

LOCAL NEWS

Call for imported vehicles ban to ease traffic chaos

A FIVE-YEAR ban on imported vehicles was called for yesterday in a bid to prevent New Providence becoming "a gigantic traffic jam".

Without proper controls on the number of cars and trucks coming into Nassau, the island will soon be gridlocked, it was claimed.

The call came from frustrated motorists who have watched Nassau's traffic congestion get worse over the last few years.

One, George Moss, said his

zog, said: "In case the government hasn't noticed, New Providence has become one gigantic traffic jam, with it taking an hour to get somewhere it once took 15 minutes to reach.

"Furthermore, nothing is being done about it and it gets worse each week. Giant car-carrying ships are regularly arriving and unloading hundreds of new cars."

Mr Herzog said a moratorium should be considered on bringing any cars - new or used - into Nas-

Wulff Road, Soldier Road and Bernard Road, there is often serious congestion, especially during the afternoon when schools close for the day.

"There are times when you can stand for five minutes in Village Road without moving at all," said a woman motorist. "When Queen's College students finish for the day, the impact is felt for an hour or more afterwards. Sometimes it has taken me 35 or 40 minutes to get from Eastern Road to the top of Vil-

lage Road. It's horrendous.

Lights

"Once, you could guarantee your journey time," he said, "Now, it's becoming more and more unpredictable. There are too many vehicles on the roads and the situation is often made worse by poorly timed traffic lights.

"Something must be done soon or New Providence is going to seize up completely. At some times of the day journeys which used to take ten minutes are now taking 45 minutes or more."

Another driver, Bennett Her-

sau for a five-year period.

"As old or broken down cars are taken off the road or scrapped with no new/used cars coming in, the traffic situation will gradually ease. Something has to be done to ease the traffic problem or New Providence will become a nightmare traffic jungle."

Eastern Road has been a problem area for years during the morning rush hour, with mile-long tailbacks on some days, but now there are new congestion flashpoints.

Village Road is now frequently at a standstill, and not just during peak hours. With traffic funneling into the roundabout at the top of Village Road from

Problems

"The lights near St Andrew's Drive can change two or three times, and the junction is so blocked that you make no progress. One of the problems is that increased prosperity means some families run two or three cars. But overall there are too many cars on the road. You don't need to be a genius to work that out."

Calls for controls on vehicle importation have been made before, but nothing has been done about it. Successive governments have said the new New Providence road scheme would help, but the congestion problem seems to be growing.

In Bermuda, not only are numbers controlled but also the length of vehicles. However, political observers believe any attempt to restrict vehicle ownership in Nassau would be very unpopular.

Nightmare

The Eastern Road jams became so bad that many people moved out west to avoid the morning nightmare, but now they are also suffering.

Mr Moss said: "Once the journey into Nassau from the west was easy, no matter what the time of day. Now, the morning rush hour is getting worse all the time.

"The Nassau Street traffic lights are part of the problem, but the real difficulty is that there are simply too many vehicles on

■ BUMPER-TO-BUMPER
traffic on Mackey Street.
(Photo: Dominic Dunco
Tribune)

the island, full stop. Whether any politician will have the guts or gumption to get to grips with the situation I don't know. But decisive action needs to be taken soon."

Mounting congestion is also causing friction among drivers.

The long morning tailback in West Bay Street caused by the Nassau Street lights is prompting some drivers to take liberties by using a secondary coast road to jump the queue. This creates anger as they try to re-enter the traffic lane near the lights.

