

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA), HELD IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY, JUNE 03, 2016**

**10.13 a.m.:** *Meeting resumed.*

**PRESENT**

Mr. H. R. Ian Roach	Chairman
Miss Ramona Ramdial	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Faris Al-Rawi	Member
Mr. Daniel Solomon	Member
Mr. Darryl Smith	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Desell Austin	Research Assistant

**ABSENT**

Mrs. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus	Member [ <i>Excused</i> ]
Mr. Stuart Young	Member [ <i>Excused</i> ]

**UNREVISED**

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR - THA**

Mr. Raye Sandy Chief Administrator

**OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF TOURISM AND  
TRANSPORTATION – THA**

Ms. Cheryl-Ann Solomon Administrator  
Mrs. Frederica Brooks-Adams Director of Tourism  
Mr. Samuel Henry Transportation Coordinator  
Ms. Gwen Toppin Management Accountant  
Ms. Deokie Ramnarine Senior Research Officer

**OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
AND CULTURE – THA**

Mr. Wendell Berkley Chairman, Heritage Committee  
Ms. Glenda Rose Layne Coordinator, Culture

**OFFICIALS OF THE DIVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURE  
AND PUBLIC UTILITIES – THA**

Mrs. Wendy Guy-Hernandez Administrator  
Mr. Henry Cook Assistant Deputy General  
Manager Operations

**Mr. Chairman:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, welcome. Also, welcome to the listening public. This broadcast—this session is being broadcast live. I believe it is also being carried in Tobago as well on channel 5. This is the second public hearing of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and the Statutory Authorities, including the THA. To the Committee's

enquiry, this is further into the Committee's enquiry since certain aspects of the administration of Tobago House of Assembly. The focus of today's meeting is the state of Tobago's tourism section and the inter-island transportation. This hearing follows the hearing that was convened at the Financial Complex in Scarborough, Tobago, on Wednesday, April 27<sup>th</sup>. The Committee will meet with officials of the THA first, followed by the representatives of the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association at about 11.30 a.m. This meeting, as I said before, is being broadcast live on Parliament channel and 105.5 FM. The audience could also be informed that they can send comments via email at [parl101@ttparliament.org](mailto:parl101@ttparliament.org), or our facebook page at [facebook.com/ttparliament](https://facebook.com/ttparliament), or on Twitter@ttparliament. My name is Ian Roach, and the other members of the Committee will introduce themselves, starting on my right.

*[Members of the Committee introduce themselves]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I will now ask the members of the THA to introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Sandy.

*[Officials of the Tobago House of Assembly introduce themselves]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I would just like to remind the listening public, as well as those present, that the main objective of this enquiry today is dealing with tourism and transportation. In terms of the tourism aspect of it, we are to determine the current condition of the sector, to assess the THA's strategy for attracting domestic, regional and international visitors, to determine the status of initiative projects aimed at improving Tobago's marketability as a tourist destination; transportation, to assess the current state of the inter-island transportation services.

Submissions were received—I would like to acknowledge submissions

received by the THA on June 2<sup>nd</sup> at 4.26 p.m. Now, I must comment on the tardiness of this. You all were written to on May 9<sup>th</sup>, right? And you were requested to have the submission before us by May 23<sup>rd</sup>; we received this yesterday. I mean, this is really, really unacceptable, because it does not give us sufficient time to peruse this with the, you know, in a way that we would have preferred to have done so. So this is, I mean, this is not a good commencement. So I am representing the other members' views that this cannot be a pattern to be followed in the future. Okay?

We also received submissions from Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL), the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the Public Transport Service Corporation, the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association and the Tobago Chamber of Commerce. I will ask Mr. Raye Sandy, Chief Administrator, to make an opening statement.

**Mr. Sandy:** Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Joint Select Committee. First, I wish to offer my sincerest apology to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the members of the Joint Select Committee for not submitting the responses to the list of questions asked in the time frame given by the Joint Select Committee. I want to assure you, Sir, that no disrespect was meant or intended but we were challenged to retrieve some of the information needed to properly respond to some of the questions asked. I can assure you, Sir, that this will not be repeated, and we accept the opening statement that you made, Sir, and we accept it with full responsibility.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, thank you. So that is it?

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** It was rather brief, eh. [*Laughter*] Before we go directly to the focus of today's enquiry, Miss Ramdial has a question, or has some concerns she will like to raise with you following from the meeting, and representations were made by yourself at the last session. Okay, so Miss Ramdial.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you, good morning. Good morning, Mr. Sandy. Mr. Sandy, on April 27<sup>t</sup>, 2016, when we had our first meeting with the THA in Tobago, I refer to the *Hansard* of this Joint Select Committee, and I need your clarification, and probably a possible apology if necessary if you see it fit. Now, from that *Hansard* I asked you a question about the Auditor General's report and why it is that there have been no Auditor General's report for the THA accounts from 2007 to present time. You responded by saying that you cannot explain why there is no Auditor General's report; however, the Tobago House of Assembly has submitted its financial statements up to the year 2013 to the Auditor General, and it is up to the Auditor General to find the staff to do the audits.

“The last audit which we defended at the Public Accounts Committee would have been the year 2007. So the Auditor General has the financial statements of the THA up to 2013—2014 will be available in two weeks' time, and 2015 in about six weeks' time. So we are very current as far as our submissions to the Auditor General.”

Mr. Sandy, as of yesterday, info coming out of the Auditor General's office is what actually exists, and it, of course, is in clear contradiction to your statements on the 27<sup>th</sup>:

One, 2012 statements were submitted by the THA but then recalled to make adjustments and to date have not been resubmitted, therefore, this is hampering the 2012 report from being done by the Auditor General's office; two, you claimed that the 2013 statements were submitted, however, these are not official statements since signed copies are necessary, and what was submitted were photocopies;

Therefore, again, the Auditor General's office cannot proceed till these official

signed copies have been sent.

The 2014 statements you said would be ready in two weeks. As of yesterday, these statements, again, have not been sent, and we have 2014 statements but, again, it is in the photocopied version and not the official signed statements.

Can you clarify, please?

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes, I would attempt to clarify. I am not aware of the situation with respect to the 2012 financial statements, and I will certainly have to get back to my office and get the information for you. As far as I know, as far as was told to me that that financial statement had been submitted; 2013, I understand there was some error or something in there and it was sent back to the THA, and that is being worked on; 2014, as of yesterday, I was told that that statement should come to the Auditor General by next week, and, 2015, about a week after that. I was told that they are awaiting some information to complete the 2015, but they have the information and in two weeks' time—as I said, next week, 2014 should be submitted to the Auditor General, and, 2015, within a week or so after that. That is as at yesterday when I checked with the office of the Director of Finance at the THA.

**Miss Ramdial:** And these statements would be the signed official statements, not photocopies?

**Mr. Sandy:** Actually, they told me that the 2013 statements are awaiting my signature. That is what I was told yesterday, because normally I would have to sign them off before they send them on to the Auditor General.

