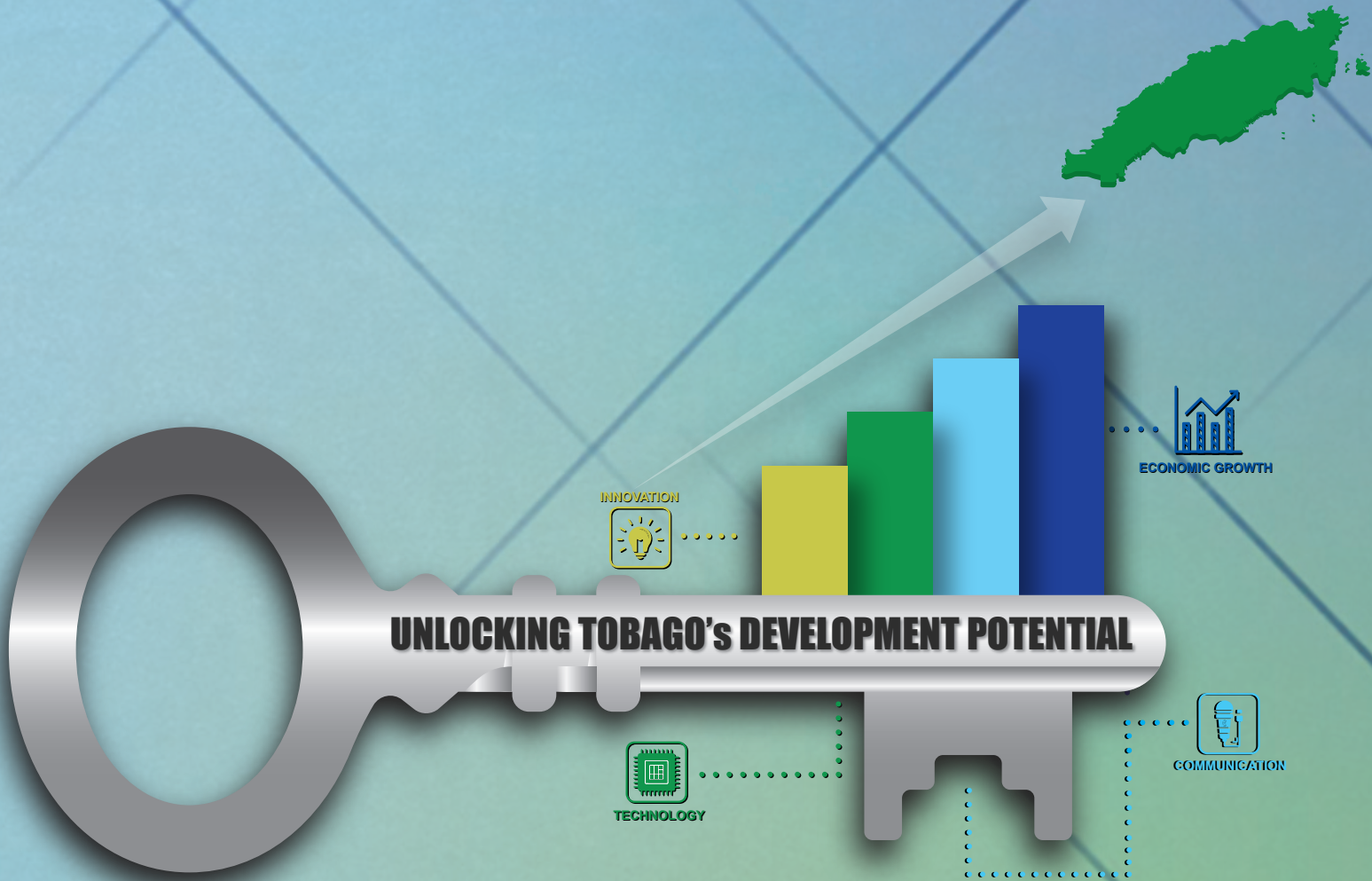




# BUDGET STATEMENT *for Fiscal - 2025*



*Presented by the  
Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade, and the Economy  
Honorable Farley Augustine*

*June 24th, 2024*



**BUDGET STATEMENT**  
**FOR**  
**FISCAL 2025**

**UNLOCKING TOBAGO'S DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL**

**Presented By:**  
**Honourable Farley C. Augustine**  
**Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy**  
**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2024**

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# UNLOCKING TOBAGO'S DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

## 1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Madam Presiding Officer,  
Deputy Chief Secretary,  
Secretaries,  
Assistant Secretaries,  
Minority Leader and other Members of the House of Assembly,  
Administrators of the Tobago House of Assembly,  
Senior Staff of the Tobago House of Assembly,  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen in the public gallery,  
Local and international audiences following this presentation on radio,  
television, and other live streams,  
Members of the Media,  
Good Morning.

- 1.1 Madam Presiding Officer, it is a humbling honour for me to present the third budget, which is likely to be my last as Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy of this Administration before this Distinguished House. As you know, the Budget Statement is a legislative mandate under Section 41 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996.
- 1.2 Madam Presiding Officer, the Budget Statement of the Tobago House of Assembly is a very important policy statement of expressed socio-economic intent for the ensuing fiscal year. It presents the objectives and the programs with their associated projects and initiatives, strategically selected and designed to effect desired outcomes. Even more importantly, it establishes the estimated expenditure that is calculated as necessary to fund the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and its estimated revenues for the fiscal year 2025.
- 1.3 Madam Presiding Officer, as I mentioned in my previous statements, and as I will do here again for emphasis, the existing constitutional arrangements and the fiscal and budgetary legislative frameworks deny Tobago access to the resources and legislative instruments necessary for the development of the island and its people. It is the unpleasant experiences of this demonstrative

denial from since 1962, even before this Assembly was re-established, that have kept Tobagonians fighting from generation to generation for constitutional transformation. This is because our current colonial Constitution inhumanely provides for the Central Government in Trinidad to determine and control virtually every aspect of Tobago's social and economic development. Madam Presiding Officer, more will be said on this later.

- 1.4 Madam Presiding Officer, we present this Budget at a juncture in the tenure of this Administration. We have been in office for about 2 and a half years now and the time is opportune for me to share some reflections on our successes, our key challenges, and the path we need to take going forward for our island to become **the greatest little island on the planet**. Madam Presiding Officer, this is the underlying philosophy which shapes today's budget presentation.
- 1.5 Madam Presiding Officer, today's budget presentation takes place against the backdrop of an intricate tapestry of global affairs in which the threads of peace and economic development are tightly interwoven, each influencing the other to shape the world we live in. However, lately, the canvas has been both tarnished with bloody wars, gun violence, and murders, and overshadowed by global economic challenges.
- 1.6 On the front of global peace, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian Gaza war has left tens of thousands of men, women, and children dead, tens of thousands more mutilated, and millions displaced, perpetuating a cycle of violence and despair with no clear end in sight while the international community looks on seemingly helplessly.
- 1.7 The conflict in Ukraine, fuelled by geopolitical ambitions and ethnic divisions, continues to defy efforts at resolution, casting a darkening shadow over relations between Russia and the West. Meanwhile, the rise of nationalist movements and the resurgence of old grievances threaten to unravel the fabric of unity that has long defined the European project.
- 1.8 On the public safety and citizen security front, the Caribbean region continues to be severely impacted by gun violence and its attendant murders and emboldened gangs.