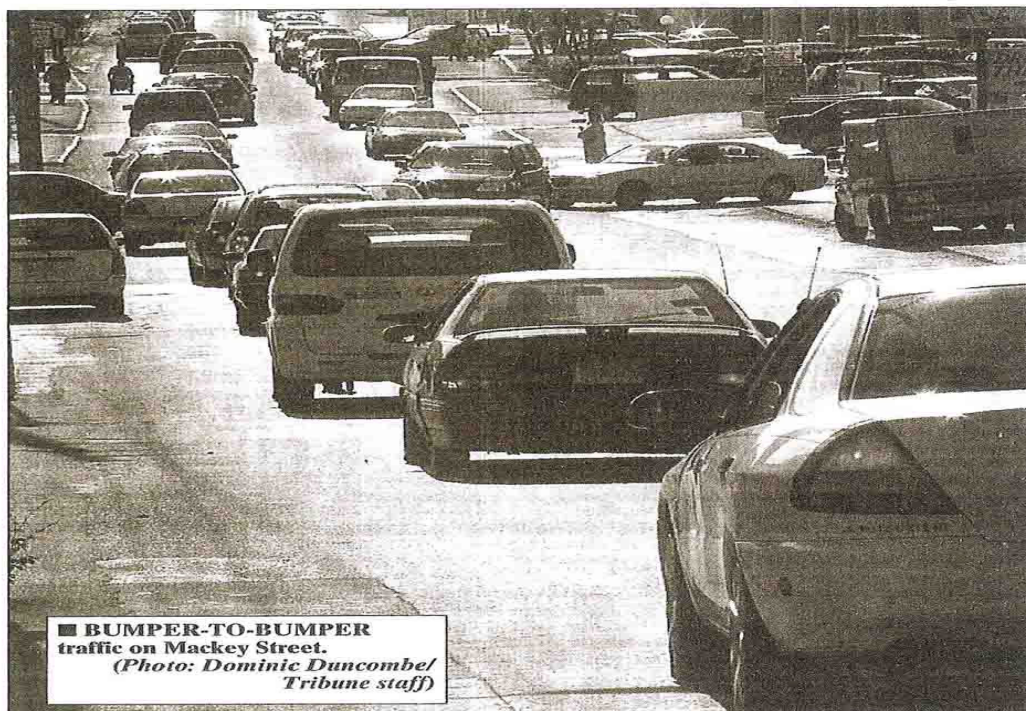
Late

One motorist admitted: "I don't like doing that kind of thing because it's discourteous and inconsiderate, but what can you do if you're late for work and you face a 20-minute wait at the lights?"

As far back as 2001, calls were being made for a proper traffic management plan. Motorists at the time said there needed to be a real strategy for traffic control, including a limit on cars per family and a proper public transport system.

When trouble flared up over the Eastern Road problem, Ms Erin Greene told *The Tribune*: "We need to discuss car management and how many cars we have on the road.

"We have to discuss how many Bahamians are driving and how they are driving. We need to discuss the role of public transport. At the moment we have no effi-



■ **BUMPER-TO-BUMPER**
traffic on Mackey Street.
(Photo: Dominic Duncombe/
Tribune staff)

Government 'must invest or impose restrictions'

THE government faces a stark choice if it is to solve Nassau's pressing traffic problems, a civil engineer said yesterday.

Either it invests heavily in new roads and possibly flyovers which would change the nature of the island completely. Or it imposes strict limits on vehicle ownership, following Bermuda's lead.

"While the first option could prove economically prohibitive, the second will probably be politically prohibitive," said Mr Ray McKenzie, head of Caribbean Civil Group Ltd., based at Cable Beach.

But he said the decision would have to be made soon or the island's traffic system would seize up.

Mr McKenzie's comments came after motorists called for a five-year moratorium on vehicle imports in a bid to ease the island's traffic congestion.

Flow

He said adding road capacity would cost many millions and possibly change the character of the island. If this was the government's choice, they would need to "build vertically", with flyovers to improve traffic flow.

The other choice was to limit car ownership, following Bermuda's successful lead. But he said this would be politically unpopular.

"It is a decision that will ultimately have to be made. If our economy continues to be strong, people are going to continue to purchase cars. We have to be concerned about this down the line."

"Limiting vehicle ownership is undoubtedly the cheaper option, but also a politically divisive option," he said.

"We have not yet reached the critical point because at certain

times of the day you can still get around and there may be a few more years to go. But we are going to reach a point, like New York and Puerto Rico, where something will have to be done."

Mr McKenzie said when the situation becomes so bad that a 30-minute journey takes two hours, motorists will reach breaking point. While Nassau may still be five or ten years away from crisis point, it was undoubtedly going to happen.

Investment

"We have to pay now or pay later - and if we pay later it will cost more," he said. "The longer we wait, the more capital investment we have to put in."

Mr McKenzie has highlighted in the past the financial cost to Bahamians of increased traffic congestion. He told Rotarians three years ago that Bahamians were losing an estimated \$22 million a year in added fuel costs, lost time and lost opportunities.

Yesterday, he said the financial loss was probably even greater now.

"I know in my own business that even to run a simple errand can take two or three hours out of the day. There is a definite cost to local business and so something has to be done."

In a paper on urban sprawl and traffic congestion, Mr McKenzie produced statistics to show how New Providence's woes will worsen over the next few years.

Currently, 70 per cent of the Bahamas population lives in New Providence, but this will jump to 73 per cent by 2010. With an estimated 136,000 licensed drivers and 90,000 registered vehicles on the island at present, the situation could get correspondingly worse over the next seven years.