**Miss Ramdial:** And for the 2012 statements you would look into that to see that it has been resubmitted?

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes, I would look into that, and if by chance I gave wrong information to the Joint Select Committee and to the Parliament, then I sincerely apologize, but

that is the information that I had.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** Again, welcome, to you all, all. I know last time we were on your shores and we appreciate, we know the effort that it takes for you all to make the trip as we went through it for the first time last time, so thank you for coming. In terms of tourism, your submission stated that most of the \$110 million spent on tourism during the fiscal year 2015/2016 was allocated to goods and services, current transfer and subsidies. I want to find out what was the DOT's main expenditure items under current transfer and "subsidiaries" during the current fiscal year.

**Ms. Solomon:** Good morning, I would like to ask the Management Accountant to respond to that question, please.

**Ms. Toppin:** Could you just repeat the question for me, thank you.

**Mr. Smith:** What was the DOT's main expenditure item under current transfer and subsidies during the current fiscal year?

**Ms. Toppin:** During the current fiscal year our allocation under current transfer and subsidy is being spent on, one, airlift; two, we will also be spending money on other areas such as financial assistance; we also do subventions to the THTI, that is the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Institute, so mostly that is what our funds will be spent on for fiscal 2015. And, of course, we also spend on tourism festivals, we have the jazz festival, we have the dragon boat festival, and all those other festivals that we normally have in the Tourism Division.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Sandy, I do not know if you will be the appropriate person to answer this, but following from the representation made by the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association, there were some things that jumped out at me, one of which is that—remember on the last occasion we were speaking about the rating of the hotels,

the stars, and you were saying there was a reluctance, or the hotels themselves were rating themselves—what I understood, if this representation is true, and I would like to put it to you for your comment, is that they said that the operators, the tour operators themselves, are the ones who inspect and rate the hotels, and that compliance by the hotels with international standards is verified annually by the two operators during their inspection; they seem to be, I mean, why is it not being done according to the THA's dictates?

**Mr. Sandy:** Mr. Chairman, I will ask the Director of Tourism to respond.

**Mr. Chairman:** First of all, is the statement true?

**Ms. Solomon:** Mr. Chairman, based on the information we have there are no international standards to rate the hotels, and as to whether the statement is true or not we will also still have to look into the whole information, but from the information I have there are no actual international standards to rate the hotels.

**Mr. Chairman:** But it is kind of odd coming from you all at this stage, I mean, Tobago is about tourism, and one of the foundations of tourism, you want to believe, is hotels, right? Hotel is one of the main attractions, right? And hotels internationally are rated, okay? Is there an organization that rate these things? Is it done locally? Is there an international body that you have to sign up with, or you have to sign some sort of agreement with? Why would this information not be readily available by you all, in your possession?

**Ms. Solomon:** Mr. Chairman, in all fairness to the division I would have to get more information to give you on that, because we would have to review, as we have been doing, as to why this is as it is, but I would prefer to have further conversations on it as to what really could be done in a quick time to ensure that we are all on the same page.



**Mr. Chairman:** Yeah, but you understand where I am coming from?

**Ms. Solomon:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** We consider this to be very important. To me it is something—I mean, you start off with that, you have certain types of hotels, you spoke about going into luxury, attracting high-end tourists, and to attract high-end tourists you have to have a certain quality type of hotels, five star, and what you may, right?—what you may have, but to say at this point in time, you do not know, I mean, that is not good. I mean, it has me lost for words.

**Ms. Solomon:** Mr. Chairman, we hear you, we are really going to work on getting a better response for such a situation, but I would prefer to have further conversations on it so that we could get back to you on where we are going on with it. But I hear your concerns. It is very important because the industry is very important, and everyone who are stakeholders also need to know that we are on the right page. So I hear your point and I am going to do all that I can do, from where I sit as the administrator, to ensure that we get what we have to do done.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, we hold you to that, eh.

**Ms. Solomon:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Solomon.

**Mr. Solomon:** That is a bit frightening, to say the least, Tobago is a tourist island, we hope to promote tourism, what is your tourism policy in relation to the quality of the hotels that you provide? How it is that you market if you do not know what the quality is? I mean, what is the benchmark?—the international standard used? You say you spend \$151,635,123 on island promotion, can you say where this is going?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** On and offshore marketing efforts in road shows, marketing efforts in the destination, training, career fairs, awareness, engaging in new

marketing initiatives and present marketing initiatives, basically.

**Mr. Solomon:** Are you satisfied that you have got the promotion of the island on an international stage to a satisfactory level where it compares to other Caribbean tourist destinations?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** We can say that, based on the moneys that we work with, we know that things can increase, but what is needed is an increase in financial resources for the DOTT. This is necessary to have sustained marketing, increased airlift support and enhancement in the island's product.

**10.30 a.m.**

For example, if we would look at competitive budgets at a glance, in 2013, Barbados spent \$94.4 million on tourism marketing; St. Lucia, in 2009, \$50 million. I am talking US dollars, yes. CTO's 2009/2010 figure was \$1.390 million. I am saying that to say that if we want to see the greater efforts of marketing destination Tobago, we would be serious about what we are putting out in the marketplace for what we receive. In this way we would be able to say, yes we are satisfied, because we would have every system in place that is necessary so to do.

**Mr. De Freitas:** Good morning, members. The question that I want to ask is in relation to the airport, given that this is the first point of contact for international arrivals. I am wondering, when was the last time that the House of Assembly engaged in conversation with regard to the renovation of the airport?

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you, hon. Member. It is a very important question and a good one at that. The Tobago House of Assembly is acutely aware of the condition of the ANR International Airport, and as a result of that the Tobago House of Assembly has been having ongoing talks—ongoing—that we hope would lead to the improvement of the international airport. Many airlines that fly into the airport,

especially Virgin, have been complaining bitterly about the condition of the airport. As a matter of fact, that was one of the reasons why in the first place that Virgin departed or pulled out of the destination because of the condition of the airport.

We are a little bit heartened to see that the Airports Authority is trying to do something. For example, trying to put in a VIP lounge so that we can afford to cater for that segment of customers. But to answer your question directly, we are in conversation with the Airports Authority, and we hope that now that we have a member on the board of the Airports Authority that the THA voice would be heard and our concerns would be attended to.

**Mr. Chairman:** Following from that, is that the reason why there are no direct flights to Tobago at this point in time? Is that a reason why?

**Mr. Henry:** No, there are direct flights to Tobago.

**Mr. Chairman:** There are?

**Mr. Henry:** There are direct flights.

**Mr. Chairman:** International direct flights?

**Mr. Henry:** International direct flights. We have international direct flights from Germany, from the UK and from New York.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Smith:** I know you all host a number of good events with regard to sport, the Great Race. I know last year I think you all had a Legends Tournament. I know you all have the goat and crab races, and recently you had the beach football, CTC marathon and so on. Do you all have a comprehensive plan with regard to sport tourism? I know the Ministry of Sport here has been liaising with the team there as well. But do you all have a comprehensive plan that you are going to be pushing forward in recent times with regard to sports tourism?

**Mr. Henry:** The THA, the Division of Tourism and Transportation has a Sports Tourism Committee, because we recognize, of course, the importance of sport tourism. To that end, we have had a lot of activities on the island related to that. You mentioned some of them. We have the dragon boat festival that attracts a lot of visitors. We also have the cycling classic that takes place in October. It brings in a lot of visitors from the UK, and other sporting activities on the island. So there is a policy to do some more work, and we have the committee in place that is looking after that.