- 1.9 On the economic front, while some countries are experiencing better than projected growth in their economic recovery, generally the regional economy remains in the sluggish lane.
- 1.10 Domestically, Madam Presiding Officer, we continue to be battered by rising gun violence, gang-related murders, and an economy that is yet to find its development space and trajectory post-COVID-19. The Central Government has seemingly lost its way, as it continues to be demonstrably incapable of deploying practical and sustainable solutions to the many problems confronting the Republic. More pertinently, it is wantonly opposed to providing a reasonable, fair, and just share of the national resources to the Tobago House Assembly. For example, in the just concluded Midterm Budget Review in which the Government increased the 2024 budget by \$2.3B, the THA was allocated only \$50M of the \$300M requested, when it should have received a minimum of \$94M in keeping with the lawful Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC) recommendations. This behaviour can now be classified under a new criminal code as **“Budgetary Attrition 101.”**
- 1.11 Madam Presiding Officer, let me state here that notwithstanding the continued weaponization of the annual National Budget against Tobago, this Administration remains committed to the task of delivering on the handsome mandate it received from Tobagonians in December 2021. We have identified the key strategy to unlock Tobago’s development potential through the strategic selectivity framework and a development pathway towards making Tobago the ‘Greatest Little Island on the Planet’. It is for these reasons the THA’s 2025 fiscal package is themed **“Unlocking Tobago’s Development Potential.”**
- 1.12 Madam Presiding Officer, it would be remiss of me to proceed with this morning’s presentation without extending my sincere gratitude to a number of individuals and groups whose invaluable inputs contributed immensely to shaping this statement. I want to thank the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries for their insightful contributions. I also want to thank the Administrators and Senior Public Officers across the Divisions of the THA for their unwavering commitment and input to the preparation of this Budget Statement. To the various individuals and groups who over several meetings dutifully submitted budgetary proposals for consideration, I say, ‘Thank you,

all.' I must also say thanks to my constituents in particular and the people of Tobago more generally for the opportunity to serve this blessed island and for their continued support, encouragement, and understanding. Finally, I must say a big and holy thank you to the Mighty King of all kings for his continued grace and mercy and for directing and guiding me through this very challenging assignment.

- 1.13 Madam Presiding Officer, for the remainder of the presentation, I will proceed as follows. First, I will provide an outlook of the international, regional, and domestic economies. Second, I will present a review of the fiscal operations and achievements over the last two years. Third, the institutional strategy and development pathways for the period 2025 to 2045 will be delineated. Fourth, the selected programmes and policy initiatives for Fiscal 2025 will be presented. Fifth, I will share the details of the draft 2025 Estimates of Expenditure and financing options. Finally, I will conclude the presentation.
- 1.14 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now examine the outlook for the global and regional economies, and then the outlook for the national and local economies.

## **2 OUTLOOK FOR THE GLOBAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL ECONOMIES**

### **a. Global Economic Outlook**

- 2.1 Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago's development challenge cannot be viewed in isolation, since the island is part of a small, open twin-island state, which is itself connected to the rest of the world by trade. We must therefore scan the global economy for a good understanding of the economic prospects in the year ahead. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global economy has shown resilience in the face of challenges and supply chain disruptions as food and energy crises resulted from the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the heels of similar disruptions during the pandemic. Global inflation has been trending downwards owing to extensive monetary tightening, easing of supply-chain restrictions, and a decline in China's export prices. Consequently, a global growth in output of 3.2 per cent has been forecasted for the end of 2024 and continuing into 2025. Global headline inflation is projected to fall from 5.9 per cent by the end of 2024 to 2.4 per cent.



- 2.2 Global output growth is forecasted to be largely driven by growth in emerging and developing countries where the average growth rate is forecasted to be 4.2 per cent in 2024 and 2025. Meanwhile, in the advanced economies, output is forecasted to grow a modest 1.7 per cent in 2024 and 2025. Among the advanced economies, United States and Canada are forecasted to grow at 2.1 per cent and 1.2 per cent, respectively, in 2024, and by 1.9 per cent and 2.3 per cent, respectively, in 2025. Among the emerging and developing countries, China and India are forecasted to grow at 4.6 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively, in 2024, and by 4.1 per cent and 6.5 per cent, respectively, in 2025.
- 2.3 Madam Presiding Officer, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) price of oil is forecasted to average **\$83 US** per barrel by December 2024, but is expected to fall to **\$81 US** per barrel in 2025. The Henry Hub price of natural gas is expected to average **\$2.20 US** per MMBTU by the end of 2024 and **\$3.10 US** per MMBTU in 2025.
- 2.4 Madam Presiding Officer, among the downside risks to the global economic prospects are the Israeli-Palestinian war and the associated geopolitical tensions, as well as geoeconomic fragmentation that could increase barriers to the free flow of goods, capital, and labour. On the upside, there may be productivity gains from greater utilisation of artificial intelligence and also from successful structural reforms aimed at supporting the retraining needs that may arise from worker displacements.

#### **b. Regional Economic Outlook**

- 2.5 Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago's economic prospects should also be seen in terms of the economic trading links between the country of Trinidad and Tobago and those within the Latin American and Caribbean region. Within this region, output is projected to grow at an average of 2.0 per cent and 2.5 per cent in 2024 and 2025, respectively. In the English-speaking Caribbean alone, while countries such as Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, Dominica, and Grenada are expected to grow above the regional average, Guyana stands out with forecasted rates of 33.9 per cent and 18.7 per cent in 2024 and 2025, respectively. Within the wider Latin American region, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic are all forecasted to grow well above the regional average. The post-pandemic recovery of tourism in the

Caribbean is expected to continue, and remittance flow is also expected to remain positive in the short-to-medium term. There is still the need for cautious optimism given the extremely lengthy El Niño weather patterns, which will increase the possibility of climate-related disruptions that may negatively affect sectors such as tourism and agriculture.

### **c. National Economic Outlook**

- 2.6 Madam Presiding Officer, the national outlook is extremely important for us in Tobago since our budgetary allocation is derived from government transfers and because of the importance of a healthy economic outlook in the nation on tourism in the island of Tobago.
- 2.7 Not unlike the last fiscal year, the outlook for the national economy shows mixed economic fortunes for the energy and the non-energy sectors. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago in its Economic Bulletin of January 2024 reported robust growth in the non-energy sector but more subdued energy sector activity. Growth in the non-energy sector was led by wholesale and retail trade (excluding energy), transport and storage, and the construction sub-sectors. Within the energy sector, however, there were declines in the crude oil and gas outputs and also in the production of energy commodities such as methanol, ammonia, and liquefied natural gas (LNG).
- 2.8 The country's gross official reserves as at the end of December 2023 stood at US \$6.3B, which represents about 7.8 months of import cover. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) recorded an average unemployment rate of 3.9 per cent in 2023. By March 2024, headline inflation stood at an average of 0.8 per cent, while core inflation stood at 1.0 per cent. The Central Bank had maintained a repo rate at 3.5 per cent, aimed at keeping domestic inflation in check.
- 2.9 With subdued economic activity in the energy sector, the buoyancy in the non-energy sector could be expected to continue to drive the domestic economy over the short-to-medium term.

### **d. Local Economic Outlook**

- 2.10 Madam Presiding Officer, the most recent Survey of Business Establishments conducted by the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy for Tobago suggests that Tobago's GDP at constant prices rose from \$1.65B in 2022 to \$1.66B in 2023, an increase of about 1 per cent.

- 2.11 Madam Presiding Officer, the state sector continues to dominate accounting for 45 per cent of Tobago's GDP in 2023. Finance, insurance, real estate, and business services accounted for about 27 per cent; tourism contributed about 13 per cent; transport, storage, and communication accounted for approximately 4 per cent; construction and quarrying also contributed about 4 per cent; and agriculture and manufacturing contributed about 2 per cent.
- 2.12 Madam Presiding Officer, the latest labour market statistics for Tobago available from the CSO indicated that, for the fourth quarter of 2023, the rate of unemployment in Tobago was about 3 per cent – marginally lower than the national unemployment rate of 4 per cent. Approximately 60 per cent of the labour force in Tobago was employed in the state sector, with the private sector employing about 40 per cent. By contrast, nationally, 24 per cent of the labour force was employed in the state sector, with the private sector employing about 76 per cent.
- 2.13 Moreover, the share of the labour force in Tobago with tertiary education as the highest level of attainment was 23 per cent; the share with secondary education as the highest level was 60 per cent; and the share with primary education as their highest level was about 17 per cent. The labour market data for Tobago is largely in keeping with its historical patterns.
- 2.14 Madam Presiding Officer, in regard to prices and inflation, the most recent data on prices available from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago suggest that Tobago recorded headline and food price inflation in April 2024 of 1.3 per cent and 1.5 per cent, respectively. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, was recorded at 1.2 per cent. The inflation data showed marked improvements from what transpired a year ago when we saw double-digit food price inflation numbers.
- 2.15 Madam Presiding Officer, it is well known that Tobago experienced an oil spill earlier this year (February 2024). Madam Presiding Officer, the spill is the largest disaster to impact Tobago since Hurricane Flora. It threatened to extend into the maritime domains of neighbouring countries, underscoring its scale and potential to escalate into a regional environmental disaster. Thankfully, this did not materialise.
- 2.16 Madam Presiding Officer, to date, the THA has disbursed **\$17.0M** in payments to contractors and suppliers. However, outstanding payments to contractors

and service providers totalled **\$51.5M** as at **April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024**. It is projected that a further **\$16.5M** will be required to complete the shoreline clean-up works. It is expected that the THA will be able to formally declare the cessation of shoreline clean-up activities at the end of July 2024. The total cost of the shoreline clean-up, therefore, is estimated to be approximately **\$85.0M**.

