



Keynote Address

By

The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP

Minister of Public Administration and Communications

Launch of TT WiFi

City Gate

July 29th, 2016

Salutations

- The Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, Minister of Works and Transport
- The Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn, Minister of Social Development and Family Services
- The Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh, Minister of Health
- The Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillion, Minister of National Security
- The Hon. Darryl Smith, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs
- Mr. Kurt Meyer and Ms. Denise Duncan, Deputy Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications
- Mr. Terrance Beepath, Chairman of the Board of PTSC and other Board Members
- Ms. Sacha Thompson, Chief Executive Officer- Digicel
- Mr. Paul Acton, General Manager-Digicel
- Executives of our Stakeholder and partner agencies
- The management team of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications
- Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- Members of the Media

A pleasant Good morning to you all!

I am happy to address you this morning as we officially launch Government's WiFi on buses project. This initiative, branded TT Wi-Fi, which is available to users from today, was born out of a need to provide citizens and visitors with sufficient connectivity and access, to get on-line and stay connected en route to various destinations across Trinidad (and eventually) Tobago.

Today, Citygate, becomes the gateway to the Information Superhighway.

Those along the prescribed routes from Port of Spain to: Arima, Sangre Grande, Chaguanas, San Fernando, Diego Martin as well as in Tobago when that route is ready, will enjoy the comforts that PTSC has provided within the seven Higer Deluxe Coaches, the six Sunlong CNG- fully air conditioned buses, and now, courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the free Wi-Fi service provided by our Telecommunications partner, Digicel.

This government recognizes that we need to take bigger strides in our attempts to ensure that our citizens are connected and engaged. There is much more to be done to leverage the digital economy for social impact.

That is why we are at Citygate today about to board a bus for new destinations on the Information Superhighway. Yesterday Cabinet agreed to the reconstitution of the E-business roundtable, the public/private partnership collaboration which aims to ensure our journey is well-planned and organized.

TT Wifi's role in providing this opportunity for citizens to access online services easier and more conveniently is a significant one; however, I must underscore that there are limits. This service was not designed to stream movies or television shows. It was designed for real-time experiences such as checking your email, downloading a map of the city, or making a quick Skype call. Additionally it must be emphasized that TTWi-Fi does not allow users to access websites that may be deemed inappropriate or unsuitable such as pornography, gambling or sites that promote hate or acts of crime.

We have provided **FREE** access to WiFi on public buses, and although there is a limit of two, one hour sessions per day, I am of the firm belief that this is sufficient time to spend connected in productive activity, trumping the idleness that long hours spent in traffic congestion often brings. I am also counting on the Minister of Works and Transport, to ensure that no journey on these routes should last more than one hour, one way.

The Global Information Technology Report recently released by the World Economic Forum reveals that Trinidad and Tobago is ranked 67 out of 139 countries in the Network Readiness Index. This reflects an improvement of three places from the 2015 results. A closer examination of the overall numbers shows that in terms of *Individuals using Internet, %*- we are ranked 47, and in the category *Households with internet access, %* we are 64th. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago ranks first globally for mobile network coverage for % population.

I repeat, the 2016 World Economic Forum Global IT Report ranks Trinidad and Tobago #1 for Mobile Network Coverage, from among 139 countries.

What this means ladies and gentlemen is that with the vast number of phones and to large extent, smart phones that have made their way to our citizenry, we have to find a way to increase internet usage and internet access to citizens when not at their homes- and TT WiFi is that way.

The continued development and roll out of the TT WiFi platform has the power to change the face of Port of Spain into a wireless city with Wi-Fi facilities at designated Government premises such as hospitals and health centres, passport and licensing offices. As such, we envision that the TT WiFi initiative will provide benefits on all fronts. With this initiative;

- People can surf the web freely for study, leisure or to access Government Information while commuting
- Government agencies and other organizations who have not yet done so, will now be encouraged to extend their services to a wireless platform to reach and connect with all citizens
- ICT industry players can make use of this new wireless platform to develop and provide more Wi-Fi applications (apps), products and supporting services to citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's launch of TTWiFi is just a first step in our destination to ensure easy access to the Internet. We are living in a digital age, and to help our students get ahead, we must make sure they have access to cutting-edge technology.

