

Mr. Speaker:

I proudly rise on behalf of the indomitable, hardworking and long suffering people of Long Island. I am honoured to represent their interests in this place.

Mr. Speaker:

Before I proceed, I crave your indulgence to wish happy belated birthdays to two of my biggest, most hardworking supporters—Mr. Elias Cartwright (7<sup>th</sup> February, aged 65) and Mr. Jason Cartwright (celebrated yesterday, aged 65).

I wish to also extend my condolences to the family of Mrs. Sheila Wells. May she rest in peace.

NLIHS Basketball Jamboree....

Police Church Service.....

Mr. Speaker:

I applaud the Member for Carmichael for his leadership in presenting such a Bill. I wish to also thank him for his efforts.

Today, I rise in support of my mentor.

I wholeheartedly support this Bill to amend the Roads Act.

Frankly, I believe that much beyond the utility companies, it imbues a sense of accountability; it keeps subdivision developers and any other person seeking to excavate roads honest.

The amendment to section 7, wherein the fine levied has been increased from \$75 dollars to \$10,000 dollars will cause all and sundry to think twice. Frankly, just yesterday, I held a meeting with the GM and Executives (operations) and managers charged with oversight of waste and leaks, road reinstatement and so on. I, admittedly, impressed upon them in no uncertain terms that WSC is not to ever be tagged with a fine of \$10,000 and that departmental consequences—given revamped policies and SOPs that the Board will deliberate upon at its next meeting—will be instituted and strictly enforced.

Frankly, given the amendment to section 11 (a), which increases the area to be restored from twenty yards to one hundred feet, it is expected that the road network—especially new corridors—would not be ruined by bumps and uneven patches in the roads soon after road works are done. As a private citizen, nothing was more frustrating that riding on a newly paved road, only to see utility companies and others digging it up a week or two later and patching it in such a hodge-podge/patchwork manner that road became uneven; that what I call “road mounts”, similar to a pitchers’ mound in the middle or the sides of the road, made the driving experience most uncomfortable.....not to mention defacing a newly paved road. The amendment will

call upon road contractors and utilities to ensure that the repaved sections blend in, that the new works seamlessly fits into the road as it were, that the roads are restored to the its previous standard (or better).

I would like to thank the hardworking staff at WSC for their efforts in the field. However, I will find it most unacceptable for WSC to breach. To those persons listening at WSC, note that WSC is not expected—under any circumstances—to be committing any infractions whilst this Member sits as Executive Chairman.

Mr. Speaker:

The new schedule—which features an application for permit to excavate in any public road (which ranges from general excavation to asphalt restoration or landscaping to sidewalks, etc), notices to the COP and the granting of an excavation permit—will keep all players accountable. Now, one would be aware of exactly which of the utility companies is undertaking work, as opposed to the current guess work as to whether it is WSC, BPL, Aliv, BTC, Cable.

### **WSC**

Mr. Speaker:

Dug-up roads and potholes are a nagging pet peeve for me.

Personnel at WSC can attest to my annoyance when I am driving and noticing open trenches where work has seemingly been completed and the road hasn't been reinstated; or when I receive a call from Minister Bannister highlighting areas he would've driven through and taken notice of the same.

I have a low tolerance for potholes and craters in the road, particularly those left by any of the utility companies or contractors. A few years ago, I was driving my car and fell into what can only be likened to a crater. That day, though I had limited time and had to return to the office for deadline, both tires on the left side of the car were busted. Imagine that.....especially with cars having only one “dummy” tire in the trunk. Needless to say, that annoyed me to no end. What's more, they were low profile tires which cost me \$140 apiece—that is, \$280—to have replaced. Even more, the time lost could never been recovered.

We accept that some traffic congestion is unavoidable. It becomes unbearable when it drags on.

Mr. Speaker:

Through you sir, I say to the Minister.....perhaps, we should also consider a lane rental scheme, involving daily fees for roadworks on the busiest streets at peak times. Notably, pilots conducted in London and Kent led to a reduction in traffic jams given that entities were incentivised to work on quieter roads or outside the rush hour. This would also encourage companies to collaborate with each other to stop roads being dug up

multiple times. This would also cause utility companies and contractors to curtail the time spent in occupation of the road.

Mr. Speaker:

In the spirit of greater collaboration, we will be reaching out to our sister utility companies. I know that the Minister is also a proponent of this approach. I met with the former BPL Board with a view to fostering a sense of greater collaboration on multiple fronts and intend to do so with the current Chairman and the Board. Such efforts will not be limited to BPL as we will reach out to the other utility companies to determine areas in which we could collaborate and save on costs (for e.g. joint fuel purchases) and, how utilities can collaborate relative to works on road ways, in an effort to avoid this very frustrating trend where one utility would dig up the road and perform works this week, only to have another do the same nearby or in the same place in another week or two.

Mr. Speaker:

In 2018, road reinstatement contractors executed approximately \$975,000 of road reinstatement work for WSC. These works were executed by 20 different contractors at the present reinstatement rate is \$5/square foot which was set by WSC in March 2012. The bulk (97%) of the \$975,000 in work is attributed to three (3) principal operations, namely: -

1. Waste & Leaks/Leakage Control – 46%
2. Mains Renewals and Long Service Connections – 27%
3. New Water Connections – 24%

East Grand Bahama, WSC—though cut by \$5 million last budget— will undoubtedly need additional funds this budget to supplement our collections drive and other efforts to cut waste and imbue a culture of efficiency!

The present SOP is that once a WSC team completes work and returns to the JFK Compound, all of their completed work orders (WO) are closed in City Works and if road reinstatement is required, a Road Reinstatement WO is generated and forwarded to the Road Reinstatement Coordination Team (RRCT). The RRCT then visits the site, measures and marks out the work to be done and return to the office. Works are then batched and assigned to contractors on a rotational and availability basis.

