

A composite image featuring a large portrait of Mikael Phillips, a man with short grey hair and a goatee, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is smiling. In the background, there is a yellow-tinted image of a construction worker wearing a hard hat and safety glasses, holding a tool. The background is divided into geometric shapes with a dotted pattern.

sectoral Debate 2025

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

In transport, Works and Road

MIKAEL PHILLIPS ^{MP}

SHADOW MINISTER
Transport & Mining

Madam Speaker,

Today will likely be my final presentation on this side of the House during a Sectoral Debate. I give thanks to the Almighty for His continued strength and guidance. "God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them." – Hebrews 6:10

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the people of North West Manchester, who have trusted me and expressed their desire for me to continue the good work I began three terms ago.

To my four councillors, Rohan Kennedy (Mile Gully Division), Devon Wilson (Johns Hall Division), Andrew Smith (New Green Division), and Ryan Peart (Spur Tree Division), my executive team and staff, thank you. North West Manchester, I love you.

To my family, my wife Rhonda, daughters Isabel and Gabriela, my mother Sandra, my father Peter, and my siblings, I express profound gratitude for your unwavering support. I could not have taken this journey without you.

Transport – A Sector in Crisis

Madam Speaker, nowhere else in the government is the lack of policy and inept operational plans more evident than in the public transport sector. The almost ten years of JLP administration have seen constant decline, from crisis to crisis. In the end, commuters and transport operators are worse off.

The Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) is in its worst financial and operational state.

Madam Speaker, the state of our transportation sector has been a topic of ongoing concern, especially this deteriorating condition of the JUTC. This government has cycled through four different Ministers of Transport, yet the sector remains stagnant.

Today, the JUTC is in its worst state in history, losing almost \$100 billion under this administration. If Jamaica had properly invested those taxpayer dollars, the country would have a public transport system unmatched anywhere in the world.

Instead, it is the opposite. Productivity is low, and public frustration is high, and the national happiness index reflects that reality. This government has failed the transportation sector and, by extension, the people of Jamaica.

We on this side have offered several recommendations, not for headlines, but because we know that a robust, efficient, and reliable transport system is essential to real economic growth. That growth is missing, and the transportation crisis is a significant reason.

We have repeatedly asked: Where is the national transport plan? What is the long-term vision to improve the public transportation system? Especially for the one million Jamaicans who depend on it daily.

This government's ad hoc, patchwork approach has not, and will not, work for commuters or operators.

Remember that the JUTC was created in 1998 through great sacrifice by taxpayers and then-existing franchise holders. The then PNP government envisioned a first-class transit system in the Kingston Metropolitan Transport Region (KMTR), including Portmore and Spanish Town, with eventual expansion to Montego Bay and other rural areas.

That was real planning, putting Jamaica first, not political expediency.

Where Are We Now?

Let the numbers speak for themselves:

Category	2016	2024
Passengers Carried	63 Million	18 Million
Daily Bus Run-out	450	203
Operational Cost Recovery	70%	12%
Farebox Revenue	\$4.5 Billion	\$1.4 Billion

This year, the JUTC is expected to record a loss of \$13 billion, with a GOJ subsidy of \$11 billion.

Despite operating with less than half the required fleet, taxpayers are spending more to operate a broken bus system; you are more concerned about headlines than dealing with the reality of an ailing JUTC.

Madam Speaker, we asked the Minister for answers during the Standing Finance Committee in March. He promised to respond, but weeks later, he has still not responded.

Let me remind him:

The public still demands answers on:

1. Why is there a \$1.8 billion increase in salaries at the JUTC, as stated in the budget, from \$4.32 billion to \$6.12 billion?
2. What would cause a \$414 million increase in toll charges, from \$194 million to \$608 million?

CNG Bus Chaos

Currently, 127 of the 200 buses in operation are CNG-powered. Yet, the only CNG fuelling station is at the Portmore depot, while CNG buses are deployed to Spanish Town and Rockfort. So these buses must drive to Portmore to refuel. How does this make sense? And with 70 more CNG buses scheduled to arrive in July, where exactly will they be refuelled? This is another example of poor planning and administrative failure.

School & Rural Transport

We, on this side, have long championed the introduction of rural and school bus services. I proposed such a program in a previous Sectoral Debate.

While the JUTC has begun rolling out rural buses, serious questions remain:

- What is the age and mileage of the used school buses?
- Where will they be parked and maintained?
- How will they be fuelled?
- Who will operate them?
- What is the cost of the subsidies?

The lack of infrastructure makes this program unsustainable in its current form.

