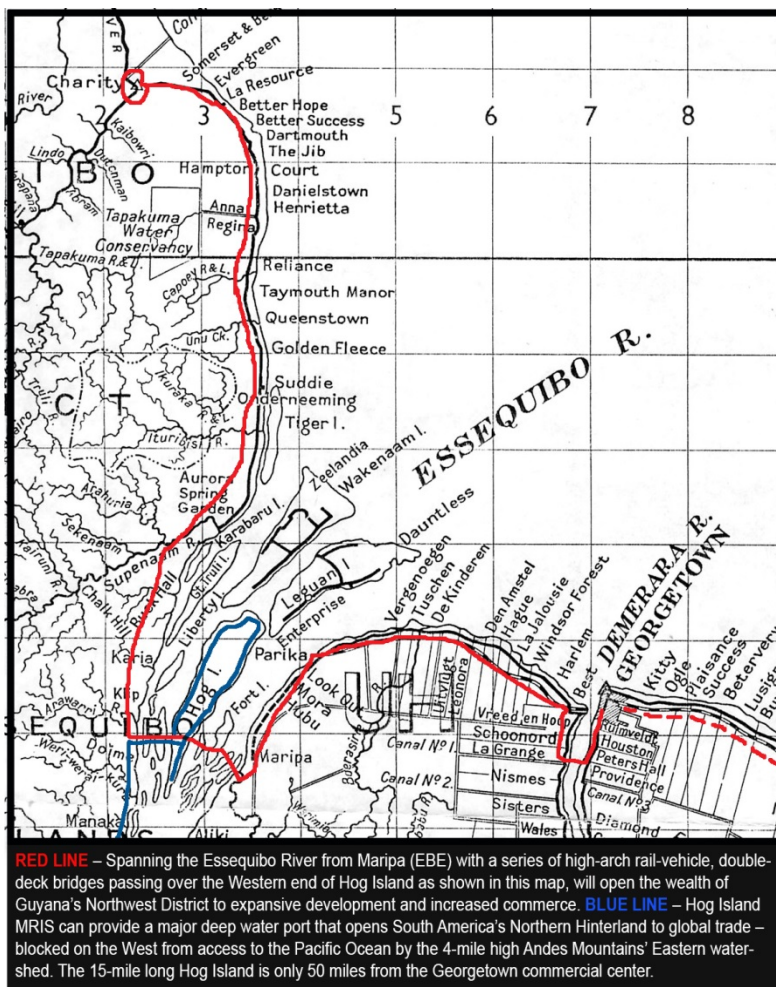


National/Regional Transportation Infrastructure Options – How About a Big Concept?

An April 13, 2017, *Guyana Chronicle* report on the preliminary findings for the Demerara Bridge feasibility study by Lievens CSO, indicated a proposed three-lane design with two-lane AM and PM lane reversals rather than four-lanes, two in each direction, that would create traffic volume unsupportable for the current road network. At the same time they unearthed their finding of a current significant increase in bridge traffic resulting from a growing economy and suggested a Houston to Versailles location as the present bridge site is plagued with heavy traffic. A line nonchalantly placed at the article’s end affirmed that a floating, fixed low-level or fixed high-level bridge options were also being considered. This raised a striking inconsistency with Minister Trotman’s March 3, 2017, statement in Toronto that the GoG envisioned bridging the Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice Rivers with high-arch permanent concrete bridges. Assuming that only one new Demerara Bridge is contemplated, the most crucial requirement in the Lievens Study’s terms of reference should have been that of a high-arch permanent concrete bridge, assuming again, a pre-determined use for the bridge. Minister Trotman also reportedly announced GoG consideration of a Linden to Lethem road, deep water port at Crab Island, Berbice and “a new administrative settlement,” as Georgetown has become too congested, difficult to traverse and is below sea level. These individual projects and the terms of the Lievens CSO Demerara Bridge study, imply that anticipated massive oil revenue has little impact on thinking still trapped in the myopic limitation of disparate projects and small aid packages.

With respect to Georgetown, the mud flats have been our home for centuries with coastal ports driving the country’s early plantation-to-port ribbon development, so Georgetown and our coasts will always hold commercial significance. Georgetown’s overcrowding, a legacy of uninspired sprawling housing developments huddled around existing infrastructure and commerce and bereft of foresight for inter alia, gainful employment is, however, a critical issue that presents challenges and deterrents to development and bespeaks the urgent need for creative thought. An innovative cadre should already have been locked in a backroom, researching, developing and refining a coherent and comprehensive outline of a 10-20 year plan, if the country is to strategically apply its new resources to engage well-ordered and meaningful private sector investment and economic diversity for a prosperous and stable future.

It could be argued that a government’s most important responsibility is national security, its second being the creation of an environment for robust economic activity, which in Guyana’s current state should be driven by national infrastructure and domestic energy development. A long-term vision of multimodal bridges, underpinned by high-voltage power conduits, linking a national passenger and freight service is a first step towards attracting investment in cement/concrete, iron-steel, PVC pipe extrusion, clean energy, bulk fertilizer and agribusiness expansion as well as tourism and rail transportation services that create opportunities for population movement to emerging centers of industry and commerce, including a new administrative district.



An integral multi-bridge system, linking the Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice River Basins, the centerpiece of such a plan, may be Minister Trotman's thinking. Bridge structure and traffic design should be forward-looking, considering the convergence of roadway arteries, traffic types and volumes and multimodal systems for both wheeled-vehicle and railway traffic. A newly conceived infrastructure system of this magnitude must be realized over the long-term and based upon sound operating statistics and studies. Quantitative resource and land-use studies that project future usage patterns will be prerequisites to identifying growth centers and new arterial routes, but even a plan in progress would promote orderly development. Other considerations are that a new Essequibo Bridge system opening the Northwest District will likely impact the design of the Demerara and Berbice River Bridge systems, depending on future traffic from that district, developments along the arterials and the port or ports assigned to Brazil and other Northern Hinterland States' in-bound and out-bound shipping.

Perhaps a new Marine Rail Integrated System (MRIS) port at Hog Island (see map – blue line), 330 miles from Boa Vista, Brazil and just 50 miles from Georgetown could be transformational for bulk shipping and passenger rail service from Brazil's remote Northeastern region and the other Northern Hinterland States of Colombia, Peru, and possibly Venezuela. Internally, apart from the obvious reduced travel distance and increased efficiencies, a Hog Island port would limit wear and tear and air pollution on Guyana's environment and internal infrastructure, while commercially linking West- and East-Bank Essequibo via the Western Hog Island Bridge system (see map – red line) to West-Bank Demerara and across a Demerara Bridge to East-Bank Demerara, through a modernized rail and bus station at the old Lamaha Street terminal with rail and roadway connections to West-Coast Berbice, connecting to a new Berbice River Bridge system to East Berbice and on to the Corentyne. Externally, a Hog Island Port would expand freight/passenger intermodal service for the Northern Hinterland States realizing President Granger's goal of integrating Guyana into the development of the South American Continent. Capitalization for a Northern Hinterland MRIS should mainly be borne by the nations benefiting from a regional transportation system, while Guyana benefits through Hog Island port revenues and major new employment opportunities. Again, Guyana needs a well-founded national view and a professional think tank devoted to comprehensive long-term planning that can channel the nation's use of new oil money and inform and engage investors for positive results.

Sincerely

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