

**Public Transportation in St. Lucia:  
Research Methodology**

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By

Kim Ianelli, John Rosendo, and Sarah Corey

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**Abstract:**

This was the first year that the public transportation system in St. Lucia was studied by UVM students. Our goal was to efficiently evaluate the system and we determined that the implementation of a survey was the best tool to do so. John Rosendo, Kim Ianelli, and Sarah Corey followed an exploratory research process (see **Appendix A**) throughout the project. The completion of this report, as well as all work conducted in St. Lucia encompasses the exploratory stage, and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has expressed desire to finish the process and analyze results from surveys observing larger sample sizes. Our conclusions supplement our recommendations for future continuation of projects with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs.

**Project Concept:**

Public Transportation systems play a central role in supporting both economic activity and social life. Advances in transportation technology make more information, goods, and services available to those with access to transportation<sup>1</sup>. Public transportation promotes “economic efficiency and growth” and tends to reduce the “ill effects of sprawl.” Public transit benefits people in rural areas by promoting “economic well-being” as well as reducing “economic and social inequalities<sup>2</sup>.” The main challenge to rural transit development is funding. High per rider costs from low population densities and

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn Yago, *The Sociology of Transportation*, 1983

<sup>2</sup> Brown, D. *Public Transportation on the Move in Rural America*. Economic Research Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, June 2004.

long transit routes make obtaining funds very difficult<sup>3</sup>. Designing a thorough transportation plan is the first step towards improving or creating successful public transportation services.

In 2006, several members of the St. Lucian Ministry of Consumer Affairs expressed their desire to thoroughly study the public transportation system in St. Lucia. Specifically the Ministry staff was interested in (a) understanding consumer needs and opinions and (b) understanding private minibus drivers' opinions and concerns. The goal of our project is to start the necessary steps to help St. Lucia's Ministries form a public transportation plan for the island by evaluating the current system through field studies.

**Problem Statement:**



In St. Lucia there is a lack of reliable and sustainable transportation services. Currently the systems are poor, unreliable and are in need of adequate scheduling<sup>4</sup>. Traffic and parking congestion has become a major concern of the St. Lucian Transport Board especially in and around the capital city of Castries<sup>5</sup>. There is a need for information on public transportation options, and a need for analysis of the concerns and opinions of both private mini-bus/taxi drivers and consumers. Before such analysis can take place an exploratory study on transportation as a whole is necessary to sufficiently represent and account for all possible challenges and opportunities presented before us.

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<sup>3</sup> Brown, D., Stommes, E. *Rural Governments Face Public Transportation Challenges and Opportunities*. Amber Waves, February 2004.

<sup>4</sup> [http://stlucia.gov.lc/pr2003/transport\\_department\\_to\\_overhaul\\_national\\_transportation\\_system.htm](http://stlucia.gov.lc/pr2003/transport_department_to_overhaul_national_transportation_system.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.stlucia.gov.lc/pr2006/march/transport\\_board\\_addresses\\_parking\\_woes\\_in\\_city.htm](http://www.stlucia.gov.lc/pr2006/march/transport_board_addresses_parking_woes_in_city.htm)

**Objectives:**

Our project for the class aims to accomplish several tasks. Evaluating and analyzing the current transportation system is our primary objective, and our conclusions will ideally be used to implement further surveys on the island addressing the need for more efficient public transportation. To best evaluate and analyze the system, each member of our group will follow basic field research procedure. This “exploratory study” will be initiated in the form of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation in and around the cities of Castries and Soufriere as well as in surrounding rural areas. Included in the study is our second objective; to present a 3 day workshop to train ministry staff. The purpose of these workshops is to introduce the skills needed to continue the study in preparation of a final survey.

**Methods:**

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The exploratory phase of this project began when we first used and observed the transportation system in St. Lucia. We talked to bus drivers and consumers about the key issues concerning transportation. These discussions, beginning in Soufriere and continuing in Rodney Bay, were informal with out any guides or scripts. We spoke with drivers, a fisherman, a bartender, an artist, and others. In Rodney Bay we continued our project by conducting interviews and discussions with director of consumer affairs, Philip McClaren, and some of his staff, as well as some users of the minibus system. We asked them three open ended questions:

- *In your own words, how would you describe the condition of public transportation system in your area?*
- *What's the **best** thing about the public transportation system in your area?*
- *What's the **worst** thing about the public transportation system in your area?*

In Rodney Bay, Sarah and John, and Kim and Kevin, tested the survey provided by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs (see **Appendix B**), which had been revised by the group before arriving in St. Lucia (see **Appendix C**). The purpose of the pretest was to further adjust and improve the survey. We focused on sentence structure, wording, and relevance to the key issues surrounding public transportation in St. Lucia. The survey was administered orally; one of us would ask the questions while the other recorded the responses. We approached St. Lucian residents for questioning, and they were chosen in no particular order. We completed 30 surveys.