2.17 Madam Presiding Officer, it is important to note that the cost of the shoreline clean-up does not include the cost of final disposal of the waste stored at Studley Park, which is estimated to be **\$60.0M**. Madam Presiding Officer, it is against the backdrop of the foregoing that the THA requested **\$153.5M** in the Midterm Budget Review to meet these unbudgeted expenditures but was only allocated a mere **\$50.0M**. The result is that the THA has been faced with significant challenges in meeting its financial obligations and in properly disposing of the waste temporarily stored at the Studley Park Landfill. This is clearly in contradiction to the public assurances given by the Prime Minister at the initial stages.

2.18 The key follow-up actions are:

- assessment and economic valuation of the environmental damage,
- evaluation of the socio-economic impact,
- re-evaluation of the disposal of waste at Studley Park, and
- environmental research and restoration.

2.19 Undoubtedly, Madam Presiding Officer, these activities will attract significant cost implications to the THA, which at this point have not been fully quantified, exacerbating the gravity of the situation.

2.20 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing international, regional, national, and local socio-economic environments represent the context in which we have framed our policy priorities and budgetary estimates for the THA for Fiscal 2025.

2.21 I now turn my attention to highlighting some of the key achievements of this Administration.

### 3 PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE THA: 2022-2024

3.1 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration has been in office for two years and six months. We thought it opportune at this juncture to review our achievements and examine our challenges as we continue to chart the way forward towards creating the “**greatest little island on the planet.**” Madam Presiding Officer, we are proud of what we were able to achieve despite obstacles and what I would call pure fight-down, bad-mind, and pure wickedness and spite at every turn. When it’s not Central Government, it is Central Government-controlled agencies, or our outdated constitutional arrangements, or opponents on the other side, or their misguided allies in Tobago. But we are not fazed—whatever they do, they will not successfully stand in the way of Tobago’s development. This is my solemn promise to the people of Tobago. Tobago shall overcome! And Tobago shall prevail! Not any other entity, which shall remain nameless! The journey thus far has been very interesting and revealing. There have been numerous discoveries, learnings, and insights which have better prepared us for the journey ahead.

3.2 Madam Presiding Officer, our achievements and deliveries were many and multifaceted, in that they covered a wide range of social and economic development sectors and issues. Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to highlight some of our primary achievements, starting with those in the social sector:

- We commissioned and commenced operations at the Roxborough Hospital, taking tertiary-level care directly to Tobagonians in the east and northeast of the island.
- We increased Speech and Language Therapy sessions by 41 per cent for children.
- We reintroduced Vascular Access Surgeries from 24th January 2024, with a total of forty-eight (**48**) cases completed to date.
- We increased the threshold of the Emergency Food Card from **\$500** to a maximum of **\$1,500**, dependent on the size of the cardholder’s family. Successful applicants no longer have to reapply every month; they receive benefits in three-month tranches, for a maximum of one year of food supplementation.

- One thousand, three hundred and ten (**1,310**) cataract surgeries were successfully performed in phases 1 and 2, reducing the cataract backlog, and with an additional seven hundred (**700**) surgeries carded to be done in phase 3, which started on June 10th 2024.
- We successfully completed upgrade and repair works to fifty-four (**54**) primary and secondary schools to the tune of **\$70.0M** under the annual school repairs programme.
- We provided financial assistance to seventy-one (**71**) new tertiary-level students and continued assistance to fifty-one (**51**) students under the Financial Assistance Programme to the tune of **\$2.6M**.
- We distributed one thousand and seventy-two (**1,072**) computers and tablets to students and teachers at primary and secondary schools.
- We exposed over four hundred and fifty (**450**) young persons to the World of Work through the Youth Department and the Youth Energised for Success (YES) Programme.
- We distributed approximately **\$25.0M** in grants and subsidies through the Home Improvement Programme.
- We distributed over one hundred and forty (**140**) parcels of land at Developments, including Blenheim, Buccoo, Castara, Courland, and Kilgwyn.
- Over seventy-five (**75**) persons benefitted from over **\$3.0M** for roof repairs in a partnership between the THA and Habitat for Humanity.
- We undertook and successfully executed the largest single street lighting exercise in the history of Tobago with the installation of five hundred and sixteen (**516**) streetlights across the island, inclusive of one hundred and thirteen (**113**) between Kings Bay and Speyside, which had been in partial darkness for decades.
- We invested **\$1.03M** in the Programme for Rural Electrification to the direct benefit of ninety (**90**) families.
- We successfully trained two thousand, three hundred and seventy (**2,370**) persons in the Vocational Skills Programme in 2022-2023, with a current cadre of one thousand, nine hundred and fifty (**1950**) in training in 2024.

- We restructured CEPEP to improve operational efficiency and productivity.

3.3 With regard to achievements in our financial and economic operations, we:

- paid the Reserve Electricity Bill for five hotels in the amount of **\$3.0M** to keep them open.
- increased salaries and wages for CEPEP and Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) daily paid workers by **100** per cent and **88** per cent, respectively, putting an additional **\$29.3M** into their pockets.
- employed eight hundred (**800**) persons on a rotating basis in the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development. (Going forward, we will be converting these to **full-time jobs**.)
- employed three hundred and seventy-seven (**377**) persons in the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection and one hundred and fifty (**150**) persons in the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development. Additionally, we increased the wages of reforestation workers.
- increased the number of Cruise passengers from **46,864** in 2022/2023 to **103,838** in 2023/2024 – an increase of a whopping **121** per cent.
- invested **\$36.1M** under the Tourism Accommodation Relief Grants Programme to the benefit of one hundred and twenty-four (**124**) applicants; and **\$5.0M** under the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme to the benefit of forty-six (**46**) applicants.
- invested **\$6.0M** in renovation and upgrade works on Manta Lodge, and secured international branding for the hotel, which will receive its first guest around August 1<sup>st</sup> 2024.
- introduced and successfully hosted the Tobago Carnival in October 2022 and 2023.
- successfully negotiated the resumption of the Condor flights from Germany to Tobago.
- improved operational efficiency at Tractor Pool with the acquisition of six (**6**) wheeled tractors, an excavator, a trailer truck, a bucket truck, and a dump truck, thereby clearing the backlog farmers who were awaiting services.

3.4 In the area of physical and social infrastructure development, Madam Presiding Officer, we delivered the following:

- the Smithfield to Dutch Fort Connector Road.
- the St. Peter's Bay Road (giving residents vehicular access to their homes).
- the connector road from Lammy Road to Roxborough.
- resurfacing of the Allfields Road.
- completion of the Little Tobago jetty, main house, and pagoda rehabilitation projects.
- refurbishment and upgrade of the prison at Scarborough.
- Friendship Connector Road.
- a bridge at Gru Gru Patch and other civil works (giving residents vehicular access to their homes).
- a refurbished and recommissioned fishing facility at Studley Park.
- completion of phase one of the Parlatuvier Fishing Depot.
- upgrade of the Shaw Park Cultural Complex.
- renovations on the Calder Hall Administrative Complex, now renamed the Hochoy Charles Administrative Complex.
- successful cleanup of approximately 15 kilometres of coastline from Scarborough to Crown Point, removing 60,000 barrels of oily liquid waste and 24,000 cubic yards of oily solid waste emanating from the oil spill which occurred in February 2024.
- construction of the Courland Beach Sport Arena – the first major sporting facility built on the island in over a decade.
- completion of electrification of the Patience Hill Playground and commencement of electrification works at Louis D'or.
- upgrade of the swimming pools at Kendall and YMCA at Courland.

3.5 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing is just highlights of some of our major achievements over the last two years and six months. Our achievements are even more noteworthy as they took place in the midst of budgetary attrition, legislative obstacles, and the general lack of support from our unpatriotic



opponents and some self-serving social and political commentators with personal agendas.