We are proposing the RIDE Program, a partnership with private operators to subsidize transportation for 20,000 schoolchildren island-wide, compared to the 4000 proposed in the government's plan. This plan will focus on children who must take more than one transport to get to school, impacting those families more.

What We Need: Is A Real National Plan

We need a comprehensive national transportation strategy that includes:

- A plan to revitalize the JUTC, projected to receive a \$10 billion subsidy this year while also incurring a \$10 billion loss
- Integration of over 100,000 public passenger operators, including 8,000 in the KMTR
- Development of a national school bus system with private sector integration
- Construction of adequate parking infrastructure in our town centres
- A modernized Transport Authority capable of gathering real-time data and acting as a true regulatory agency

The time has come to get it right.

Within our first 100 days in office, we will:

- Implement a workable franchise system in the KMTR.
- Roll out an organized, workable, and affordable school bus service.
- Begin restructuring the transport sector with Jamaica at the centre of our decisions.

Ride-Sharing

Madam Speaker, the tragic death of 29-year-old teacher Danielle Anglin, who disappeared on May 13, 2024, after reportedly using a ride-sharing app, has cast a spotlight on the urgent need for regulation in this sector. Her remains were later found in Salt River, Clarendon. The suspect, believed to be a driver for a ride-sharing service, had a prior arrest for sexual assault in 2015. This incident underscores the critical gaps in our current system, where background checks and safety protocols are insufficient.

In response, the Minister of Transport announced an immediate 12-month ban on all ride-sharing apps. This decision aims to address national security concerns and the lack of regulatory oversight. The ban mandates that these services cease operations until they comply with local laws and regulations.

Madam Speaker, while the intent to protect our citizens is commendable, a blanket ban is not the most effective solution.

It is imperative that we develop a comprehensive regulatory framework that includes:

- Mandatory background checks for all drivers.
- Certification and licensing requirements for ride-sharing companies.
- Clear guidelines for data sharing between ride-sharing companies and law enforcement agencies.
- Public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on safe usage of ride-sharing services.

Madam Speaker, we must balance innovation with safety. Ride-sharing services offer convenience and economic opportunities but pose significant risks without proper regulation. Let us work collaboratively to establish a system that ensures the safety of our citizens while embracing technological advancements in transportation.

The government has dropped the ball on this one, making announcements for headlines.

Taxis and a workable franchise system.

Madam Speaker, no conversation about the transportation sector is complete without addressing the backbone of our commuter landscape our taxi operators.

Route taxi drivers and hackney carriage operators move thousands of Jamaicans daily, particularly in underserved areas where the JUTC cannot reach, and our rural communities.

For many Jamaicans, the taxi driver is the first ride of the day and the last one home at night. Taxi drivers are not just drivers, they are community figures, small business operators, and a core part of the public transport ecosystem.

But, Madam Speaker, the reality is that the sector remains fragmented, unstructured, and in urgent need of integration. And yes, we acknowledge that some behaviours within the taxi sector can be unruly and contribute to public frustration. But the answer is not to vilify or exclude them, it is to create a system where accountability, opportunity, and respect go hand in hand. We need them. And they need us.

The Case for Integration

For decades, taxi operators have functioned in a semi-informal space—regulated, yes, but without any real stake in the broader transport plan. This has led to:

- Route overlaps
- Conflicts with JUTC services
- Inconsistent fare structures
- Lack of investment in fleet upgrades

It's time to bring order, respect, and opportunity to the taxi sector, starting with a workable franchise system in the KMTR.

Our Proposed Solutions

- 1. Create a Tiered Taxi Franchise Framework**

- Establish a zonal franchising model where operators apply to serve specific corridors.
- Prioritize routes underserved by the JUTC.
- Offer exclusive rights to operate on designated routes within franchise agreements, giving operators security and predictability.

2. Digitize and Register All Operators

- Create a centralized digital taxi registry under the Transport Authority.
- Allow passengers to access verified driver info and route data via app or SMS.
- We will launch a know your driver portal/app, allowing customers to verify license status, view the driver's ID, and submit feedback.
- This enhances accountability, safety, and data collection for policy development.

3. Subsidize and Incentivize Upgrades

- Offer tax breaks, fuel concessions, and low-interest loans to operators who participate in the franchise system and upgrade their vehicles to those conducive to public transport and safety.
- We will launch a National Taxi Modernization Grant and Loan Facility, in collaboration with the DBJ and private lenders. This facility will offer low-interest loans and partial grants to taxi operators who join the franchise system and commit to upgrading their vehicles.

4. Develop Designated Pick-Up Zones and Taxi Hubs

- Collaborate with local municipal corporations to build structured taxi stands in key commercial centres and transport hubs.