**Mr. Chairman:** In terms of the heat map that you all have, how is that working? Again, for the clarification of the information of the public, you could explain what the heat map is about.

**Mr. Henry:** The heat map is essentially a document that was collaboratively developed between the THA, stakeholders and Caribbean Airlines. What it actually does is to identify the areas of peak demand on the domestic air bridge, so that it can inform Caribbean airlines, so they in turn can provide adequate supply to meet those peak periods. That essentially is what the heat map does.

How effective it is, is another question because I have been tracking it over time and I realize that even when the heat map demands certain amount of seats on the air bridge that Caribbean Airlines sometimes fall below that. So what we actually need is not only the heat map, but adherence to the dictates of the heat map.

**Mr. Chairman:** So what was part of the strategy when you developed the heat map? Where there are glitches in it, what are the means of remedying it? Was something not worked out that there is a communication link where it can be quickly called into question and the persons that are really dealing with resolving it be brought on board, and some sort of quick execution is done to remedy it?

**Mr. Henry:** I think it is just a matter of implementation. I think what Caribbean Airlines has to do is to look at it, is to deploy resources as demanded. I mean, it is not possible to have air planes just lying around and waiting for when you have peak demand, we know that. And they try; I must say that they try. But if during these peak periods they can have one or two extra jet services, so that they can mop up in a very timely manner the excess demands on the airport, to ease the frustration of the travelling public.

What again we could add is that Caribbean Airlines has about five ATRs, and those ATRs were really supposed to be for the air bridge. These planes are being used for scheduled regional services. As a result of that, the sort of redundancy that is supposed to be existing on the air bridge is hardly ever present. So if, for example, you have two planes working on the air bridge and for some reason there is a breakdown of one airplane, then we have real problems, especially on peak periods like weekends and public holidays.

**Mr. Chairman:** But is it that CAL's response to that is that the air bridge is not profitable for them per se, and therefore they need to seek alternative markets in order to compensate for the shortfall in the service being provided with Tobago?

Just bear me with this. You just said that planes cannot be left idle—I do agree with you—but the peak periods between Tobago and Trinidad, that domestic air bridge, by now must be known to all. So if it is known to all, adequate provisions must be made for those times. I mean, once in a while you may have an emergency. This is not talking about emergency, these are planned periods that we ought to know from time immemorial now. So why would this be an excuse?

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Chairman, I like where you are going. I think that we have to look carefully about the whole institutional arrangement with CAL, vis-à-vis the air

bridge. I think for the air bridge to be fixed—and these are my thoughts—that one, we have to look at it and see it as an essential service. We might say it is essential, but that comes from the top of our head. I think the Government has to declare the service essential and treat it as such.

I also believe that the air bridge should be delinked from all the operations of CAL. The air bridge is subsidized, but where is the subsidy going? Is it going to the air bridge or is it going to subsidize CAL operations? With the delinking of the air bridge, we can tell for sure that our subsidies are directed toward the air bridge and nowhere else. Until we tackle these fundamental issues, we will always have problems with CAL and the air bridge. We have to really tackle it head-on and do something about it.

**Mr. Chairman:** I like what you are saying there, but has that been articulated to the THA, and the THA has articulated that to the Government or to CAL directly?

**Mr. Henry:** We are in the process—when I say we, in the THA, the Division, is in the process now of preparing a document that would be sent to CAL and that would be through the THA. At the Division we prepare the document, the document would be sent to the Executive Council for its approval. If it is approved it would be transferred to CAL and, of course, to the central government as recommendations, so that they can take on board to solve this problem once and for all. We may not have all the answers, but the conversation has to start.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you very much. With respect to the hosting of the Tobago Jazz Experience over the past five years, from the information you have given us here the actual expenditure over the past five years has been \$65,244,493.59. The revenue generated over the past five years has been \$17,116,961.15, with a shortfall of \$48,127,532.09. Do you think that it is feasible to continue with this event, in

light of the statistics that we are given here in terms of the shortfall? And the expenditure far exceeds the revenue at all times.

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Chairman and members, we have to look at the jazz in a sort of—I do not want to use the word “holistic”—but for want of a better word, holistic way.

I am talking about the Tobago Jazz Experience, which is different from the jazz festival. The jazz festival used to be run by Clico sometime ago, which came to an end around 2009 thereabouts, and thereafter the Tobago House of Assembly started the Tobago Jazz Experience. One of the differences between that is the jazz festival used to be held at Plymouth, if you would remember that. The Tobago Jazz Experience is island wide involving different communities.

When you look at the return from the jazz festival, it is not right to look at direct expenditure, direct revenue because there are a lot of indirect benefits. For example when you travel to Speyside where the jazz festival is held, or Castara, you can see 20, 30 vendors plying their trade and benefiting from the jazz festival. The taxi drivers benefit from the jazz festival. The communities benefit from the jazz festival. What we are looking at there is the direct expenditure versus direct income; that is income from ticket sales as well as sponsorship and probably some concessionaires. But the benefit of the jazz goes way beyond the direct income.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Samuel, just an observation. Your designation here is Transportation Coordinator, but you seem to be very versed in other areas of the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Laughter*] I mean, I am really impressed with that, but it makes me wonder, the other members here, are they not directly responsible for some of the questions being raised? Certainly we would like to hear some of them. Not that I am saying that we are not interested in what you are saying, it is very helpful. I am impressed with your holistic knowledge of the THA’s affairs, but

we have people who are designated in certain portfolios, and they are just silent so far. Probably they may have a lot to say later on, but I am actually waiting to hear from them as well.

**Mr. Sandy:** Bro. Chair, can I make a small response to that? In defence of Mr. Henry here—

**Mr. Chairman:** I am not attacking him.

**Mr. Sandy:** I know, but in defence of him, the Director of Tourism only recently took up her position in the Tobago House of Assembly, so Mr. Henry who has worked in the Tourism Division for a number of years has more historical and institutional knowledge than perhaps the Director might have at this time. The Director only very recently in the last few months took up that position, so is the administrator. The Administrator is relatively new to the division, so it is in that context that Mr. Henry is offering to explain some of the situations.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you for the clarification.

**Miss Ramdial:** Let me just ask one more question also with respect to what I mentioned before. The figures, they speak for themselves. Yes I understand what Mr. Henry is trying to say, when you look at the economics of this venture and the revenue generated, is there any sort of future plans moving forward to look to increase the revenue from the Tobago Jazz Experience, and not have this large shortfall of \$48 million over the past five years? When you look at the individual years you are seeing that the shortfalls keep increasing. So this is really food for thought and a concern. We cannot be expending so much money and having little returns and then say, well, you know, the benefits are otherwise indigenous to communities and vendors and all of that. We need to also look at the economics of the situation. Are there any plans moving forward to have these revenues increase



in the future?

**Mr. Henry:** Absolutely. There are plans to narrow the gap between revenue and expenditure. But there is a sort of catch-22 situation. If you would notice in 2014 when we had John Legend on the island for the jazz, revenues were greater than in previous years. But what happens is that it costs a lot to bring people like John Legend to the island. So if you decide, look I really want to bridge the gap between revenue and expenditure, and you look for less expensive performers, then you have a situation where less people would attend the jazz festival, and that same gap that you are trying to reduce may increase.