On Monday the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, we began our 3 day workshops that ran from 9am to 12pm Monday through Wednesday. These workshops, on social research methods, began with a presentation by Thomas DeSisto and concluded with work groups lead by Sarah, Kim, and John. The first day our group held an open discussion on transportation in general. The second day we broke up into three small groups and went over the changes we had made to the survey based on our work in Vermont, and our pretest in Rodney Bay. This gave ministry staff an opportunity to ask questions and give suggestions. On the third day we presented the ministry staff with a final survey template with all of our revisions (see **Appendix D**). We gave our final presentation and recommendations on Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup>.

## Results:

Through our observations, interviews and work groups we determined the main concerns regarding the minibus system in St. Lucia. The key issues included safety, vehicle condition, cleanliness of vehicle and drivers, dress code, availability, fare prices, scheduling, bus stops, and government regulation. These issues were considered when putting together the final survey (see **Appendix D**).

There was no analysis of the data collected from the 30 surveys. It was our initial intention to develop the survey, and inform the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on proper research methodology. The responses from consumers gave us a better understanding of the minibus system which contributed to the work shops and the survey's development.


In our work shops, the participants were informed of the steps we had gone through from our initial research in Vermont to our field work in St. Lucia. The work groups were supplemented by the presentations given by Thomas. This gave the ministry staff the opportunity to apply the research theories and methodology learned in the first half of the workshops to field work that was being done. The combination of presentations and work groups proved to be an effective educational tool. Each participant (including the three UVM students) gained critical thinking skills which can be useful when analyzing the legitimacy of other "scientific studies" or reports. Ministry staffs expressed their confidence in finalizing/administering the public transportation survey and felt better prepared to take on future research projects.

### **Obligations of Group and Sponsor:**

The primary sponsor of our project is Philip McClauren, the director of the Consumer Affairs. Mr. McClauren's foremost obligation to the group and the project was to provide us with specific information concerning the local transit situation. He also facilitated our meetings with other ministry officials who were interested in the project.

The members of our group had various responsibilities: drafting questions for interviews, recording the interviews, contacting crucial representatives prior to our arrival, securing venues for workshops and presentations, and more. The obligation we had to ourselves and project partners was simply maintaining communication, equally distributing the set tasks, and holding ourselves accountable for those tasks.

### **Conclusion:**



Based on the results and feedback from ministry staff we conclude that Saint Lucia's public transportation system is essential to the economic well being of the island and its people. There are areas of the system that can be improved. We have assisted and enabled personnel in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to conduct an appropriate consumer perceptions survey. This will help them actualize what will need to be improved upon in the future to boost the success of the system. We have completed the exploratory step, and it is now the Ministry's job to continue the next step of the research process, the descriptive step, where they will carry out the survey as they feel necessary. Once the survey is carried out, there is potential for a trip to Vermont by a few of the



Ministry staff. Then the third explanatory step will commence with the evaluation of the survey results.

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**Recommendations:**

*For Future CDAE195 classes*

The continuation of this project is dependant on the Ministry's needs and wants. First and foremost, we recommend that an itinerary be created for ministry staff once travel dates are confirmed. It would be helpful for students to become familiar with the organization and hierarchy of the St. Lucian government to best execute projects.

The transportation system in St. Lucia has great opportunities for further analysis and observation. As mentioned in our results, some of the key issues (safety, scheduling, etc) are all aspects that can be improved upon. We recommend future classes work with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to analyze data gathered from the Consumer Perceptions of Public Transportation survey. Conclusions from the initial survey could be used to create additional projects and surveys that seek to evaluate more specific areas concerning the minibus system. For example, speed limits and seat belts were not issues included in the draft survey, but our results from the pilot study revealed concerns for passenger safety. Substantial research into the public transportation of other Caribbean islands and small countries would be helpful in identifying successful policies and regulations. This can then be applied to the development of public transportation in St. Lucia.

*For Ministry of Consumer Affairs*

Our recommendations to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, as stated in our final presentation, are to finalize and conduct the survey, code data, and prepare data for analysis. Thomas DeSisto discussed various sampling methods in our second workshop, and participants concluded that face to face interviews were the best way to conduct the survey. We came to this conclusion after considering cultural, technological, and human resource constraints. Our group did not work with the Ministry of Transportation, but we suggest the formation of a partnership tailored for this particular project, and that both ministries collaborate to address the needs and concerns of drivers and passengers alike.

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**Appendix A**

**The Research Cycle**

