



MEDIA RELEASE

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Continuing Sea Bridge Woes

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is deeply disappointed by recent statements made by the Honourable Minister of Works and Transport regarding the termination of the contract for the delivery of the Ocean Flower 2 passenger ferry.

While the Minister has explained his decision to terminate, it should be noted that the Cabo Star cargo vessel currently in use is yet to meet the projected service capabilities.

The Tobago Division of the T&T Chamber agreed that there would be an initial three-week teething period for the Cabo Star. After some 10 days in operation, however, it is unacceptable that among other challenges, air conditioning units and washroom facilities are malfunctioning; the cafeteria is not in operation; cabins remain unavailable to truckers; and sailing time to Tobago is still six hours on average.

The time taken on the seas severely hampers the logistics re off-load and re-load times for trucks, and efforts to meet the boarding deadline for the return trip to Scarborough - or Port of Spain, as the case may be – have led to desperate and untenable practices.

Back in April, the Works and Transport Minister indicated that the services of the MV Super-Fast Galicia were acquired under questionable procurement processes. Recent media reports regarding contracts with Bridgemans Services Group suggest that yet again, the procurement process may not have followed best practice. Not surprisingly, this serves only to diminish any confidence we may have in attaining a sustainable sea bridge service in the near-term.

Based on news reports today, the T&T Chamber commends the Chair of the Port Authority of T&T (PATT) who has signalled her willingness to resign, if the Board is found to have failed to follow proper procurement procedures re the Bridgemans Services Group. In the final analysis, the T&T Chamber unreservedly advocates transparent procurement practices and requests that the Government, working in tandem with the PATT, preserve the highest principles in ensuring that our country is perceived in the best light globally by potential investors.

The critical nature of the services provided via the sea bridge for all of Trinidad and Tobago cannot be overstated. This continued interruption of cargo and passenger services has caused irreparable damage to the Tobago hospitality sector and its downstream industries. Financial losses are accruing unabatedly along with reduced employment due to decreasing aggregate demand and economic activity.

In light of the foregoing, the T&T Chamber urges the Government and the PATT to bring urgent and immediate resolve to the matter, in the interest of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

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