On the other hand, if you decide to bring to the island, for want of a better word, more recognized performers, they cost more. So we have to start thinking now whether the marginal cost of bringing these more expensive performers would be compensated by the marginal revenue received from the additional patronization of the jazz event.

**Miss Ramdial:** Just one more question. But would that not be a marketing issue? I mean, it does not matter the cost of the artistes coming, if it is you want to generate high revenues you would look at the marketing strategy in terms of attracting more people to the Tobago Jazz Experience. So that is also something that could be looked at with respect to your marketing strategies at the end of the day.

**Mr. Henry:** Agreed, it is an all-round effort that is needed. We agree.

**Mr. Solomon:** Through you Chair, just briefly on the air bridge. This problem with the Trinidad and Tobago air bridge with Caribbean Airlines has been going on forever, and there are simple fixes that can be done; for instance people on standby could be communicated by text whether their flights are delayed. These simple mechanisms could be implemented without a massive address by central

government, but I do think that it is high time that we get a timeline on when we are going to solve these problems, from you guys and from Caribbean Airlines, and that we get some sort of feedback as a committee so we can support you with your ideas and with the processes, from our end of Parliament. That is just by way of comment.

I want to go to the relationship in relation to the region, how Tobago compares to the region. I want to ask you, what was your room occupancy for 2015 and how does that compare to the region?

**Ms. Solomon:** The Senior Research Officer will be referred to answer that question.

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Our room occupancy for last year averaged for hotels 40 per cent, between 35 and 40 per cent. We disaggregate hotels and guest houses, usually the hotels are a little more than the guest houses depending on the season.

**Mr. Solomon:** And how does that compare to regional room occupancy for the hotels and guest houses?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Regional occupancy is usually a little bit higher than ours.

**Mr. Solomon:** Can you say how much was our average nightly rate?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Yes, I have that figure. Give me a minute. Was that for 2015 as well?

**Mr. Solomon:** 2015, yes.

**Ms. Ramnarine:** The average rate for 2015 was \$1,086 for hotels and \$54 for guesthouses. Sorry, \$1,086, that is in TT dollars and that amounted to \$167 US, and for guesthouses it was \$344, and that is equivalent to \$54 US.

**Mr. Solomon:** How does that compare to the region? You have the regional figures?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** No, I do not have the regional figures.

**Mr. Solomon:** If I may, the figures that we have been provided with is that Tobago

achieved only a 34 per cent occupancy, and that the nightly rate average was \$154 US.

**Ms. Ramnarine:** According to my figures—

**Mr. Solomon:** If I may just— To do the comparison, the regional occupancy rate was 68.8 per cent as opposed to US \$299. So Tobago you see is lagging way behind. Do you follow me?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Yes.

**Mr. Solomon:** Can you give an explanation as to why we are lagging so far behind?

**Mr. Henry:** If I may, thank you for the question. You see, we have to be very careful when we compare one with the other, and be careful that we are not comparing apples and oranges. Let us look at what is happening in Tobago and what is happening within the region.

Tobago as we stand has no internationally recognizable brand hotel. We used to have the Hilton Hotel which was closed for some time, and it took us almost five years to replace the Hilton with the Magdalena, which is a good hotel. But if you go to the States or anywhere else and you up and say, “Look, I am marketing the Magdalena”, they would ask you what is that? They cannot compare with anything that they know about. We have no recognizable brand hotel. The evidence has shown that a recognizable brand hotel in any destination helps international arrivals.

Look what happened in Grenada. Grenada was struggling. As soon as Sandals went into Grenada the numbers start to speak. The only recognizable brand that we have in Tobago is Kentucky Fried Chicken, Wendy’s, and Subway.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Henry, if I may, who is responsible for that? Is that not the responsibility of the THA then to promote that?

**Mr. Solomon:** And if I may as well, we also spent \$151 million on marketing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Solomon, let him answer that question first, please.

**Mr. Henry:** The question is?

**Mr. Chairman:** I said is that not the responsibility of the THA to see about what you are just ventilating there?

**Mr. Henry:** Well, it is not only the THA, because I will tell you something.

**Mr. Chairman:** You are saying it is not only, but do you see it as a fundamental responsibility of the THA to rectify that?

**Mr. Henry:** I would not even say that it is a fundamental responsibility of the THA. Why I say that it is not a responsibility of the THA is that this involves foreign investment and it would also involve us taking a look at the Tourism Development Act of 2000, so that we can align our incentives with those of the Caribbean. When we look at the incentives that we offer for investment in the tourism sector, our foreign investment that is, and we look at what happens in other jurisdictions, we have to really look at—so it is not right, it is not fair to compare what is happening in Tobago with elsewhere.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Sandy, the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan No. 2, that is a very comprehensive document, is it not?

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Now, it is over some 200 pages. It is two volumes, volume 1 and volume 2, and that is supposed to encompass a very large, broad review and policy making document concerning—and something was done with the Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the THA? Are you familiar with the document?

**Mr. Sandy:** To some extent, yes I am familiar.

**Mr. Chairman:** But is that not the document that is going to drive tourism and the whole development of policy and so forth with the THA?

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes, well it is the THA's, if you want to call it a blueprint, for the year 2013 to 2017, the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan.

**Mr. Chairman:** It covers what period?

**Mr. Sandy:** 2013 to 2017, the last iteration of it.

**Mr. Chairman:** But we are in 2016 right now.

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes, I agree.

**Mr. Chairman:** So what aspect of that has been implemented or not?

**Mr. Sandy:** I cannot say how much of it has been implemented, but I know that an effort is being made to follow the plan, but of course it depends on resources that are necessary to implement the plan and so on. The plan is the ideal kind of situation, but I am afraid that we have not met all of the goals of the plan, given the resource constraints and so on, but it is something that drives the operation of the Tobago House of Assembly.

**Mr. Solomon:** My concern is that we are spending \$151 million on promotion, yet still we are hearing that we are below region, we are below par, we are below profits, we are below in terms of averages, and now I am hearing, if I am to read you right, that it is not the THA's responsibility. That sincerely is an area of deep concern for me, and I am not hearing anyway that it is going to change.

I am not hearing anything new or inventive. I am hearing that we have to accept losses in the millions for various festivals, and there is nothing being done to increase or to get value for money, or to increase the promotion of Tobago. So whose responsibility is it and where are we going? Where is the money being spent and why are we not getting the returns for it? These are the questions that the nation needs to hear.

**Mr. Henry:** I do not know if probably it is my inability to make our position as

clear as possible. What I am saying is the THA is responsible for tourism on the island, but there are certain things that are outside of the remit of the THA. For example, as I mentioned before, if the THA wants to attract investment on the island, new hotels for example, the THA can hold conversation with foreign hotel developers, even local hotel developers. However, if the Act that provides the incentives for these hotel developers does not provide—or the incentives are not as attractive as those in competing destinations, it is obvious that the development funds would divert to those areas where incentives are more attractive and the returns will be more attractive.