3.6 Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration has found the strategy to unlock Tobago's development potential. Therefore, the next eighteen months promises to be a time of elevated social and economic delivery to Tobagonians. There is a saying that the reward for good work is more work. Therefore, my Administration is prepared and ready to do more for every Tobagonian everywhere.

3.7 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now set out in detail my Administration's Institutional Strategy for Fiscal 2025 and beyond.

## **4 THE INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY FOR 2025 AND BEYOND**

### **a. Introduction**

4.1 Madam Presiding Officer, our selected institutional strategy for Fiscal 2025 and beyond and the associated priorities were determined from a series of technical reviews and analyses of development plans prepared for Tobago from the mid-1960s, long before I was even a thought. The records have shown that at least eleven (11) development plans were prepared that focused entirely on Tobago's social, economic, and spatial development. The last two (2) were done in 2005 and 2010. The reviews revealed that, in the main, the plans addressed fundamental social and economic issues and matters related to the lack of civic infrastructure. Sadly, many of these issues persist today. Although a lot has changed since then, many of the recommendations are still germane to some of the key developmental issues facing Tobago today.

4.2 For example, Madam Presiding Officer, the 1965 plan that was prepared following the devastation of Hurricane Flora in 1963 recommended improvements to Tobago's security infrastructure by the construction of police stations – one in Plymouth, one between Scarborough and Roxborough, and one along the Northeast coast that is still being serviced by the Moriah Police Station. These remain part of the 90 per cent of the recommendations of ALL the plans that were not implemented.

4.3 Madam Presiding Officer, the reviews were also greatly impacted by the everyday reasons that gave urgency to the need for a technically sound

institutional strategy and development framework that will unlock the island's true development potential, thereby putting Tobago on a sustainable and resilient development pathway to becoming the **“Greatest Little Island on the Planet.”**

- 4.4 Madam Presiding Officer, this is what gave rise to the budget theme for Fiscal 2025: ***“Unlocking Tobago’s Development Potential.”***
- 4.5 Madam Presiding Officer, the keys that will unlock Tobago’s development potential come naturally from the findings of the technical reviews and analyses conducted on ALL the development plans for the island, the everyday reasons, and the interceding annual budgetary work plans. The findings, as mentioned earlier, revealed that the provisions and development prescriptions are all in the main still relevant today. These findings are significant given the calls from many quarters for a new Tobago Development Plan.
- 4.6 Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago is not void of development plans. What is evidently missing is the capacity and capability to effectively and efficiently implement the development prescriptions over the past six-plus decades. This continues to manifest as an implementation deficit up to today, on account of the financial, administrative, and technical limitations, as well as the legislative constraints that continue to define Tobago. Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, what is urgently needed is a technically sound and rational institutional strategy designed and engineered to enhance and elevate implementation across Tobago’s social and economic development ecosystem.
- 4.7 Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration has taken the informed decision to pursue Tobago’s development within the Strategic Selectivity Institutional framework. In the landscape of development, where resources are often limited and challenges abound, the concept of strategic selectivity presents itself as a guiding principle for crafting effective development strategies. In essence, strategic selectivity speaks to the deployment of a practical and scientific methodology of selecting where to allocate resources, interventions, and efforts to maximise impact and sustainability.
- 4.8 It is about prioritising development programs, projects, and sectors based on impact, scale, pace and, most importantly, the available financial and institutional resources. Therefore, selectivity can be viewed as a natural outcome of a carefully constructed output-based budgeting optimisation model

that acknowledges the interconnectedness and complexity of our development issues linked to our overall goal of making Tobago the “**greatest little island on the planet.**”

- 4.9 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration views strategic selectivity as very critical to the overall development outcomes being pursued to positively impact the lives and well-being of Tobagonians. Research reveals that the strategic selectivity model has been used successfully by multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank Group in countries with significant and persistent resource constraints. As such, selectivity can be deployed as a key strategy in Tobago, where our development needs are great compared to the financial resources that are made available through the National Budget. Relatedly, at its core, strategic selectivity requires a deep understanding of the context in which development interventions have to operate. It requires critical consideration of factors such as socio-economic dynamics, political landscape, cultural norms, environmental conditions, and, in Tobago’s specific case, our colonial Constitution.
- 4.10 Madam Presiding Officer, it is worth mentioning here that a technical analysis of the development projects and programmes on the books of the THA revealed that currently there are **four hundred and six (406) projects** in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). In the Fiscal 2024 PSIP, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) was allocated **\$260M** for three hundred and seventy **(370)** or **91.2** per cent of the projects. The remaining thirty-six **(36)** projects or **8.8** percent received no allocation. Of the three hundred and seventy **(370)** projects that received an allocation, three hundred and sixty-six **(366)** were ongoing and **four (4)** were new proposals.
- 4.11 Madam Presiding Officer, the message in these observations, coupled with the everyday administrative limitations and human resources capacity challenges that we have been recording, is that reducing the number of projects is an urgent development priority for Tobago. One of the fundamental aspects of strategic selectivity is the recognition that **all our problems cannot be addressed at the same time, nor can they be treated with equal intensity.**
- 4.12 Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, selectivity advocates for focusing on high-priority areas where programmed interventions are likely to impact broader

positive transformation and change. This approach promotes and enables the most efficient use of resources and minimises the risk of spreading efforts too thinly, thereby diluting impact and effectiveness.

- 4.13 Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, our calculated intent is to incrementally reduce the number of projects from fiscal 2025 and re-align them based on impact, scale, and pace, thereby systematically *“Unlocking Tobago’s Development Potential.”*
- 4.14 Relatedly, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration recognises and understands that transforming an indiscriminate development culture into a selective and disciplined one will not be easy. Indeed, it will take some doing to implement, especially as our development needs are overwhelming.
- 4.15 However, what is clear, Madam Presiding Officer, is that without this brave, bold, and big effort to improve development spending impacts through strategic selectivity, the island’s development will remain unimpactful and virtually stagnated. Therefore, our drive is to institutionalise strategic selectivity by deliberately doing fewer but larger programme operations that would effectively leverage the resources of the THA and those of our development partners, thereby delivering greater and much-improved benefits to Tobagonians.
- 4.16 Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, strategic selectivity emphasises the importance of building partnerships and collaborations to amplify impact. In recognition of the fact that no single actor, organisation, or entity holds all the necessary expertise or resources, strategic alliances enable the pooling of diverse strengths and resources towards common development goals. Therefore, this Administration is committed to promoting and protecting our partnerships with our communities, the Central Government and its agencies, civil society, and the private sector entities towards enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of our development efforts.
- 4.17 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now turn to the Development Pathways we have adopted.

#### **b. The Development Pathways**

- 4.18 Madam Presiding Officer, strategic selectivity promotes the significance of adaptability and flexibility in development strategies. While it is essential to have a clear plan and set objectives, it is equally crucial to remain responsive

to evolving circumstances and feedback from clients and stakeholders. This means that we must be willing to adjust priorities, reallocate resources, and pivot strategies based on new information and the changing dynamics on the ground.

- 4.19 Therefore, coupled with our deployment of the selectivity framework, my Administration commissioned the development of a strategic targeted development planning approach towards ensuring that Tobago achieves high-income economy status in the next two decades. The approach has been titled: ***“Towards the Greatest Little Island on the Planet: Strategic Development Planning Pathways for Tobago 2025 to 2045”***.
- 4.20 These development planning pathways represent a fundamental shift from previous approaches to development planning in Tobago. The preference for this approach is based primarily on the need for a more flexible, emergent, practical, and resilient approach to planning that is designed to encourage continuous learning, innovation, and adaptation buttressed by the principles, policy prescriptions, institutional arrangements, and decision-making processes that are geared towards identifying and integrating the most appropriate solutions to public problems.
- 4.21 Madam Presiding Officer, a central and underlying feature of the planning pathway is the twenty-one (21) development priorities derived from the people’s mandate, and the everyday and emerging issues confronting the island. Some of our core priorities are: targeted GDP growth; education and innovation; a scientifically driven modern healthcare system; safe and sustainable food systems; a sustainable tourism sector; digital transformation; and growth of the SME sector. These priorities will shape the development work programs of the Divisions. The programs will inform the projects and initiatives of the Divisions and the monitoring frameworks with clearly established targets and measures of progress and success in our project implementation and management matrix.
- 4.22 Madam Presiding Officer, we have carefully curated how we should present the planning pathway to Tobagonians. We are mindful that we are planning in the most technologically advanced and fluid era in the history of modern man. We are also patently aware that many of our young and not-so-young engage with information in ways far removed from our engagement modalities

twenty years ago. We are also very mindful that many Tobagonians in the diaspora have demonstratively expressed a keen interest in the development of their native island.

