

LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF WORKS FOR

METRO EXPRESS PROJECT

SPEECH BY HON PRAVIND KUMAR JUGNAUTH

PRIME MINISTER

FRIDAY 10 MARCH 2017 AT 1900 HRS

CAUDAN OLD TRAIN DEPOT

The Deputy Prime Minister,

Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence and Minister for

Rodrigues,

The Vice Prime Minister,

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Ministers,

His Excellency, the High Commissioner of India,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

The Mayor of Port Louis,

Captains of the Private Sector,

Chairperson and members of Metro Express Limited,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening to everybody,

It is with immense pleasure that I stand here this evening to launch the Metro Express Project.

Today Mauritius starts an entirely new chapter in its history.

In my Budget Speech last year, that was centered on A NEW ERA OF DEVELOPMENT, I said that we have to change the way we do things and change the things we do. With the Metro Express, we are indeed bringing about a conspicuous transformation in the way people will commute from one place to another and we are redefining and modernising significantly our public transport system.

It is a major stride forward to the New Era of Development and a critical success factor to realise the High Income goal of Vision 2030.

The launching of Metro Express is a historic event.

Government has taken the firm decision to forge ahead with this endeavour after careful and comprehensive assessment of its economic and social costs and benefits.

We have studied existing and future transport demand and come to the conclusion that the pressures on our existing public transport system is already overwhelming.

The frustration of commuters has reached its limits. They lose too much time daily in traffic jams, especially as they travel from their home to the workplace and back.

Our country, a small island, is also fast reaching its limits in terms of accommodating new road networks.

The pressure of pollution from vehicles keeps building up.

Traffic congestion is also a serious constraint on the nation's productivity. It is conventional wisdom that countries where employees take less time to travel

to work are likely to be more productive, all things being equal.

It is estimated that traffic congestion is costing our country 4 billion rupees every year. This annual cost is projected to more than double to reach some 10 billion rupees by 2030.

It is therefore clear to us that 'Business as Usual' in the transportation sector cannot be an option.

The problem of traffic congestion has to be resolved. And it has to be resolved in a decisive way.

Various alternatives have been studied over the years. The Metro Express has turned out to be the superior option.

The Metro Express is not just another infrastructure investment. Seen in a wider development perspective, it is a game changer. It will totally redefine and modernise the physical fabric of our country along its route from Curepipe to Port Louis. The main line from Curepipe to Port-Louis which is 26 kilometers long will comprise 19 stations, including 4 interchanges. Each station will be a new 'Pole d'activités économiques', that will bustle with economic activities. It will have significant positive

spill over on its surrounding and provide vast opportunities for SME operators.

As we invest in the infrastructure there will be a tremendous boost to the construction sector and to employment creation. It is estimated that during the construction phase the project would create around 7000 full time equivalent jobs and contribute some 13 billion rupees to national output.

We are expecting even greater economic and social spin-offs as it will be a safer and environmentally cleaner mode of transportation.

In the future, the line can be extended to connect to the western, northern, and southern parts of the island. This will integrate the rural and urban areas, and give greater and faster mobility to our population. Extending the line to the airport in the future would significantly enhance the tourism product as well.

We expect that the Metro Express project will generate net job creation in the transportation sector itself which should allay any apprehensions about job losses among bus employees.

Let me give the assurance that there will be full consultations with all stakeholders concerned in the

sector, particularly with bus employees, bus owners and companies with a view to coming up with win-win solutions.

Notwithstanding the large net benefits that we expect from the Metro Express over its life time, raising the financial resources for investment in the project would have been a major challenge for Government had it not been for the grant of 9.9 billion rupees from the Government of India.

Your Excellency, Mr Abhay Thakur, Indian High Commissioner, I would like here to express our deepest gratitude to the Government of India for making this historic day possible for us. Once again,

India is supporting us to implement a national project that will have deep and far reaching impact on the Mauritian economy and society for generations to come.

Thank you Excellency and please convey our heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency Prime Minister Modi.

With India's support we are today launching a national project to endow our country with a modern transportation infrastructure that fits into the future.

And we are looking forward to India's participation in the Metro Express project that goes beyond financing. In fact, we are very thankful that RITES

Limited, a Government of India Enterprise, has accepted to supervise the works for the implementation of the Metro Express project. An agreement to this effect has been signed earlier today between RITES Limited and the Metro Express Limited which is a company set up by Government of Mauritius to implement the project.

The Metro Express is the culmination of years of studying and planning, I should say of thinking and even rethinking. The first study on the setting up of a 'metro leger' in Mauritius was carried out in 1989 when Sir Anerood Jugnauth was Prime Minister. And we are very grateful to Sir Anerood for that

vision which is today being realised and for his commitment and support to the project.

There have been many arguments for as well as against the need for a new mass transit system. This decision making process is quite normal for such a project with wide and deep implications for development. Even the Singapore Mass Railway Transit project took several years of studies and debates before being implemented. But in the end the growing precariousness of the traffic congestion problem has dictated that we take concrete actions urgently. And that is precisely what we are doing today.

An entire team of Government officials and external experts from the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise (SCE) have been working hard, very diligently and with a high sense of urgency to give shape to the Metro Express Project. They also deserve our heartfelt recognition for the good job done.

Today, the project moves from desk work to concrete actions on the fields.

I am confident that the Metro Express will be fully operational in the years to come.

It is said that the People, and the People only are the motive force for making history.

It is with this conviction that today I am delighted and proud to launch the Metro Express Project for the population of Mauritius and for generations to come.

I thank you for your attention
