

**SPEECH OF HON PRIME MINISTER
AT THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION
CEREMONY OF
METRO EXPRESS DEPOT**

RICHELIEU – THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 – 16 H 30

Deputy Prime Minister,

Minister Mentor,

Vice Prime Minister,

Ministers,

Private Parliamentary Secretaries,

The High Commissioner of India,

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Members of the National Assembly,

The Lord Mayor of Port Louis

Distinguished Representatives of the Private Sector,

The CEO Railway Business of Larsen & Toubro,

Consultants from Singapore Cooperation Enterprise
and RITES,

Chairperson and Directors of Metro Express Ltd,

Representatives of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening to everybody.

It is a pleasure for me to address you at this laying of the foundation stone ceremony of the Metro Express Depot.

Today marks another crucial milestone in the implementation of the largest and most impactful public sector investments ever made in Mauritius.

This place is going to become the nerve centre of the Metro Express, as not only the light rail vehicles will be housed and maintained here, but also the control room which will be at the heart of this modern and smart mass transit system.

In a few months, the whole landscape in this region will be transformed and we can imagine the multitude of development opportunities that will unfold for the inhabitants and stakeholders from different sectors.

The expected transformation will be the harbinger of another wave of socio-economic development that will propel Mauritius towards the league of high income economies, bringing significant improvement in the quality of life of the population.

This is what we promised to the nation and as Prime Minister I am confident that we are taking the

best decisions that our country deserves to deliver the second economic miracle which is the dream of one and all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For nearly three decades now, Mauritius has been giving deep thoughts to the need for an alternative mode of public transportation.

The reasons were clear.

Year in year out, the cost of traffic jams kept on rising. Today, the annual cost of traffic congestion to the country is estimated at around Rs 4 billion and would increase to Rs 10 billion in 2030 if we do not act now.

The fleet of private vehicles on our roads has been growing faster than we can expand our road network.

The country is reaching its limits for constructing new roads.

Commuters, especially those traveling long distances, are spending longer and longer hours of travel every day. And we can feel the frustration of our citizens who get caught in traffic jams and arrive late at their work places.

We cannot let the situation erode productivity any further and put a hand brake on the economic growth

much needed to create wealth and jobs for our children.

Moreover, road accidents are taking a heavy toll of human lives besides having a negative impact on social and economic progress, as well as sustainable development.

Imperatively therefore, we need an integrated approach to sustainable transport.

At the same time, we have to protect and preserve our environmental assets which make Mauritius so unique as an internationally acclaimed tourist destination.

But it is just as important that we don't leave future generations with an infrastructure deficit.

As Prime Minister I cannot ignore the costs and potential risks of continuing with the existing public transportation system –

Risk to public safety,

Risk to our economy,

Risk to the environment

and Risk to social advancement.

I could have looked at the short term political considerations, implement some palliative measures by providing for new roads here and there, knowing fully well that building of new roads is not in itself a solution to traffic congestion. I could have swept the real problem under the carpet for others or for future generations to deal with.

But I could never shirk my responsibilities. Instead, I believed I had to act decisively, especially when

there is urgency and when there is convincing evidence that the quality of life of our citizens is at stake.

I therefore could not accept the status quo as an option. As an avant-garde and ambitious nation, we have to address the problems hindering progress.

Taking the nation's legitimate concerns and aspirations into account, I made of an affordable light rail mass transit system one of the topmost national priorities. The Metro Express project, as I said in my Budget Speech in July 2016, fits into our strategy to redesign our towns, create new poles of growth around the stations and terminals, drastically reduce the commuting time for our citizens, raise productivity, eliminate the inconvenience of traffic

congestion, reduce road accidents, save on our petroleum bills and cut down pollution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Government has, with the help of experts, evaluated various options, including the bus lanes, the Bus Rapid Transit, the Metro Leger Project of the previous Government, the Metro Express and other traffic decongestion measures.

And we have come to the conclusion that the economic and social outcomes we are aiming at will be more optimally achieved by the Metro Express option.

In making that choice, we have focused on the need to ensure:

- safety of commuters;

- affordability for the country;
- affordability for the commuters; and
- quality of services.

We have not lost sight of the need to preserve the jobs of employees in the transportation industry and everything has been done, in all legality and through extensive consultation, in cases where families have to be displaced for the implementation of the Metro Express Project.

But, once more I wish to highlight that the implementation of the Metro Express project could not have gone that fast had we not obtained the generous grant of nearly Rs 10 billion from the Government of India.

Indeed, the support of the Government of India has been a crucial determinant of the feasibility of the project. I therefore seize this opportunity to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to the Government of India and to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji for extending this grant to Mauritius and accompanying, once again, our country on its journey towards more progress and prosperity.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Today the Metro Express Project moves a major stride ahead, from the conceptualisation and project preparation phase to concrete implementation.

Today starts a new chapter in the history of our nation.

And today we make the first big step to build the infrastructure that fits the future we all want.

I have said before and would like to reiterate that the Metro Express is not a stand-alone project. It is part of a broader vision of this Government to modernise our country.

Along with the Metro Express, there is an urban and rural regeneration plan.

We are also developing a modern administrative city at Highlands. In the vicinity, there will be a Multi Sports Complex which will be ready for the next Indian Ocean Games that will be held in Mauritius.

The airport city is unfolding and the Airport Master Plan is being reviewed to include a second terminal.

Our sea port is also undergoing a major transformation. In fact, a new Quay at the Mauritius Container Terminal will be inaugurated next week.

We will continue to extend our road network.

We are also seeing to it that 24/7 water supply becomes a reality, and investing in wastewater management to protect our environment.

Furthermore, Government is investing billions of rupees to improve infrastructural facilities that impact on the day to day life of people across the country, in rural as well as urban areas.

The Metro Express project is therefore part of a 100 billion rupees plan to transform and modernise the physical fabric of our country over the next three years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have chosen to endow Mauritius with the most modern infrastructure that we can afford because I believe that our population deserves it. Our children and their children must grow up in a country with the most modern facilities and in a clean and safe environment.

We all know the sacrifices that our forefathers have gone through to build this great nation of ours - starting as indentured labourers, as slaves, as merchants and traders, as pioneering entrepreneurs, and as free men and women. One generation after another has toiled hard to build a better future for themselves and their children and grandchildren.

Like our forefathers, our generation must leave behind a legacy founded on the values of equity.

It is my deepest conviction that building modern and appropriate infrastructure is one of the most powerful ways to promote equity in our society.

The Metro Express must therefore be viewed in the broader perspective of Government's vision to lift up the quality of life for one and all and not just another mode of transport.

The Curepipe to Port Louis route is but a beginning. This corridor will be the backbone of future smart and sophisticated Mauritius. And extending the Metro Express lines to the four corners of Mauritius would be the next challenge.

As we put the Metro Express on track we are setting in motion the process to turn today's dream in tomorrow's reality.

Let us therefore put aside unwarranted criticism and pursue this journey together with the confidence that in the years to come, all of us Mauritians will be able to live in a modern country with the higher quality of life that we have always worked hard to achieve and that is our due.

I will conclude by quoting Nigerian business strategist Fela Durotoye who said: - I quote:

“There's a place for talking and criticism. But there's also a place to let our ACTIONS do the talking!” End of quote.

I thank you for your attention.