- 4.23 It is because of this awareness, Madam Presiding Officer, that we have decided to launch and host the information system related to the development planning pathway digitally, as a core component of the “My-THA” online platform. The online portal will allow for every Tobagonian and, more generally, anyone to sign up for an account to provide real-time feedback on the ideas presented on the website. We will be able to send alerts to every account holder via text message. In this way, Tobagonians will be constantly involved in the development planning processes. Additionally, we will continue to engage our stakeholder communities and receive their concerns and recommendations via our town hall meetings.
- 4.24 Madam Presiding Officer, I am pleased to report that with the assistance of Tobago Information Technology Limited, we have been engaged in the building out of our Greatest Little Island on the Planet Web portal. Relatedly, we have set a deadline of the first quarter of Fiscal 2025 for the full launch of the site.
- 4.25 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to now present our key Sectoral Priorities, Programmes, Projects, and Initiatives for Fiscal 2025.

## **5 SECTORAL PRIORITIES, PROGRAMMES, PROJECTS, AND INITIATIVES FOR FISCAL 2025**

- 5.1 Madam Presiding Officer, I will start with the Administration’s plans to stimulate business development, economic growth, and diversification.
- a. Business Development, Economic Growth and Diversification**
- 5.2 Madam Presiding Officer, through the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy, the Office of the Chief Secretary and various THA special-purpose companies, there are a number of initiatives geared towards business development, economic growth, and diversification of the Tobago economy.
- 5.3 Madam Presiding Officer, previously we indicated our intention to address the inadequacies of the financing options and of business support services currently provided by the Venture Capital and Equity Fund Limited (VCEFL)

and the Business Development Unit (BDU). Accordingly, the Administration commissioned the establishment of an integrated development financial institution, namely, the Tobago Development Fund. This Fund is intended to provide financing for commercial borrowers who are either unable to meet the borrowing requirements of traditional banking institutions or who lack sufficient access to the institutionalised credit market. The services to be provided will encompass long-term investment finance, the issuing of shares and debentures, acceptance of new securities for credit, leasing, factoring, and offering of additional non-financial services as a supplement to credit grants.

- 5.4 The Fund will provide technical support related to products, processes, and markets, and engagement in capacity-building programmes to support business start-ups, innovative projects, and other institution-building activities. It will also mobilise investment capital to supplement the financing of economic growth and development programmes and projects of the Assembly, and will supply low-cost funding for the medium-to-long-term expansion and development of businesses in the island.
- 5.5 Madam Presiding Officer, as a precursor to the full operation of the Tobago Development Fund, we have recently finalised the start-up of a Loan Guarantee Programme which will initially be administered by the First Citizens Bank but will be continued within the Fund. This will ensure that creditworthy businesses in Tobago are able to obtain the required financing to address their short- and medium-term needs to stay afloat as well as invest in new business ventures. Any registered business, partnership, or company whose major business operations are conducted in Tobago, and which approaches its banker with a minimum loan requirement of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000) and a maximum of three million (\$3.0M) may be considered for the loan guarantee once the eligibility criteria are met. The guaranteed amount will cover up to 80 per cent of the total amount of the loan granted.
- 5.6 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025, the Strategic Business Support and Development Unit (SBSDU) will continue to play a key role in supporting the efforts of Tobago's SMEs to successfully establish their products and services outside of Trinidad and Tobago. In recognition of the development of Tobago's SMEs and in support of those who are very close to doing so, key partnerships

currently being discussed will provide opportunities for Tobago's SMEs in the areas of warehousing and logistics, production capacity, and marketing.

- 5.7 Madam Presiding Officer, it is also notable that selected producers of Tobago sweets have put in the necessary work to prepare their products for international markets. This includes product testing and packaging support. It is expected that within the next three (3) months these sweets will enhance the presentations made by Trinidad and Tobago's Commercial Attachés as they work to engage North America, Guyana, the United Kingdom, Jamaica, and Panama on our behalf.
- 5.8 It is also important to note, Madam Presiding Officer, that key segments of the value chain will be engaged with a view to strengthening them. The SBSDU proposes to engage producers of labels and packaging solutions in Tobago with a view to strengthening this key sector in support of our SMEs, thereby reducing costs. It will also allow for the development of producers of this key segment of our value chain.
- 5.9 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025, the Eco-Industrial Development Company of Tobago (E-IDCOT) will actively seek public-private partnerships to develop additional built spaces at Cove. These spaces will be specifically earmarked for agro-processing and light manufacturing. In addition, E-IDCOT will expand its Land Tenancy Incentive Campaign to stimulate interest and uptake at the Park. These incentives will include a waiver of lease premiums of up to five (5) years, as well as complimentary access to E-IDCOT's project management and business development services. Further, as part of the campaign, land-based tenants will be able to utilise their lease lands as collateral for securing financing **only** for their business operations at Cove. This is expected to result in the signing of additional large land-based tenants in the short term.
- 5.10 Madam Presiding Officer, in the fiscal year 2025, Studley Park Enterprises Limited (SPEL) is committed to undertaking significant strategic development initiatives aimed at improving profitability, enhancing operational efficiency, and building organisational resilience. These initiatives will create a more robust and sustainable organisation capable of adapting to changing market conditions and earning significant foreign currency for Tobago. The underlying



strategic objectives are to boost aggregate production and to expand its product portfolio.

5.11 Madam Presiding Officer, to meet these strategic objectives, SPEL will undertake the following activities in Fiscal 2025:

1. Purchase and install two modern crushing plants to enhance aggregate production capacity and efficiency. These new plants will address current and projected supply deficits, and reduce operational inefficiencies caused by the consistent repairing of the outdated plants currently used by SPEL.
2. Acquire supporting equipment and machinery, such as mobile equipment and maintenance tools, needed to maximise the production capacity of the two new crushing plants.
3. Upgrade the concrete batching plant and the asphalt plant to improve operational efficiency and reduce downtime.
4. Establish the infrastructure and acquire the machinery needed to produce bricks and pavers, thereby expanding the product portfolio and tapping into new market segments.

5.12 Madam Presiding Officer, SPEL will use a mix of on- and off-budget financing to give effect to these initiatives in Fiscal 2025.

5.13 Madam Presiding Officer, the THA, through its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Unit now under the Office of the Chief Secretary, aims to foster a diversified, resilient, and sustainable economy by promoting Tobago as a prime investment destination. This initiative is expected to drive positive socio-economic transformation for the benefit of the island's residents and future generations. Key focus areas are film, tourism and hospitality, infrastructure, renewable energy, agribusiness, manufacturing, and innovation. The FDI Unit will support Tobago's economic development by promoting the growth of these key sectors, creating employment opportunities, and facilitating public-private partnerships to leverage the sectors' expertise and resources for successful investment projects. The Unit will prioritise investments that align with sustainable development goals, considering environmental, social, and governance factors.

5.14 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now detail some of our plans to strengthen and reform governance arrangements.

**b. Strengthening and Reforming Governance Arrangements**

5.15 Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago's constitutional rights and entitlements must not be fettered by the Constitution but instead be promoted and protected through rational and democratic transformation of our 1976 colonial Constitution. Accordingly, the Tobago autonomy project, defined by the decades of struggles for internal self-government, remains a selected and active strategic policy objective of this Administration in Fiscal 2025. It is a foundational pillar in our greatest-little-island-on-the-planet design and goal. Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025, we are going to continue our relentless pursuit of the following core transforming upgrades to the constitutional and legislative foundational governance relationship between the THA and the Central Government:

1. A constitutional definition of Tobago that is in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, and that embodies the socio-economic, cultural, and political histories of the people of Tobago and Trinidad.
2. The conferral of final constitutional authority and powers on the THA for all the matters/items listed in the current Fifth Schedule. This transformation would clearly establish the matters for which the THA has final authority and control over in Tobago, the matters that the Central Government are responsible for, and the reserve list for Tobago in respect of other matters relating to Tobago.
3. An appropriate transformation of section 53 of the Constitution by the creation of the Tobago legislature with defined constitutional authority and powers to make laws and associated regulations for the matters for which the THA would have final constitutional responsibility and control.
4. An appropriate transformation of section 75 of the Constitution by placing a fetter on the Cabinet in relation to the matters for which the Executive Council of the Assembly would have final constitutional authority.