Going forward, it will be mandated that these work orders are immediately generated. We will be sourcing additional handhelds for the same to be closed in the field upon completion.

The present MOPW target is that main (arterial/collector) roads should be reinstated with 48 hours of excavation and side roads/subdivisions roads as promptly as possible.

We are revising the SOP to improve the timeliness and quality of road reinstatement work and also to ensure that prior to and during the execution of the works, the inconvenience to vehicular traffic is reduced.

Present challenges include but are not limited to: -

1. WSC present backfilling and compaction activity requires improvement. Quality backfill material is now being purchased on a regular basis, each of the three (3) major operations responsible for roadway excavations now have an assigned small dump truck and as part of the MOPW Utility Coordination programme, MOPW is scheduling a upcoming training session (led by a FDOT Trainer) for all utilities regarding trench compaction. Further WSC investment will be required to purchase the required compaction equipment and critical staffing needs must be urgently addressed to provide adequate personnel to perform this activity. If the excavations are properly backfilled and compacted, the drivability over these works which awaiting reinstatement will be much improved as compared to our present practices.
2. Given the long list of contractors used, many of them do road reinstatement on a part time basis and also have other business operations. Further, many of the contractors are very small contractors with very limited resources including cash flow, which results in many complaints about WSC's payment timeline and many of them are unable to execute another job which awaiting payment for a prior job.
3. The present WSC requirements for our contractors are limited and issues such as minimum installation/day rates, minimum equipment (hot boxes) specifications and flagmen, signage & general safety for vehicular traffic all require better definition.

I am happy to hear that plans are in place to develop a new hot mix plant at Baha Mix. The BM plant suffered a major fire in 2018.

To improve the timeliness and quality of our reinstatement including improving vehicular conditions prior to and during reinstatement works, the SOP changes will see the New Providence Operations instituting and enforcing revised trench backfilling and compaction requirements for all NPO excavations in conjunction with corporate commitments to fund the human and equipment resource requirements.

Obviously, given the limitations on the Family Islands, adjustments will be made but factors such as availability and the realities on the ground are considerations for SOPs.

Mr. Speaker:

To contractors, I say, "hear ye, hear ye".....you will be struck off of the list if your delay on reinstatement works, if you cost WSC any fines and if you take a job and don't complete it within the agreed timeframe. Hear ye, hear ye!

Last night, I reviewed a road reinstatement report, citing the works done by all contractors, how much they made and so on.

We are reviewing our list of contractors and the activities of contractors in the list. We will also revamp our pre-qualification process. Given the proposed amendments, WSC will shortlist contractors and lean particularly towards those who can assure us of immediate mobilization.

Contractors would be required to: -

- A. Have a dedicated team assigned to their respective area of responsibility a minimum of 5-day/week.
- B. Have a minimum hot box capacity of ten (10) tons. Given the challenges with having a consistent supply of asphalt, this would allow contractors to store the asphalt, to have the asphalt at the ready and be able to work on weekends.
- C. Have a minimum installation rate of, say, four (4) tons/day.
- D. Have a minimum cash flow capacity. We find that some contractors don't have the money and they are delayed due to it, oftentimes rabidly pursuing us a day after submission of invoices though the contracts speak to a 30 day turnaround.
- E. Be responsible for the provision of signage, flagmen and other safety requirements to meet MOPW Traffic Management approval.
- F. Be responsible for site clean-up within 24 hours of excavation completion.

WSC will also be recruiting additional safety managers for site management.

It must be noted that these changes will not come without some social commentary in that the present system utilizes many small contractors and some of these contractors employ men who would be challenged to obtain employment elsewhere for a variety of factors. However, the present WSC practice of using up to 20 different small Contractors, some with very limited resources, does not best serve WSC's interest with respect to WSC's responsibility for timely and quality road reinstatement.

The revamped policy will also feature departmental consequences and disciplinary action for breaches of protocol.

Mr. Speaker:

I have directed that a right sizing exercise of all WSC departments be done in an effort to assess which departments have too many people, which ones are understaffed and attain a general overview of capacity. I have already seen preliminary reports and, based upon my observations, I have directed that the road reinstatement and construction departments be bolstered. No doubt, there will be internal transfers; however, we will also be hiring qualified and experienced persons to bolster our road reinstatement and construction units.

Mr. Speaker:

We are looking at contractors who are fully capable of carrying out FDOT reinstatement. The MOW is currently or will be undertaking FDOT training for utilities as well as contractors. That training will address backfilling/compaction and other related matters. I encourage any contractor interested in doing business with WSC to attend.

Mr. Speaker:

I have directed that WSC purchase one or two asphalt hotbox trailer, a recycler and a test meters. This would equip in house teams to mobilize. With respect to the test meter, it would ensure that when roads are compacted, it is at FDOT standard—this would avoid the sinking of quarry/roads that we have seen throughout the archipelago. Along with these purchases, a regimented maintenance plan is being implemented.

Mr. Speaker:

Taking a cue from the Minister, I have also directed that WSC implements a hotline and email address for persons who see WSC working, observing trenches left open for extended periods and not reinstated— call us and email WSC! The hotline number will be shared shortly.

WSC will be taken all the requisite steps to ensure that the speed with reinstatement and the quality of works are on par.

Let me also note that I will be conducting unannounced spot checks at various WSC project sites.

Today, all of us in this place have the ability to make the necessary changes we would wish to see now and when we return to our lives as private citizens.

I applaud the Member for Carmichael.

Mr. Speaker, I support this amendment.