- This reduces congestion and brings dignity to the profession.
-

5. Professionalize the Industry

- Launch a National Taxi Operator Training & Certification Programme covering customer service, defensive driving, fare handling, and dispute resolution.
- Certified drivers under the franchise system will wear visible ID badges, improving public trust and safety.
-

6. Modernize Fare Structures and Integrate Payment

- Pilot smart fare systems or prepaid cards that can be used across JUTC and franchised taxis.
- This supports seamless mobility and transparent revenue tracking.

Madam Speaker, we cannot continue to treat our taxi operators as outliers. We must treat them as partners in national development. A well-managed, franchised taxi system will not only ease the burden on the JUTC but also increase public transport access, safety, and dignity.

This government has had nine years to organize this sector and has failed. We are ready. Within our first 100 days in office, we will begin consultations and pilot projects to bring structure, opportunity, and respect to our taxi sector across the KMTR and eventually Jamaica.

Road Traffic Act

Madam Speaker, we believe the Road Traffic Act needs to be reviewed. We have had enough time to see its weaknesses, including too many inconsistencies.

Mining

Madam Speaker, the mining sector significantly contributes to our GDP and foreign exchange earnings. However, the concerns raised by affected communities must be addressed: dust, land degradation, lack of consultation, and environmental impact. Mining can no longer be merely about extraction; it must be part of a sustainable development strategy.

Madam Speaker, this government must commit not only to mining but also to sustainable and equitable mining practices. Regulations must be modernized to reflect the realities of our communities and the global standards we aspire to meet. Additionally, we must actively engage with local stakeholders to ensure grassroots voices shape the future of this sector. The communities that have borne the brunt of mining's negative impacts are owed not only compensation but also empowerment and investment in their future.

We must:

- Strengthen environmental regulations and enforce land reclamation
- Reinvest mining revenues into impacted communities, infrastructure, health care, and education
- Ensure transparency in mining leases and community assessments
- Develop a national minerals policy focused on value-added production, such as refining and manufacturing, instead of raw exports

Mining must serve the people, not the other way around.

Road Infrastructure

Madam Speaker, quality roads are essential for national development. Yet, roads in both rural and urban Jamaica remain in poor condition.

Madam Speaker, too often, when we talk about infrastructure, the focus is on the big highways, the flashy ribbon-cutting projects. But in most rural communities, residents are left navigating crumbling roads, narrow corners, and overgrown verges.

The message is clear: rural Jamaica feels forgotten, all of Jamaica feels forgotten.

That is why we are calling for a Rural Connectivity and Equity Strategy to ensure every Jamaican, regardless of postcode, has reliable access to transport, schools, health care, and commerce.

We propose:

- A national rural road upgrade programme that prioritizes access roads, not just main roads.
- Embedding a rural infrastructure equity index into national planning to ensure fair allocation of resources.

Let us stop treating rural infrastructure as charity. It is a right and a necessity. Millions are spent in select areas while many community roads are ignored. This imbalance is unacceptable.

Good roads are not a luxury; they are essential for productivity, access to services, and economic activity.

Once again, I call for a National Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance Plan. What we have now is unsustainable.

The government spends \$5–8 billion annually, but that is far from enough. The central government alone cannot carry this burden, so we have found ourselves in this vortex of unrehabilitated roads.

The SPARK programme was introduced as a solution. But is it sustainable? Given the current funding and costs, can it realistically rehabilitate 600 roads? Or will it simply flicker out like so many other failed promises?

Now we hear of a proposed one-road authority. Let me caution this House: Before we go down that road, let us have a full stakeholder consultation.

We believe the municipal corporations still have a critical role in managing Jamaica's 27,000 km road network. Let us find real solutions for financing road maintenance, not just shift responsibility around. You are putting the cart before the horse. Have you forgotten that you've been in government for nine years? The country still awaits a plan.

We propose:

- A National Rural Roads Rehabilitation Plan, including:
 - A ten-year national rehabilitation and maintenance plan
 - A National Road Maintenance Fund
 - A comprehensive drainage maintenance programme
 - Decentralized road maintenance budgets
 - A focus on climate-resilient road designs

We remain committed to a Jamaica where no community is left behind and national priorities, not party politics, drive road development.

Closing

Madam Speaker, After almost 10 years in office, some people are promising to choose Jamaica. We have been doing that since 1938, and repeatedly at all material times, particularly in 1944 and 1962. It is our lifeblood. We understand the needs of Jamaica and Jamaicans. We are ready to build a thriving, productive, safe, and healthy society for all.

It is by our deeds that the people will know us. As we come to the end of the life of this Parliament, "Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing. Thanks for mercies past received. And those returning are more faithful than before."

God bless Jamaica, Land We Love.