5. An appropriate transformation of section 113 of the Constitution to provide for a minimum share for the THA of 8 per cent of the National Budget and of any budgetary supplement or of any grants given to the Central Government for the administration of the country.
- 5.16 Madam Presiding Officer, we have submitted these and other proposed adjustments to the Constitutional Reform Committee recently established by the Central Government. Adjacent to this, we will continue to organise, mobilise, and empower Tobagonians and, by extension, the national community on the issues and matters that speak to the urgent need for constitutional transformation.
- 5.17 Madam Presiding Officer, digital transformation also remains a selected high-priority policy of this Administration. As such, the digitisation of the THA through our Tobago Online programme, of which the MY-THA project is the first phase, will continue with alacrity. In Fiscal 2025, we propose to accelerate the implementation of an Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) with an interface with our e-tender platform which was launched earlier this year. Additionally, we will intensify the digitisation of the Assembly's social services delivery systems, with the aim of completing the online application digital infrastructure by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 and the implementation of the associated e-wallet payment method.
- 5.18 Madam Presiding Officer, another focal area for digitisation is the health records of the population.
- 5.19 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue the deployment of digital applications to the business processes of the Assembly, we will simultaneously equip our public officers with the "high-touch skills" necessary for the effective and efficient use of same.
- 5.20 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me now to speak to the issue of public safety and citizen security.

**c. Public Safety and Citizen Security**

- 5.21 Madam Presiding Officer, the protection and promotion of the safety and security of the citizenry is the core responsibility of a government. In this regard, my island government places the public safety and security of Tobagonians at the top of its priorities because every good thing done will be

unsustainable and unproductive in an unsafe, unsecured Tobago. Therefore, we are intensely monitoring the disturbingly increasing trend of gun violence and murders in the island and stand prepared to do whatever is necessary to stop this trend. Accordingly, in Fiscal 2025, we will strengthen the socially enabling environment for us to take collective actions against those who we know have illegal firearms in our communities. In this regard, the Tobago House of Assembly will do the following: -

- Immediately re-instate the ***Tobago Community Safety Programme*** with the tagline ***#when you are safe, I am safe***. The Programme will be implemented and managed by the Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport and develop projects in relation to the following: -
  - The mobilising, organising, and empowering of our communities to collectively and effectively participate in the promotion and management of their safety and security.
  - The establishment of community services support secretariats in all our community centres and multipurpose facilities.
  - The building of trust and confidence pathways between our communities and law enforcement agencies, which is critical to the call for collective actions against gun violence and murders.
  - The development and implementation of co-created community safety plans designed and engineered on the unique risk profile of each community.
  - Community safety rallies and events.
  - Establishment of a framework for the building of safer communities through environmental designs and the deployment of “Smart City Technologies” such as facial recognition.

5.22 In addition, Madam Presiding Officer, in the medium-to-long term, the THA will establish a Department of Public Safety and Security in the Office of the Chief Secretary. This Department will amalgamate all the units, agencies, and departments of the THA that have a core public safety function. I am happy to note here that the legal review for the establishment of the THA police has been completed and the path is clear for its implementation. We are now

preparing to do a public safety audit, the findings and discoveries of which will inform the institutional design and operation of the Department.

5.23 Relatedly, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration is unconditionally committed to working with our law enforcement agencies to effect whatever fixes are necessary for improving their operational effectiveness and efficiency in Tobago. In this regard, I will continue the ongoing collaborative works with the Office of the Commissioner of Police towards ensuring the continued operational presence of some of the key specialised units in the island.

5.24 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to look at our selected strategies for the building of the tourism sector and the orange economy.

#### **d. Tourism and the Orange Economy**

5.25 Madam Presiding Officer, as this Administration positions itself to follow a strategic pathway to the island's development, the Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation has developed as its foundation an approach rooted in responsible development, resilience, and stakeholder collaboration. This approach has tremendous potential for impactful socio-economic growth through the development of a well-curated and integrated tourism sector and the exploitation of the orange economy.

5.26 Madam Presiding Officer, our selected approach to tourism development involves an elevated focus on issues such as the improvement of tourism infrastructure, product enhancement, airlift, human resource development, and research capacity. Therefore, in Fiscal 2025, the Division will continue its maintenance and upgrade of the existing tourism infrastructure across the island, such as:

- Upgrade of the Store Bay Beach Facility at an estimated cost of **\$15.0M** to a new flagship attraction to be called **Store Bay Beach Club**.
- Transformation of the home of the Blue Food Festival into an entertainment and commercial hub at an estimated cost of **\$14.0M**.
- Restoration of the historical value of the Fort King George Light House as a tourist attraction at an estimated cost of **\$3.0M**.
- Beautification of Scarborough at an estimated cost of **\$3.0M** to uplift the capital through upgrades to various spaces.

- Construction of a Beach Facility, Pier, and Jetty in Louis D'Or and development of the Highland Waterfall Nature Trail in Moriah as part of our community tourism development initiative at a budgeted cost of **\$3.0M**.

- 5.27 Madam Presiding Officer, another critical area of focus is economically sustainable airlift to the island. Going forward, British Airways and Condor will remain engaged. We will also continue our strategies to attract airlift that will increase our connectivity with North America and the traditionally strong Scandinavian market. Additionally, in Fiscal 2025, avenues to open destination Tobago to increased direct regional airlift will be pursued.
- 5.28 Further, we will continue to negotiate with Caribbean Airlines for the return of the domestic capacity to pre-COVID numbers. This will significantly improve the ability to seamlessly connect to Tobago, not only for domestic travellers and visitors, but also for international travellers arriving at Piarco and connecting to Tobago.
- 5.29 Fiscal 2025 will also see the Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation collaborating with the Tobago Hospitality & Tourism Institute for the establishment of a scholarship programme for short courses and degree programmes. The Division has envisioned that this partnership will drive the retooling of the workforce and the re-culturing of minds and attitudes regarding tourism.
- 5.30 Madam Presiding Officer, the Division will also collaborate with the Rural Development Unit in the Division of Settlements, Public Utilities, and Rural Development. In this partnership, communities in East and North-East Tobago, including those in the designated Man and the Biosphere space, will benefit from capacity building (training, mentorship, and awareness) in support of the community tourism development thrust in the island. Further, fifteen (15) communities will benefit from targeted interventions to address the following identified challenges: limited community engagement, sustainability and preservation; economic marginalisation; limited resources; and lack of expertise. Our strategic aim is to empower rural communities to overcome barriers and unlock their full potential for socio-economic development through a sustainable and thriving tourism sector.

- 5.31 Another key area of focus of the Division is product enhancement, diversification, and development. In Fiscal 2025, we will provide technical support for the development of community tourism based on the Castara model, which has had international best practice recognition. Our plan is to replicate it in our community-based tourism development thrust.
- 5.32 Madam Presiding Officer, Fiscal 2025 will also see us developing and implementing a Sport Tourism Policy aimed at building a solid strategy to attract tournaments, and monetise the existing world-class infrastructure. This initiative is designed to be executed in collaboration with the Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport.
- 5.33 Madam Presiding Officer, as part of our broader strategy to develop the tourism sector, we will also focus on the cultural and creative industries (the orange economy). The island's orange economy has significant potential for exponential growth. Known for our creativity and rich tangible and intangible culture, we are poised to tap into the global trillion-dollar orange economy to drive Tobago's socio-economic growth and development.
- 5.34 In addition to the continuation of engagement through the 2024/2025 work plans, the Culture Department and the companies and agencies will focus in Fiscal 2025 on three selected initiatives:
- i. **Artiste Development:** This initiative is envisioned to drive the development of the craft and skills of participants for an impactful and sustained professional career in the entertainment industry. The Division will partner with industry experts for the implementation of the artiste development programme.
  - ii. **D Yard Project:** This initiative will serve as a supportive incubator of talent and tourism business alongside the community tourism thrust. 'D Yard' will move across communities to unearth and showcase indigenous talent, local businesses, and tourism assets (that are both popular and lesser known). Each 'D Yard' will be uniquely tailored to fit the community's cultural heritage and historical antecedence.
  - iii. **Tobago Carnival:** This year will mark the third edition of this event. Last year's version of the carnival was undoubtedly a tremendous success, with tens of thousands of persons from the world over participating. As this event continues to grow and develop, our aim is to

ensure that local stakeholders derive greater socio-economic benefits as their capacities continue to improve.

