



Ministerial Statement

by

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Minister of Public Works

Update on Island-Wide Roadworks

Friday, November 18th, 2022

Mr. Speaker, this morning I would like to provide this Honourable House with a further report on the state of the island's roads and the various ongoing trenching projects.

Mr. Speaker, it is worth repeating some of what was said at the beginning of this exercise. In a Ministerial Statement in this House on February 14th, 2020 – I said and I quote:

... if you are a road user in this country then the announcement of a plan to coordinate road trenching and remediation works with all the entities involved will be welcome news.

For many years, various service providers at one time or another, have on their own carried out road trenching works to install or repair equipment under the public roads – often times without much regard for the landowner – the Ministry of Public Works or indeed road users.

Mr. Speaker, just over a year ago -in an effort to address this issue the Ministry implemented a policy of enforcing the issuance of trenching permits and requiring the proper reinstatement of roads following those works. Concurrently, we began discussions with Belco, as the primary utility in this space, to explore ways in which we all could better plan for these types of works. Once we had a working plan – other service providers were included in the discussions. The result of those discussions was an agreement to collaborate and jointly plan for these works and effective January 1st, a coordinated approach to road trenching going forward was put into effect.

These discussion were timely as Belco's need to carry out major improvements to their underground network over the next three years, provided the opportunity to coordinate these efforts to carry out island-wide trenching and ensure that all the necessary entities were prepared and ready to install their underground equipment at the same time.

Mr. Speaker, during the last 100 years, BELCO has installed hundreds of miles of overhead, underground and even undersea cables connecting homes and businesses across the island. As power needs and technology progressed, this grid infrastructure has been upgraded and replaced. However, there are parts of the grid that are now over 60 years old and in need of replacement.

As part of BELCO's \$250 million capital plan, they are making major improvements to their grid that will serve all their customers into the future with more reliable, safe and cost-effective electricity.

Mr. Speaker, part of this grid upgrade, will require trenching along public roads to lay cable underground. This project is expected to last 36 months. **End quote.**

Mr. Speaker, colleagues will also recall in March of this year, I advised this House and the listening public on the forecast for Highway works under the Ministry of Public Works.

In that statement, I reminded all of the partnership between the Government and BELCO for the replacement of the high-voltage underground cable network throughout the island in addition to installing new water mains and telecommunication conduit wherever feasible for future public use under the Water and Wastewater Masterplan.

Mr. Speaker, my previous statement highlighted the status of the BELCO project and what the public should expect for the coming year and some eight (8) projects that will be progressing concurrently.

Mr. Speaker, it has now been eight (8) months since the last update and it is not amiss on the Government that this infrastructure initiative has and continues to impact the daily commute of many - including ourselves here in this House today.

Therefore, it is time for another status update and I am pleased to provide that.

Mr. Speaker, of the eight (8) projects previously announced, two (2) have been completed leaving six (6) projects ongoing concurrently.

Mr. Speaker of the six (6) projects, four (2) are set to be completed by the end of this year those being:

1. The multiple trenching projects on St. David's Road and along Southside Road in St. George's Parish; and
2. Works on Palmetto Road leading into the Railway Trail near the Department of Public Transportation entrance in Devonshire.

Mr. Speaker, the remaining four (4) projects are set to be completed by the end of the summer 2023.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind honourable colleagues and the listening public, that with any project of this magnitude there will be challenges that rise from time to time. To that end, it is important to note that these scheduled completion dates are tentative and subject to change. However, I am informing this Honourable House that despite the challenges - there is light at the end of the tunnel.

On behalf of the Ministry of Public Works, I reiterate – yes, these infrastructure projects are inconvenient for all and for that, we apologise for the tiresome burden of having to spend a little extra time waiting at the trench work traffic lights.

However, these improvements are critical and if they are not undertaken, the Island would be facing unexpected power blackouts and the potential for whole segments of the island to lose power for extended periods due to failures of the aged underground power infrastructure.

But, thanks to the forward planning and capital investment by BELCO, the hardworking private sector contractors and the cooperation of this Government, we together have averted this crisis for the country.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to now turn to the pinnacle issue – the state of the island's roads.

The state of the roadways can simply be surmised as inadequate – to put it bluntly. We acknowledge that these infrastructure projects have contributed to the issues as the temporary asphalting after trenching work has been uneven...but it's just meant to be that...temporary. It has never been the intention of the Government to leave our roads in this manner.

It is surprising to me that with all the complaints about the state of the roads – people are still driving recklessly and when their vehicle is damaged they are looking to government to pay for the repairs. Drivers need to slow down and drive more cautiously generally but more importantly during these times.

Mr. Speaker, now that most projects are nearing their respective completion, the Ministry of Public Works has commenced with the permanent asphalting of the areas that the trenching works have been carried out - which will ultimately lead to smoother roadways.

Those residents that travel throughout the Harrington Sound Road area will have noticed the final asphalt reinstatement beginning on Fractious Street, Wilkinson Avenue and Harrington Sound Road. The project will continue to see final asphalting up to Flatts Village over the next few months.

Regarding other areas that continue to or have been affected by these infrastructure repairs, the Ministry is currently solidifying the 2023-2024 paving schedule and once confirmed, I will update the public accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, along with the 2023 permanent asphalt reinstatement projects there are two additional projects that are set to commence shortly.

1. Installation of Fibre Optic Lines in Flatts Village – this project requires very minor road diversions and I am pleased to say, no trenching works; and
2. The desperately needed road widening and sidewalk construction from the former T.N. Tatem School to Tribe Road No. 7 in Warwick – again no trenching works are required. This will complete the works that are currently occurring between Tribe Road No. 7 and St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Agreement to proceed with these works has finally been secured with the last land owner.

Mr. Speaker, we are nearing the end. As I have said in my previous statements – while I can empathize with the motoring public that the long queues and waits have been challenging at times, I want to stress that it is vital for this work to take place and that we are doing all we can to minimize the impact.

To this end I again wish to publicly thank the Acting Principal Highways Engineer, Mrs. Tina Beer-Searle and her team, who have been instrumental in coordinating both the BELCO and BLDC works to ensure the safety of the public – and the smooth flow of traffic across the island while the work continues to take place.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker**.