There are some destinations that would actually give away anything to get, because they look at the big picture. They say if these investors come in and they build a 300 five star or whatever hotel room on the island, they look at the long-term benefit. So they do not mind being very liberal with incentives. All I am saying is that those things do not reside within the ambit of the THA. The central government would have to look at these things and make it more attractive, so that we can receive the sort of investment funds that are necessary in order to give us the branding, so that we can go out there and market as much as we are doing, and get better returns for the same amount of money we are spending. Otherwise we continue spending the same amount of money, or even more, for the same returns, because we do not have on island those things that would attract the tourists.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I apologize, I had another commitment prior to this. May I welcome everyone.

Mr. Chairman, I am a little concerned that the conversation is being skewed. Permit me to put a position forward and invite a response.

As I see it, the THA, which acts under the THA legislation, has a fixed budget

to do a certain scope of work, which includes some of the activities which we are speaking today. But I cannot see it as the THA's sole responsibility to deal with the large enabling issues which the central government must deal with. An airport cannot be built to deal with lift capacity by the THA. Water on the island is not something to be dealt with solely by the THA. Electricity capacity—which is under capacity at present—cannot be dealt with by the THA, and the issue of the provision of services, i.e. labour, to facilitate, cannot be dealt with by the THA, nor can the fiscal packages by way of incentives in consecutive Finance Bills year on year, be the responsibility other than the Ministry of Finance, Trade and Investment. So the enabling environment as I see it has some role and responsibility shared, between the THA and the central government.

What I would like to ask is: we have had a discussion in relation to comparing outside of Tobago statistics, where we heard of room occupancies at 60-something per cent, where we heard of average rates at different points, but may I ask this question? What are the stumbling blocks by way of enabling inputs that the THA would require from central government to address the issues that affect the productivity and value for money growth in relation to tourism? Those are, to me, the real issues that will move us away from the THA's constant expenditure—if I could use this expression for those who have seen the movie—in a ground hog way, Ground Hog Day sort of expenditure, where you do the same thing and wake up every morning with the same experience. But those are the things which are going to impact the THA's ability to achieve its mandate under law. Could I invite your reflections on those?

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you very much for your input, member. What is needed is a conversation. Let us sit together, central government and the THA. Especially now,

we understand that a lot of focus has to be placed on tourism. We further understand that when you really look at it, Tobago is tourism; we recognize that. Let the THA and the central government come together, come around the table and let us say, “We want to develop tourism in Tobago, what are those problems that you are facing?” Let us discuss them. What do we have to do to facilitate the process? Let us sit together and come up with the answers to those questions, in a serious and meaningful way and let us take it from there.

At the THA we understand the impediments we face; we understand the problems in the industry. You mentioned the airport, look at the sea port. We are losing one of our largest cruise ships next season, because when QE came into Tobago there were two tyres used as fenders to protect a vessel that is worth \$1 billion. They almost turned back. They said they are not coming again; let us get our act together. They are not coming again. Now, every single visitor that comes off that cruise ship spends US \$74 on the island. That ship made 10 calls, 2,740 passengers per call. We are losing that. Why?

The THA is not responsible for port infrastructure. The last time the THA had to spend \$15 million to extend the pier, THA money where that Port Authority should have spent, just to save the cruise industry. Let us sit and come up with the answers and let us move forward.

**Mr. De Freitas:** In keeping with the sentiments of the hon. Member, the Attorney General, I just wanted to indicate also that I have been seeing certain things popping up with regard to tourism in Tobago recently. One of them was a report or a positive note whereby Tobago was indicated as one of the fastest growing tourism destinations in the Caribbean this year. What I wanted to make sure was that given all of the initiatives that have been taking place from the House of Assembly, in



trying to boost the international tourist arrivals to Tobago, have we yet identified exactly what initiatives, whether it be festivals, whether it be sports tourism that would have led to this commendation by the international body?

**Mr. Sandy:** Can I respond partially, and then I will ask the people from Tourism Division specifically. Mr. Chair, the conversation has started in the sense that the hon. Prime Minister now heads a national committee treating with the issue of tourism in Tobago. We have not yet had a meeting, but I am a member of that committee. The Prime Minister chairs that committee and it includes persons from the public and private sector. It is a fairly large committee, very wide-ranging and so on. The conversation would be about tourism in Tobago, with the Government recognizing the importance of tourism to Tobago, and the importance of tourism to Trinidad and Tobago. I am just indicating here that a committee has been set in place. In fact, Cabinet approved it fairly recently, and I believe that conversation will start soon.

**Mr. Chairman:** Everyone is speaking about a conversation to start, but you have this document here as I said, the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan 1, and Plan 2. I would believe that some conversation must have taken place to inform this. About eight items here are being covered by this comprehensive plan, one of which is the branding Tobago, clean, green, safe and serene, good governance and institutional reform, business development and entrepreneurship. So far these things I have mentioned must have incorporated some of what you all have been speaking here. Human capital development, improved infrastructure and utilities, social development and resilience, enhanced safety and security and environmental sustainability.

This must have been a significant amount of conversations taking place to

inform this document. The conversation has to stop somewhere, and implementation has to begin somewhere. I am taken back by the level of conversation invitations, when we should be doing implementation. How do you address that?

**Mr. Sandy:** I do not know if I have the answer to the question of how we address it, but that conversation I am referring to, Bro. Chair, has to do with implementation. In other words, we have our Comprehensive Economic Development Plan that was developed in Tobago by the Tobago House of Assembly as the blueprint for Tobago moving forward. The central government in recognition of the importance of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago has decided in its wisdom to start a discussion with the Tobago House of Assembly as to how that plan can be implemented in the broader context of national development. So when I say the conversation has started, that is the kind of conversation I am talking about.

**Mr. Chairman:** It cannot be just conversation and conversation stage, we must move on to implementation.

**Mr. Sandy:** And, Bro. Chair, at your wish, I have a response for member Ramdial with respect to the Auditor General reports. Can I do it now?

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure.

**Mr. Sandy:** Using the technology of course, my Director of Finance informed me that the revised 2012 and 2014 document is awaiting signature to be sent to the Auditor General. So it means that I have to sign off, the Director of Finance has signed off already. In other words, by next week those documents should be to the Auditor General. That is the 2013 and 2014 financial statements.

The 2013 financial statements they confirmed that that has been sent to the Auditor General a long time ago, and the 2015 is to be completed shortly, and when I say shortly within the next week or two weeks, and that would be sent to the

Auditor General also. So let me repeat, 2012 and 2014 are just awaiting signature to be sent to the Auditor General, 2013 has already been sent to the Auditor General, and 2015 will be sent to the Auditor General very shortly.

**Miss Ramdial:** Just to respond. Mr. Sandy, I do not mean this back and forth with you, but at the end of the day, first of all, with respect to the 2013 accounts, are we to assume that the Auditor General's Office gave me wrong information yesterday?

**Mr. Sandy:** The wording I have here from the text is that I can vouch that the 2013 documents have been sent to the Auditor General.

**Miss Ramdial:** Signed or sent copies, not photocopies, right?

**Mr. Sandy:** I believe that is the protocol for sending them to the Auditor General.

**Miss Ramdial:** With respect to the signatures for the 2012 and the 2014, I mean, we need to be a little more proactive and efficient in getting these submissions in. Because we are one of the few oversight committees at Parliament, and for you to make that statement at the first meeting and mislead us, again is food for thought. We need to be little more careful with our accurate information. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let me just add something to what Ramona Ramdial just said. I want to believe that when we invite participants to come before any of the joint select committees, even our Committee, we expect them to be careful in preparing their material. I would want to believe that it is not a deliberate effort to mislead us because you would be misleading the public, certainly it is an embarrassment to yourselves as well, so I want to believe it may be a bit of tardiness in not making sure, crossing your t's and dotting your i's. But in future it is probably a good warning lesson or whatever it is, caveat, to move forward in coming again before us or any other review oversight body you may be coming to make your representation.