5.35 Madam Presiding Officer, let me speak now to the agriculture and agro-processing sector.

**e. Agriculture and Agro-Processing Sector**

5.36 Madam Presiding Officer, the availability of safe, healthy, and affordable foods, as well as increasing value added from the agricultural sector, remains a critical priority of this Administration. Our strategic and targeted approach to the development of the sector is to increase the share of the agriculture sector GDP to 5 per cent in the next three (3) years. Our aim is to develop scientifically designed and technologically driven sustainable food systems in Tobago, thereby promoting the uptake of science and technologies in our agriculture practices. If nothing else, the one lesson emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to develop sustainable food supply networks.

5.37 Madam Presiding Officer, the agricultural sector in Tobago continues to be plagued by some critical challenges that continue to stymie its development. They include the following:

- Praedial larceny,
- Pest and diseases,
- Limited application of innovations, new technologies, and climate-smart practices,
- Production inefficiencies and restricted scales of production,
- Land tenure and land preparation limitations,
- Limited product value-chain development, and
- Inadequate marketing arrangements.

5.38 Madam Presiding Officer, these challenges must be addressed if we are to stand any chance of developing sustainable food systems. In Fiscal 2025, there are a number of measures aimed at enhancing the island's food security and sovereignty, and the development of the agro-processing sector.

5.39 One of our primary projects is the continued development of the Tobago Agriculture Research Institute (TARI). TARI aims at building the capacity to



use research and scientific knowledge to guide the development of the agriculture sector in Tobago. TARI will offer a wide range of research, training, and certification options to local, regional, and international students. The Institute will form collaborations with other local, regional, and international institutions to ensure rigorous academic standards are developed and maintained. Earlier this year, a Board was appointed to lead the development of the institute and a number of programmes are expected to be rolled out in the next fiscal year. The Kendall Farm School is being repurposed to house this institute.

- 5.40 Madam Presiding Officer, another critical project is the construction of the mechanical and agro-technology hub. This project is aimed at enhancing the efficiency and reliability of services which now reside at Tractor Pool. The current range of services now offered at Tractor Pool will be expanded to meet the growing needs of the farmers in the island.
- 5.41 Another key project is the establishment of a modular poultry abattoir in Hope. This abattoir will have a capacity of 3,000 to 6,000 birds per hour and is targeted to stimulate the development of the broiler sector in Tobago. The plant will drive the transformation, enhanced efficiency, and profitability of the island's broiler poultry industry. Our objective is to increase the share of the local poultry market by the end 2025.
- 5.42 The Tobago Genetic Improvement project involving small ruminants is an important project under this Administration. This project focuses on the continued strengthening and development of the genetic capacity of the small ruminant sector (sheep and goats) in Tobago. The island has been recognised for the genetic capacity of its small ruminant sector. There is some potential for the export of the genetic materials and the earning of foreign exchange. An investment of **\$4.0M** is proposed for Fiscal 2025.
- 5.43 Madam Presiding Officer, other initiatives in Fiscal 2025 to stimulate the development of the agricultural sector are the following:
- Construction of shade houses, thereby adopting the use of the technology that promotes intensive farming on small portions of land with very high yields.
  - Restarting of the agricultural access roads programme at a budgeted cost of **\$32.0M**.

- Rehabilitation of cocoa estates with the introduction of a solar-powered bird squawker sound deterrent systems to treat with parrots and cocricos.
- Establishment of a Food hub at Mason Hall at a cost of **\$1.5M**.

5.44 Madam Presiding Officer, to ensure greater value added from our agriculture production, we will continue to pursue integration of, and articulation between, the island's agriculture sector and its agro-processing industry. Towards this end, in fiscal 2025, we will develop and establish an intermediate agro-processing facility at Louis D'or. This is a modular food processing facility that is designed to have three specialised processing areas to meet the diverse needs of agro-processors. One section of the facility will focus on the production of value-added items (such as jams, jellies, and sauces) for local and regional markets in the first instance. Another area of its operations will focus on increasing the value-added of root crops through alternative flour production. The other section will cater for the processing of hams, smoked chickens, and smoked fish. Each production area will be outfitted with high-quality equipment to ensure quality controls as well as effective and efficient management. The budgeted cost of the project in Fiscal 2025 is **\$8.0M**.

5.45 Additionally, TADCO will continue to provide market access to our agro-processors by financing their exposure to foreign markets where necessary and appropriate. For instance, a contingent of agro-processors from Tobago will be afforded opportunities to attend Tobago Day in New York in August 2024 to market their products to our diaspora community.

5.46 Madam Presiding Officer, some of the other initiatives of TADCO include:

1. Developing a food-testing facility in the island with emphasis on nutritional value and microbiological profiling, which will be available to all processors.
2. Building export capacity among processors through training in aspects of Food Safety Modernisation Compliance (FSMC) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).
3. Establishing at least one time-sharing processing facility in western Tobago.

4. Networking with TARI, UTT, and UWI to provide certified training in Food Technology, especially for youths and women in Tobago.
5. Providing processors with support and training to enhance their business acumen.

5.47 It is estimated that TADCO will spend **\$11.0M** on the above initiatives among others.

5.48 Madam Presiding Officer, please allow me to turn to education and human capital development.

#### **f. Education and Human Capital Development**

5.49 Madam Presiding Officer, education and human capital development continues to be a primary focus of this Administration. We are also cognisant of the transformative socio-economic impacts of a highly educated and technically skilled and savvy population. In this regard, the Division of Education, Research and Technology will develop and deliver programs and projects designed to ensure the provision of quality education to our population within the formal education system and informal learning through partnerships with the wider community.

5.50 In Fiscal 2025, we propose to incrementally and strategically infuse selected aspects of Tobago's history, culture, heritage, and geopolitics as part of our Tobago-centric curriculum rollout. Our aim is to develop a strong sense of self-identity anchored in the value identity of Tobagonians in the island's school population. Towards this end, the recently-appointed Tobago-centric curriculum committee will:

1. Hold wide-scale stakeholder engagement events.
2. Organise teacher training and professional development workshops.
3. Promote collaborations such as competitions involving other Divisions / Departments, such as Tourism, Community Development, and Food Security.
4. Record and document authentic oral presentations, including stories and plays, as well as folksongs, interviews, and speeches.

5.51 Madam Presiding Officer, another selected focus area for us is transforming the island's education system from a teaching-centric one to a learning-centric one. We have taken note of the learning outcomes of students, which are seemingly pointing to an unacceptable relationship between teaching and learning. I know the multifaceted nature of this issue but, being a former teacher, I also know that the primary factor is the teacher. Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration will take all the necessary actions to start addressing this worrying problem. In Fiscal 2025, we will ensure that-

1. The Teacher Leaders, Accountable Principals, and Effective Schools programme is launched. This programme is intended to hold principals and teachers directly accountable for the students' learning outcomes in their schools. A foundational activity of this programme will be a comprehensive analysis of student performance over the last decade and the systems used in schools to account for student performance.
2. Principals insist that all teachers prepare and submit comprehensive teaching plans for review and approval. This is aimed at ensuring that teaching is done using appropriate teaching and learning methodologies that will positively impact student learning outcomes.
3. Extensive teacher training, monitoring, and evaluation allow for data-driven interventions to improve student performance.
4. Schools are provided with modern teaching aids and other teaching support systems and devices for their use.

5.52 There is also a continuation of the Community IMPACT learning enhancement programme targeting students that scored under 30 per cent in the SEA, with a focus on literacy and numeracy, student discipline, parental involvement, and teacher efficacy. The programme is a collaboration between the Division of Education and the Division of Community Development, and it is budgeted to cost **\$5.0M** in Fiscal 2025.

