

24<sup>th</sup> October 2010

Dear Editor:

IS THE AIRPORT HIGHWAY OF VALUE TO BAHAMIANS?

Recently, the Nassau Guardian carried a letter from Mr. Philip Davis, MP, with reference to the contract signing to create a four lane highway from the International Airport to the 'six-leg roundabout' at Thompson Blvd.

Like Mr. Davis, I have been researching the government's websites looking for information on the design but, alas, they still have yet to put the information online. So much for transparency.

Mr. Davis made a request of "those Bahamians with the technical and financial backgrounds to guide us on a full appreciation of this matter to weigh in on the issue." I am not one of "those Bahamians with the technical and financial backgrounds" but I am a citizen upset that we are wasting money on building "Sol (for sunshine) Highway".

This is a project, not before its time, but one outside of logic. Mr. Davis makes a very clear argument about the foolishness of the government's argument with reference to the use of a Chinese construction company using Chinese nationals because the loan from the Chinese government owned Export-Import bank is at a low interest rate, so there is no need for me to go there.

Mr. Davis asks, as well, "How is the Bahamian public to receive benefit for their investment" in this lavish project?

I spoke with a manager from BEC who said that he thought it would cost \$4 to \$5Million per mile to put all the utilities underground. \$28Million to \$35Million expenditure with but two obvious benefits, i.e., aesthetically pleasing (no poles with electrical and telephone wires) and insurance against hurricane damage. Other benefits escape me. Is this worth up to \$35Million for a seven mile distance?

With up to \$35Million for underground utilities we are left with \$35Million to possibly purchase some private land, build two totally new lanes and rebuild the existing two lanes (accepting that they will cost the same) and build "dense landscaping" to quote the Prime Minister. Even if this is a fair price, where is the need to build the roadway? Anyone who drives to and from the airport along the John F. Kennedy Highway now at any time of day or night will be able to confirm that there is no slow traffic movement except at the Gladstone Road junction. Going east or west one gets into slow movement in the morning and in the afternoon from Gladstone Road going east. Fix this using a Bahamian contractor of the same talent as the one who built the Tonique Darling Highway.

PHILIP P. SMITH

And while in a problem fixing mode, why not consider using overpasses at the east-west highway's junctions with East Street and similar locations of massive traffic backups in the morning and afternoon. We could handle it; after all, we already know how to transit from street to bridge and vice-versa.

And while you're at it, why not bite the bullet and take a shot at fixing the public transport system. Available for a free read is the 62Foundation's considered paper on 'Public Transportation in The Bahamas'- available at [www.62foundation.org](http://www.62foundation.org). You might actually find that with a properly working public transportation system in New Providence we could stop tearing up trees and paving over everything. We could reduce the importation of auto gasoline and remove a lot of tension from the road travelling public. Maybe even consider building some bike paths to encourage the use of bicycles, especially for short runs and safe exercise.

[Studies have](#) demonstrated: "The simple truth is that building more highways and widening existing roads, almost always motivated by concern over traffic, does nothing to reduce traffic. In the long run, in fact, it increases traffic."

We won't have a single argument in place in favour of the \$71Million 'Sunshine Highway' if we did these things, so I don't suppose that the Government will do any of them. And I don't expect that "those Bahamians with the technical and financial backgrounds" will actually weigh in, since they don't want to risk annoying anyone in the Government even though they will say in private that the money is a waste and the project as described by the Prime Minister is, in fact, anti-Bahamian.

I remind you of another statement by Mr. Davis: "The government is not supposed to be the overlord but, rather, it should be the servant of the People answerable to the People."

The Canadian journalist and activist June Callwood advised in 2007: "If any of you happens to see an injustice, you are no longer a spectator, you are a participant. And, you have an obligation to do something." If this tremendous expenditure on the airport roadway is wrong- and, therefore, an injustice against the Bahamian people- do we have the luxury of just letting it happen? Those who can offer objective advice and guidance on effective reactions to the people have a responsibility to do so.

Any takers?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. P. Smith', written in a cursive style.

Philip P. Smith