**Mr. Sandy:** I take your advice, Bro. Chair, but I am told here that November 14,

2014, was the date when the 2013 documents were sent to the Auditor General. November 14, 2014, the 2013 financial statements of the THA were sent to the Auditor General.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thanks, we will accept that.

**Mr. Solomon:** I was wondering what you would say would be the most burning issue in terms of the hoteliers and how you support them with those problems that they may have?

**Ms. Solomon:** Mr. Solomon, could you just repeat the question for just one second for me, please.

**Mr. Solomon:** I asked you what would you say is the most burning issues that the hoteliers of Tobago may have and how do you help them with that problem?

**Ms. Solomon:** In my opinion, the TTIC registration of properties in Tobago is one of the most burning issues, and by our stakeholder meetings and so on we would give our input and get theirs as to where do we go forward with it. So that is to me, from where I sit, one of the most burning issues.

**Mr. Solomon:** Through the Chair, could you explain that a little better please; just expand on it for us.

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** There is no internationally recognized brand in Tobago, nor is there a national regulatory system at the moment for industry regulation, save and except one quasi body that provides certification, the TTBS through the TTIC programme.

**11.15 a.m.**

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** Because of the fact that the arrangement calls for the engagement of TTBS and the private sector for this certification, there seems to be an issue emanating somewhere between the TTBS and the hoteliers, because there

is an audit fee requirement which I have been made to understand is very costly. We are awaiting advice as to how this audit fee is going to be covered and by whom. In the meantime however, the THA has been trying to facilitate a process of some sort of a quality by providing advisory visits at no cost to the property owners.

**Mr. De Freitas:** I just wanted to mention that I did not actually get an answer to my question, I think you went on to the Auditor General's Report. Just to reiterate, given the report that came out that said that Tobago is one of the fastest growing tourism destinations for this year in the Caribbean, do we know what initiatives that would have been taken by the Department of Tourism and Transportation that would have led to that report so that we can increase those?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** We believe that our marketing efforts, even though we have all the challenges, have somehow started to bear fruit, because for two consecutive weeks on CNN, our beaches were identified as some of the best beaches in the Caribbean, and also on CNN, also about two to three weeks ago, our food, especially the blue food, was identified. So, we think that even though we have all these challenges we can feel comfortable that Tobago is still a destination that people would like to go to. And when we have all the challenges that confront the growth ironed out we can look forward to a very positive outlook on the destination as a tourism preferred destination.

**Mr. De Freitas:** Okay. I also want to go back to a statement made earlier with regard to not having a name brand hotel on the island. I do remember, I think it was a month or two ago that there was a hotelier who showed some interest in Tobago. Now, I do not want to preempt that discussion because I do not know where it is, but I think for the general public and the nation at hand, at least you could indicate if it is positive or, given what you all said before with regard to needing that name brand

hotel on the island.

**Mr. Sandy:** I just want to say that—I know the Chairman might not want to hear these words—the discussion with that interested person continues.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, it is difficult as members of the Executive with knowledge that we have to sometimes be a little restrained, but permit me to say insofar as it has been opened, that the Office of the Prime Minister which has taken direct responsibility for improving Tobago situation, is in fact very busy at work with an international large brand entity in respect of which publicity will be had soon.

Secondly, the capacity for electricity in Tobago has been dealt with by way of approval by the Cabinet. Thirdly, the water solution is being dealt with. And fourthly, the airlift situation. These are the large impacting factors which have not been attended by successive Governments for a very long while. So, the difficulty in restraining oneself is sometimes a little hard. But insofar as that horse has bolted, I felt compelled to put some of that onto the record.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am certain the public will be very appreciative of the efforts that are being made, certainly the Tobagonian population. But, having said that, what impact is the land licence issue impacting upon—the same thing—attracting these international brands to the country? It that an issue—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, that falls under my portfolio as Attorney General

**Committee Member:** You better go on that side.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Yes Sir, that is a little odd, but I am just declaring the position, because that is something that the AG's office is working on right now, again, which has sat down for a very long time without solution, and which I would have the full

details of, but we are near the cusp of that end. There has been a significant amount of work exercise, so I do not know if it is fair to put that question across there. I apologize.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I got a submission where somebody termed Tobago as being a tired destination. Is that a fit description to give of the situation that is currently held by others in the community?

**Mr. Sandy:** At the risk of getting the negative response from some of the operators on the island, I do not think the destination is tired, we might have some tired properties, we might have some tired persons, we might have some tired—but the destination itself is not tired.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would put it in the context why they determined it as being tired. Because they said there was a lack of attraction for direct foreign investment hence being considered as being tired, a tired destination because there is no growth.

**Mr. Sandy:** Well, in the context of your definition maybe I can agree with you. Tobago really needs a fillip, an injection of—

**Mr. Chairman:** An impetus of some kind of new energy.

**Mr. Sandy:** Yes, new energy and so on. I think the destination is ready for that. It might have tired people.

**Mr. Smith:** Riding on that point, Mr. Chairman, I saw in your submission, late, but it was well done, page 9 when you spoke about the marinas, and this is something just coming off with regard to waking up and livening up the island. I too have gotten several requests from the boating industry under sport, and I see you all talked about establishing two locations and so on. Do you know exactly where and what kind of time frame that may be again? And will you all definitely need central government involvement in that, or is it something that you all will be doing on your

own?

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you for the question. The whole idea of a marina in Tobago is very critical. We understand that, because we have a situation where yachties visit the island and the whole thing is unregulated, and as a result we do not know what they are bringing, we do not know how they dispose their refuse. So, it is definitely unregulated. Last year around May 6<sup>th</sup> a proposal for a marina was sent to the central government, and that proposal was sent, I think it was by Tobago Plantations, to develop a 50-boat marina close to Lambeau, and among other facilities, of course. And our information is that that document was sent to the then Cabinet for discussions and was referred to the Finance and General Purpose Committee of Parliament for further deliberations. As a matter of fact, my information further is that it was even recommended that the Government should have a majority shareholder in that entity. After that we have heard nothing about it. So, we are hoping that with the new dispensation, that efforts would be made to develop a marina on the island, because it is absolutely necessary.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, again, the embarrassment prevails, the Cabinet has the—

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr.—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** I know.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Al-Rawi, I think you better go on that side. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Insofar as put this way, the Ministry of Trade is in fact in the course of dealing with the issue of not one, but several marinas—I believe it is up to four—in Tobago right now. But, it is only insofar as imparting information that this opportunity now presents itself. So, just to resonate a position, but also to plug a hole that has just been put forward, it is not that nothing is done. You see, the



difficulty in this situation is that the opportunity to perfect something requires policy, which is then approved, and then operationalized.