We cannot develop a digital economy until we develop a digital Government, and in this respect we recognize the need for Government inclusivity in ICT platforms. We need to protect what we have done, build on it, and put it on a course to provide higher speeds and greater opportunities in the years ahead.

This initiative, begun by iGovTT, is an exciting effort that has my wholehearted and enthusiastic support, particularly because of the benefits it will provide for citizens who commute to Port of Spain each day, yet retreat to rural communities, where it is generally known that high-speed Web access still lags behind urban and suburban areas.

There would be some who would question the need for free public wi-fi, on buses, throughout Government offices, (and eventually in popular areas Island-Wide) given that public amenities such as electricity and public transportation are not free. This Government however, overwhelmingly recognizes the potential for public Wi-fi to stimulate business and enhance the quality of life. Ladies and gentlemen, the internet is a basic requirement in 2016, akin to water and power in a civilized society that helps people communicate and keep informed.

In 2011 the United Nations declared that Internet access is a human right, and that limiting a person's access to the Internet is a violation of their human rights under international law, a move that signaled a newfound understanding of 'digital rights'.

Today begins the city's journey to position itself to join the ranks of others around the world like New York City, Hong Kong; Paris, and Macau to name a few. What these cities have successfully done, ladies and gentlemen, is develop hundreds and in some cases thousands of hotspots that are available for all citizens and visitors to connect to, which are password-free, and easy, thanks to a network in public buildings, civic squares and even on some buses and trams around the city.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no acceptable reason that can be advanced, to explain why citizens cannot now apply for and purchase Government services online.

The development of e-Government must be seen as a priority, facilitating greater efficiencies and effectiveness in the delivery of basic social services and minimizing opportunities for corruption.

The Government therefore will work in tandem with its stakeholders to ensure the implementation of systems which will support the interoperability of ICT infrastructure and programmes across government agencies.

Our e-service portal, branded as ttconnect and managed by iGovTT, aims to improve the performance of the public services provided to residents and organisations, as well as to streamline public services to make an efficient and effective contribution to the country's economic growth.

ttconnect underscores the merits of decentralization of Government services and the utilization of information and communications technologies (ICTs) as a medium for enhanced service delivery and people empowerment. It is in this regard, that those connecting to TTWiFi will first be directed to ttconnect to access any one of over 59 e-government services available on the ttconnect channels.

Ladies and gentlemen, Trinidad and Tobago must develop its ICT ecosystem to achieve higher levels of usage, and in so doing, bridge the digital divide. Our public libraries are making great strides towards helping to stem the issue of usage, but even they have closing times.

A public internet connection means that there is one more avenue where we all can connect- where public transportation users can research the opening times of the nearest restaurant, a student can send a WhatsApp message to a parent saying they are running late, or anyone can submit an email enquiring about e-tax, all without using up precious megabites on their data plan.

This is part of the reason why, on this Government's legislative agenda, recently laid in the Parliament, we have committed to ensuring the passage and implementation of the Electronic Transactions Act and its companion-the Proceeds of Crime Act. This government is committed to ensuring that there is a sufficient legislation to bolster the political and regulatory environment when it comes to ICT and ICT Policy.

As Trinidad and Tobago continues to integrate the use of ICT into our daily activities more completely, we intend to reap the benefits that robust digital economies generate.

It is the stated intention of this Government that Trinidad and Tobago will not be left behind. I wish to emphasize this administration's commitment to the active development and delivery of every aspect of ICT to the people of T&T.

Ladies and gentlemen the ICT bus has finally left the station.

I thank you.