

CIHT Dubai Evening Seminar (Online)

Jarrold Smith

Transportation Planning in Paradise – Issues and Challenges of Career in Fiji

About the Event

Situated in the Pacific Ocean, the island nation of Fiji is approximately 25 hours by plane from Dubai and over 30 hours from Europe. Over 300 islands provide an idyllic paradise destination for any traveller. But is “transport planning in paradise” a job which comes with a hamoc, snorkle and beach towel? Not a chance!

A tropical climate with frequent cyclones and extreme weather, a position on the frontline against climate change, a local drink which numbs parts of the body, managing the sugar cane season, the seasonal pressures of tourism and the peaks and troughs of foreign investment all make for an exciting, turbulent and demanding role which is a once in a lifetime experience in anyone’s career ladder. The Event presented an experience from a transport planner based on his time working for the Fiji Roads Authority.

The road network within Fiji connects many cities, towns and villages and is of paramount importance for people and goods around the country, with the condition of the roads the first item on the news everyday. In addition bridges, airstrips and jetties need to be constructed and kept open as a lifeline to communities nationwide.

Roads are also the main mode of transportation for Fiji’s most important export, sugar cane, with the crop season lasting four months and vital to the economy and local jobs. Providing a network that is reliable, safe and is resilient is therefore vital.

The seminar presented the multiple and often unique issues and challenges that present themselves on a daily basis to transport professionals in Fiji, the factors which exacerbate these challenges, improvements that have been tested and implemented, as well as ensuring that stakeholders at all levels understand the importance of a reliable transport network and long-term solutions which are being out into place.



About the Speaker



Jarrold Smith has 20 years’ experience in Transport Planning and Traffic Engineering and is currently working for Jacobs in Dubai. His experience includes 11 years in the UK working in transport master planning and development control, 7 years in Qatar working on station area planning for the new metro, local roads planning and delivery. Prior to moving to Dubai in 2020, he was the Lead Transport Planner for the Fiji Roads Authority which is the subject of this Seminar.

Presentation

Jarrold presented the geography and history of Fiji. The country became independent in 1970. The current national population is around 900,000, with a relatively young demographic structure. There are over 300 islands, of which 106 are inhabited, to connect, with the main island being Viti Levu which includes the capital, Suva, and the main international airport at Nadi. The main export materials are sugar cane and kava. Major languages spoken are English, Fijian, and Hindi.

Jarrold Smith presented the responsibilities of three major transport agencies which are the Fiji Roads Authority (Roads and Infrastructure), Land Transport Authority (Licensing and Regulation) and Fiji Police Force (Road Safety and Traffic Management). These govern the major modes of transport which are:

- Cars, of which many are hybrid;
- Buses;
- Taxis;
- Ferry for inter-island transport; and
- Domestic aviation for inter-island transport.

Jarrold presented his extensive responsibilities leading transport planning functions within the FRA, often going back to basic methods and skills learned at university and his early career. He was assumed to be responsible for “everything” to do with transport.

Jarrold presented the highlights of the Greater Suva Transport Strategy 2015 -2030. The Strategy aspires to an Integrated and Sustainable Transport System that contributes to an inclusive, prosperous, and environmentally responsible region. Around 200 solutions have been identified across all modes, although funding, skills and capacity remain highly constrained for implementation. The key issues highlighted in the Strategy include:

- Traffic congestion;
- Road safety;
- Bus infrastructure and routes;
- Quality of transport infrastructure;
- Enforcement and regulation; and
- Driver education, responsible behaviour and awareness.

Jarrold presented current land uses in Suva, development control issues and the constraints in the current land use planning system. Historically Traffic Impact Assessments (TIAs) have not been consistently required or assessed, with result that the traffic impacts of development have not been properly regulated, although improved procedures have now been put in place. Pedestrian and cycling provision remain non-existent or sub-standard in many locations and traffic signals are out-of-date and need to be upgraded in urban areas. Jarrold also presented a number of road improvement schemes across Fiji and the issues involved in progressing these.

Jarrold presented road conditions and issues in urban and rural areas. Some of the major issues he pointed out are the following:

- On street parking and taxi bays;
- No pedestrian crossings;
- Traffic conflict and safety issues;
- Potholes and poor maintenance;
- Steep terrain; and
- Narrow or no footways.

Jarrold highlighted that attempts had been made to introduce Suva Clearways by restricting the on-street parking, loading and drop-off in the morning and evening peak hours. Key issues here were road user complains, cost of yellow paint and poor enforcement. He highlighted the poor conditions of bridges in rural areas, often exacerbated by overloaded lorries and high levels of rainfall.

Jarrold covered identification of the accident black spots from the available data, and classifying the accidents are Fatal, Serious and Minor. The major causes of the accidents are the following:

- Overweight vehicles;
- Drugs and kava;
- Poor driving behaviour relative to road conditions and weather;
- No pedestrian facilities; and
- Poor visibility and signage.

Jarrold stated that the rainfall in Suva is 300 mm in January, February, and March with almost 300 days raining taking place in a year. This takes its toll on infrastructure. Jarrold also presented information on jetties and airports/airstrips, infrastructure investment, ITS planning, skills and capacity issues, local consultants and contractors, utilities, and environmental impacts. He presented some ways forward for Fiji in order to improve the transportation facilities and outcomes. Finally he highlighted major environmental concerns including climate change, flooding/rising sea levels, and dumping of rubbish and garbage, especially on the coast and on beaches.

| Questions and Answers | |
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| 1. Fiji Roads Authority has reputation of 'waste' and corruption. Has there been much to reduce such whilst you were there? | From 2010 to 2016 there was mismanagement in FRA, and this wasted a lot of money. But after 2016 it is improved and now FRA is working better |
| 2. What are the major causes of accidents? | The major causes of accidents are the use of kava, speeding and wet road conditions during and after rainstorms. |
| 3. Is there any use of Motorcycles? | Motorcycles are very few, mainly due to rainy weather. |
| 4. Is there any informal transport like minibuses? | There are minibuses available, although no ride-hailing schemes like Careem/Uber. |
| 5. What are the lessons for your own career in Fiji Transport Authority? | There was a need to go back to basic methods, carry out all stages of projects from start to finish and use adaptive approaches. As a transport professional you are responsible for "everything." This was challenging, but also very satisfying as well. |

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