unpredictable nature of an aged fleet of buses that undergo maintenance periodically;
- The reasons for the decline in visitors to “Little Tobago” and “Bird of Paradise Island”.
- The amount of money expended on the promotion of Tobago’s unique brand of tourism;
- The reluctance of the THA to apply an international hotel rating system in Tobago;
- The challenges faced by the THA in terms of Tourism and Transportation.
- The absence of a policy and a legal framework in respect of hotel ownership.

Issues raised with officials of the Agriculture, Marketing, Marine Resources and the Environment

- The volume of agricultural products that Tobago exports;
- Actions taken by the THA to increase the value added to agricultural produce;
- Focus on any agro-tourism products;
- The opening of the new Packing House Facility;
- Plans to expand agricultural production in Tobago;
- Measures that are being implemented to reduce the reliance on foreign goods in the Hotel Industry;
- Greenhouses at Roxborough;
- The possibility of utilizing CEPEP in the agricultural sector;
- Strategies for encouraging young people to get involved in Agriculture in Tobago;
- Security of Land Tenure;
- The most pressing challenges in the Division achieving its mandate;
- The number of vacant positions within the Division of Agriculture;
- The renovation of the Scarborough Market.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

Contact the Committee's Secretary

You may contact the Committee's Secretary at jscasasc@tparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283

Committees Unit

April 28th 2016