It is for that reason for instance that I would remind that the approval for the improvement road to Toco, which has already begun by the Ministry of Works, leading to the port from Toco to Tobago to deal with the service issue of employment on the island, is a significant benefit to the problems that the THA is facing. And that is, of course, something which central government has already approved. So, these are articulating factors which impact upon some of the answers that are being given.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Thank you for that again Mr. Al-Rawi. I saw something on the last occasion, I think it was brought on by your submission, where there was a concern concerning the supply of local agricultural produce Tobago's hotel which was quite astonishing. You said that the menu offered by hotels in Tobago do not require much local produce so there is little demand on the local farmers. Now, I found that a bit startling as well, given the fact that on the last occasion I think it may have been Mrs. Adams spoke about identifying some of the tourist attraction to Tobago. One was cuisine. So, if cuisine around culture and festivals are a big focus of the tourism drive in marketing, it is quite difficult to reconcile this being identified and articulated by you all, I think on the last occasion, that the hotels, because of the menu, the cuisine that they offer, it does not require a great input for local farmers, local produce,

**Mr. Henry:** I wonder where you got that information.

**Mr. Chairman:** This is what I got from you all on the last occasion. Yes?

**Mr. Henry:** From the Division of Agriculture or the Division of Tourism you got that?

**Mr. Chairman:** From the Division of Agriculture, yes. Now, if that is in fact so, how is that being addressed? I mean, because I will want to believe if you are coming to my country, one of the things you want to come—apart from, as you said, Tobago is being uniquely marketed not only in sun, sand and sea, but culture, cuisine, and festivals, so this to me is something significant. If you are coming to stay in a hotel and you are not going to be getting the local cuisine, then how do you reconcile the drive with what is happening if in fact it is so?

**Mr. Henry:** Well, while we are tourism, you do recognize the linkage between tourism and agriculture. I think that the fact that is coming from agriculture, that agriculture would be the person who has to sit and decide how that should be addressed. I remember at the last submission from agriculture when you were in Tobago on the last occasion they had mentioned the problem that they were having with reliability and quality. And I think the agricultural officer also spoke about their intention to establish cooperatives so that they could have producers' cooperatives who would sort of conglomerate the produce from agriculture and then feed the industry. But I think agriculture would have to be the one who would—

**Mr. Chairman:** I see it as a bit more fundamental than that. If you are a hotel and you are presenting a cuisine, you are creating an ambience, you are creating the different activities and experiences to come to the country, why would the Ministry of Agriculture or the Division of Agriculture be the person fundamentally concerned with that. To me that would be more for the Division of Tourism to deal with engaging or encouraging local hoteliers to have a menu that reflect the culture or the creativity, the cuisine. I mean, that is something that Trinidad and Tobago is known for, the variety of our cuisine experience.

**Mr. Sandy:** But, Chair, I visit quite a bit of the tourism outlets and restaurants and

so on in Tobago, and I can vouch for the high degree of local content in the meals provided. So, my anecdotal research suggest that that information is not—I am not in agreement with that information at all.

**Mr. Chairman:** That came from your Division of Agriculture while we were in Tobago on the last occasion, eh. I was reviewing the notes and that is what jumped out at me.

**Mr. Sandy:** As Mr. Henry indicated, perhaps it goes towards the issue of quality and so on. But, the majority of the hoteliers in Tobago, the local content used is fairly high, in fact we almost boast about it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Mr. Solomon.

**Mr. Solomon:** I would like your comments on a statement I am going to read:

Tobago has not inspected and registered as THA approved any of its accommodation providers for the past four years.

Is that correct?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** If I may, the answer is yes to that question.

**Mr. Solomon:** Why is that?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** That is because we are supposed to have a TTIC programme, as we keep going back to, and that has not been ironed out yet with the division and the Bureau of Standards, as far as I am aware. But we do have advisory visits where persons from the division go to properties and inspect, and give advice concerning the properties on measures that they should adopt in terms of improving the physical plant.

**Mr. Solomon:** So, that failure for the past four years, how does that reflect or impact on Tobago as a destination?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Well, of course that will have a negative impact, because we do

not have a standardized plant in terms of the accommodation sector. But I do know that some of the properties, the larger properties, they try their best and they have the star rating, but they have a certain standard. They have tried to maintain a standard. And they also have the associations which work together to keep a certain standard.

**Mr. Solomon:** So, what is THA doing about it?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** As I said earlier, at present there are truly no TT registered properties on the island, and I explained also that it was due to the fact that the arrangement was one that calls for the engagement of the TTBS. After I mentioned the last time that there are no—and I am going back to that word—regulatory framework as far as licensing of properties are concerned. I know now that the Government in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly are in collaboration with preparing a document which will be a national tourism policy on tourism product development on the island.

**Mr. Solomon:** If I may, Sir? All right, what we are dealing with is the failure to inspect. But, leaving that aside I wanted to move on to the customer service level at the hotels and guest houses in Tobago. What is your opinion of it?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Well, the level of customer service—when we conduct surveys and so at the research unit the level of customer service has been poor throughout the island.

**Mr. Solomon:** Poor! And what sort of impact do you think that has on Tobago as a destination, and what are you doing to improve it?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** At the moment the Division of Tourism has been used in the roving caravan for creating awareness on the benefits of tourism and the need for improved customer service in targeted areas. We are now in the process of rolling

out an island wide initiative via electronic media and community to provide buy-in on how tourism impacts on their lives. There is also a small tourism enterprise programme that provides training, and they have been providing training in all aspects of tourism in Tobago, and most recently they have rolled out a charter programme where they trained taxi drivers and small operators in various aspects of service delivery.

As a matter of fact, for the nine months that they trained the taxi drivers, they have trained them in customer service, how they react, how they interact with the visitors, et cetera, and they have started a charter which will—the programme is now towards the end and we will launch the charter on June 14<sup>th</sup> and this will inform us as to how we are doing as far as training in the tourism industry services are coming along, or how far are we getting towards improving the situation of the service level delivery.

**Ms. Ramnarine:** But customer service should not be under—the Division of Tourism should not be solely responsible for improving customer service, the stakeholders also have to provide training as well to their employees. So, it has to be a holistic effort, it cannot be on tourism alone.

**Mr. De Freitas:** I just wanted to ask one final question. Looking at the submission that you guys gave, I noticed for the festival of carnival and Tobago Heritage Festival that the general trend is that international arrivals as well as domestic arrivals have increased from 2011 to 2015, and I am wondering with regard to the private sector and some of the events that they have, if you all have any data with regard to such, which is international arrivals as well as domestic arrivals for events—for example, there is a beach soccer event in November, BagoSports puts it on, and I know for a fact that they have a lot of teams from all over the world that come. If you have any

data regarding—or specifically around that weekend, if we have a bumper international arrivals or domestic arrivals, and if you guys are going to work with them in the future, given that it is a private organization, to sort of increase the size of these events towards increasing international arrivals and domestic arrivals?

**Ms. Ramnarine:** Yes, we gathered data on a monthly basis, both domestic and international, so we do have the figures.

**Mr. De Freitas:** So is it that just as you have it here for carnival July/August 2011 to 2015, would you have that data from, let us say, 2011 to 2015, around that time? And do you know—I do not know if you will have it on you right now—if there has been an increase in international arrivals and domestic arrivals during that event? That is just one of the events, I know there are others.

**Ms. Ramnarine:** We track all the events that Tobago has and, yes we always see a spike whenever there is an event that occurs on the island.

**Mr. Chairman:** Just one final question, I guess, coming from here, and finally I think I have a question most suited for Mr. Henry [*Laughter*] which is, I understood that one of the vessels between Trinidad and Tobago was taken out of commission recently. We are coming towards, I would want to believe, a heated period for transportation between the twin island. What provisions are being made or have been made, and if they have been made how is it working so far?

**Mr. Henry:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, you are right. The *TT Spirit* is out and for a good reason. It is one of the two vessels on the inter-island ferry, and that vessel needs serious refurbishing, the seats need to be changed, also the carpeting, et cetera, and they will be using the opportunity, I think, to do dry-docking at the same time. Now dry-docking is required as you know, because in order to keep their insurance current, the Port Authority has told us—they have indicated—that during the period

June 1<sup>st</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup> the vessel would be out and as a result they would be doubling up on the sailings of the other vessel, the *TT Express*.

**Mr. Chairman:** One?

**Mr. Henry:** One, yes. They will be doubling up. That vessel is supposed to be back on July 1<sup>st</sup> and we hope that that would happen because, you are quite right, July/August is serious peak period where people travel a lot between the islands, and we really hope that that vessel would be back and in good condition, good working order, in time for the holidays.

**Mr. Chairman:** But Mr. Henry can some other additional accommodation be made, because to rely on one vessel, should something happen unfortunately, there is a breakdown, that would be a chaotic situation in terms of people getting goods and services to be ferried across there. I mean, really.

**Mr. Henry:** Yes, but that is the reality. But if it happens, then I guess the only alternative for the people who decide to travel by sea would be to use the slow cargo boats which take forever to get to Tobago. And what would normally have to happen though, there must be some sort of a communication between the Port Authority and Caribbean Airlines so that Caribbean Airlines can, as far as they can, put on extra flights between the islands to accommodate.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, but is only taking care of one thing. I mean, those who can afford the airfare. But, what about the water taxi? I think the last time you all spoke about the water taxi being used?

**Mr. Henry:** That is an alternative, but the water taxi was used for a specific period. It was during the Easter holidays when unfortunately they had removed one of the vessels just around Easter time. And you know what happens around Easter time? We travel between the islands. So they were forced to put on the water taxi, but

during normal times like now, if they remove the water taxi, then I am sure it would disrupt the travel between San Fernando and Port of Spain, of the users of that water taxi.

**Mr. Chairman:** But, at least, in San Fernando you could use the roads to get to and from Port of Spain. [*Laughter*] I do not expect people to swim across from Trinidad to Tobago with their goods. And I am not being facetious in saying that, eh. I mean, this is a serious concern, because this is not a planned dry dock schedule? Is it planned or this is an ad hoc?

**Mr. Henry:** It is planned.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, why proper alternative arrangements have not been made?

**Mr. Henry:** Well, let me say that—I am not trying to defend them—there is never a good time to disrupt the service between Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I appreciate that, but you may have something to put in place that may be appropriate.

**Mr. Henry:** Yes. But if it comes to that I am sure that they would look at the water taxi as an alternative, because it has been done in the past.

**Mr. Sandy:** Mr. Chair, can I also add that the issue with respect to the dry-docking of the fast ferry, is not so much the cargo, is more passengers, there is adequate capacity on the cargo vessels to treat with cargo to Tobago, that is with the *Warrior Spirit* and the *Super Fast Galicia*. Those two boats that we refer to as the slow boats can take care of the cargo movement between Trinidad and Tobago. So, it is really about passengers when you remove the fast ferry.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, thank you for that. Any member?

**Mr. Solomon:** If I may, I understand that the THA purchased the Manta Lodge and Sanctuary Hotel which is, from what I understand, two failed tourism projects.



Could you tell me about the cost for that and what your plans are to revive it and make a failed tourism project into a positive tourism project for the country?

**Ms. Toppin:** In terms of cost, the THA spent \$32 million to purchase both properties. Currently we are working assiduously to revive the properties. There were a few teething issues. I think we have mostly gone past that, and what we are looking at now is in terms of financing. Now, because of the time that the properties were purchased, there was no financing from central government, but the THA in its wisdom have actually reviewed the financing provided to us and we have actually made those two properties priority projects, and we are now expecting to very soon start the repairs and so forth for those two properties.

**Mr. Solomon:** How much is it going to cost, and what do you plan to get out of it?

**Ms. Toppin:** Currently there is an estimated cost of about \$68 million to bring the two properties up to operational standard.

**Mr. Solomon:** And would you benefit from it? How is the country going to benefit from these completed projects?

**Ms. Toppin:** There is going to be an additional 80 rooms to the island and, yes, we know that more could be provided, but that is one of the THA's initiatives or ways of contributing more rooms to the island. So, we expect about 80 rooms would be available.

**Mr. Chairman:** Luxury rooms, what standard rooms?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** We are hoping that the properties would be managed by, after selecting a suitable brand through regional and international advertisements, and similar to the model of Hyatt and Hilton, so that it would immediately have international branded hotel.

**Mr. Chairman:** Now, can I ask who principally is undertaking the refurbishment

of those properties?

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** E-IDCOT.

**Mr. Chairman:** UDeCOTT?

**Mr. Sandy:** E-IDCOT.

**Mr. Chairman:** E-IDCOT, which means? E-IDCOT or UDeCOTT?

**Mr. Sandy:** E-IDCOT means the Eco Industrial Development Company of Tobago. It is one of the state companies.

**Mr. Chairman:** Now, is accommodation being made specifically in refurbishment of those properties so that the differently-abled persons would be accommodated?

**Mr. Sandy:** Bro. Chair, I think the answer has to be, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** You think, I want you to be more—[*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Brooks-Adams:** The answer is yes, because it is one of the requirements of internationally recognized brands.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, well that is encouraging to hear. Mr. Sandy and Mr. Henry in particular, and other members, I would like to thank you for presenting yourselves before us in Trinidad. We thank you for coming. We are sorry that we had to make the change in schedule, but we can assure you that the next opportunity you are to be with us again, we certainly will be having it in Tobago. At this point in time we would like to suspend—before I close, if there is anything Mr. Sandy would like to leave with the Committee, as well as to the listening public, on this morning's session, please do so.

**Mr. Sandy:** Mr. Chair, I just want to thank the Joint Select Committee for having us again, and for giving us this opportunity. For me it is not just an opportunity to come here and answer some questions, it is an opportunity to also take a look at ourselves and see where we have some deficiencies that need to be remedied, and I

can certainly identify a few of those that we need to change some of the ways we have been doing business and so on. So, I really want to thank the Committee for bringing to the fore some of the issues that perhaps we did not take a look at before, or perhaps we took a different kind of look at them. So, I really want to thank the Committee for their input, and certainly the deliberations here would certainly assist us in managing better the resources that are entrusted to the Tobago House of Assembly, and I sincerely want to thank the Committee.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. At this point in time we will take a five-minute suspension of the proceedings so that the Tobago Tourism and Hotel Association can take your place. You are invited to exchange places and remain for the session that will follow. Thanks.

**11.48 a.m.:** *Meeting suspended.*