5.53 Madam Presiding Officer, we also aim to leverage the use of information technology and other online learning applications across the entire education system. We have developed a draft Online Learning Policy that will guide our strategy for hybrid education. We are at a stage where we are arranging to conduct all the necessary consultations with key stakeholders as well as pilot

studies to refine and finalise our policy in a way that meets the needs of our student population. To support this initiative, we will invest in IT infrastructure in all our schools and procure the devices needed for effective online teaching and learning. Training will also be provided to all stakeholders, including parents and students. We propose to expend **\$2.0M** on the pilot project in fiscal 2025.

5.54 Madam Presiding Officer, other selected projects and initiatives of the Division of Education in Fiscal 2025 are the following:

- Start of construction of the long-awaited Scarborough Secondary School. We budgeted **\$15.0M** for the completion of preconstruction activities and the commencement of construction in Fiscal 2025.
- Design and implementation of school-specific safety plans to address indiscipline and the incidence of school violence. This will be done in collaboration with the Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport under the Tobago Community Safety Programme at a budgeted cost of **\$5.0M**.
- Revision of the Financial Assistance Programme to ensure greater alignment and uptake between the offerings for financial assistance and the island's projected labour needs. We propose an expenditure of **\$4.0M** in Fiscal 2025.
- Repair and upgrade of our aging school plants at budgeted cost of **\$30.0M**.
- Construction of an Early Childhood Centre in Courland at a budgeted cost of **\$8.0M**.
- Start of construction of the Education Campus for our Special Needs Children at Signal Hill. **\$4.0M** is budgeted for this project in Fiscal 2025.

5.55 Madam Presiding Officer, permit me to speak to our selected health and social safety net support strategies.

**g. Health and Social Safety Net Support**

5.56 Madam Presiding Officer, the promotion and protection of the health and well-being of all continue to be a highly-selected priority of this Administration. Good health is an inalienable human right, according to the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, as it allows people to reach their full potential, children to be better learners, workers to be more productive, and parents to better care for their children. Relatedly, goal 3 of the SDGs speaks of ensuring healthy lives and the promotion of well-being for all.

5.57 Madam Presiding Officer, as you know, the primary entity charged with delivering health and wellness to the Tobago population is the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA). TRHA delivers primary and secondary healthcare through the Scarborough General Hospital, the Roxborough Hospital, and a network of twenty-two (22) health and outreach centres. For Fiscal 2025, TRHA will focus on four selected priorities, namely:

1. Service reliability, predictability, and sustainability;
2. Prevention and wellness;
3. Complete operationalisation of the Roxborough Hospital; and
4. Digitisation.

5.58 Madam Presiding Officer, an important project in our programme of works to promote service reliability, predictability, and sustainability is the purchase of new critical equipment. Towards this end, in Fiscal 2025, the TRHA will acquire new equipment for medical imaging, the laboratory, the operating theatre, and urology for both the Scarborough General and Roxborough Hospitals. The equipment includes a sixty-four (64) slice CT scanner, a laparoscopic tower (to allow for laparoscopic surgeries at the Roxborough Health Facility), portable x-ray machines, a colonoscope, an endoscope, and cystoscopy set (to allow for the diagnosis and management of gastrointestinal diseases), and tabletop and horizontal sterilizers. The TRHA has budgeted to expend **\$19.2M** on this project in Fiscal 2025.

5.59 Madam Presiding Officer, we also propose to deploy a computerised equipment and facility maintenance management system. The system will monitor the lifespan of equipment and schedule timely maintenance to improve the reliability of all critical plant and equipment. This will serve to reduce downtime and replace assets in a timely manner.

5.60 Additionally, the TRHA will institute a series of measures to engender shorter waiting times for diagnostic services. In this regard, to reduce the waiting time for reports on all medical imaging and pathology services, specialists will be

recruited on both a full-time and part-time basis, and experts will be outsourced. The project is designed to address a backlog of approximately 1,500 samples and images and will cost an estimated **\$3.0M**.

- 5.61 Another initiative geared to delivering services that are reliable, predictable, and sustainable is the procurement of four (**4**) ambulances. The TRHA proposes a phased change-out of the old ambulance fleet and has budgeted an expenditure of **\$6.0M** for the procurement of the four new ambulances in Fiscal 2025.
- 5.62 Further, the TRHA proposes to upgrade the buildings and grounds of various health centres at a budgeted cost of **\$1.6M**.
- 5.63 The Diabetic Wellness Centre will also be re-established to monitor diabetes and deliver health education and health promotion for diabetic patients towards an improved quality of life for them. Its primary focus is to reduce complications associated with the disease (strokes, renal failure, and limb amputations) and provide patients with innovative treatment options, inclusive of consultations on diet, nutrition, and eye and foot care. TRHA proposes to spend **\$3.0M** on this initiative in Fiscal 2025.
- 5.64 The Scarborough Waste Management and Disposal Programme will be implemented in Fiscal 2025 at a budgeted cost of **\$3.0M**.
- 5.65 Madam Presiding Officer, the full operationalisation of the Roxborough Hospital in Fiscal 2025 will give effect to the following services:
- The opening of in-patient services and 24/7 Accident and Emergency (A&E) operations from November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.
  - A colon cancer screening program using Fecal Occult Blood Testing (FOBT). This program will be used for early detection of colon cancer. Due to the high cost of a colonoscopy, the FOBT screening program, which is a recognised tool for population screening for colon cancer, will be introduced.
  - Vascular Access Surgery. This is necessary for patients who need dialysis treatment and, therefore, a part-time vascular access surgeon will be engaged.
  - The “Meds to Bed Program”. This program will seek to educate patients on their medications by allowing the pharmacist to play an active role in patient education.

- 5.66 Madam Presiding Officer, the enhanced and elevated use of digital applications in our healthcare and wellness services delivery remains a priority programme. In Fiscal 2025, we will continue implementation of the integrated Hospital Management Information System (HMIS), which will enable improved management of, and access to, patient information through an integrated digital platform that seamlessly connects patient interface across the entire healthcare delivery system via a unique identifier. An estimated **\$4.5M** is budgeted to be expended on this in Fiscal 2025.
- 5.67 Madam Presiding Officer, following the unfortunate neonatal deaths that occurred recently in Trinidad, we took the opportunity to review and assess our neonatal operational protocols and other related matters. Coming out of this review, we have decided to upgrade and rebrand our neonatal care programme in Fiscal 2025 at a cost of **\$2.0M**.
- 5.68 Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn my attention to our selected strategies to protect vulnerable groups. The work of the Department of Social Protection is critical to the safeguarding and improvement of the quality of life of the most vulnerable among us.
- 5.69 In Fiscal 2025, we propose to:
1. make the grant application process less tedious in order to enable faster dissemination of grants to successful applicants.
  2. assess the feasibility of increasing the thresholds of the REACH grant by 100 per cent – from **\$7,500.00** to **\$15,000.00**.
  3. create new social assistance grant offerings, such as the Kinship Support Programme, which will provide financial support to relatives taking care of children in instances where their parents are either unable to or are absent. The Programme also includes the Home Modification Initiative to assist persons with disabilities to improve mobility and accessibility to and within their homes.
- 5.70 In addition, Madam Presiding Officer, we are currently working assiduously towards the digitisation of the business processes of the Department of Social Services. The background work to digitise the entire case management aspect of the social grants programme is currently ongoing. Our goal is that by the



end of the first quarter of Fiscal 2025, clients will be able to apply to have their case managed and receive grants digitally.

- 5.71 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration has taken the policy decision to establish a Diversity and Inclusion Unit (DIU) within the Department of Social Protection. The core mandate of the DIU is to develop practical solutions to reduce the inequities faced by historically marginalised segments of the population, such as the elderly and persons with disabilities. This is a selected priority aimed at improving the socio-economic well-being of this segment of the population.
- 5.72 Madam Presiding Officer, let me now present our plans to improve housing opportunities and housing quality.

#### **h. Improving Housing Opportunities and Housing Quality**

- 5.73 Madam Presiding Officer, fit-for-purpose quality housing is a significant contributor to socio-economic development and has long been recognised as a basic human need. Therefore, the provision of affordable housing solutions to low-and middle-income residents, as well as the improvements to our housing quality in Tobago, remains a selected priority of this Administration. We are forever mindful of the fact that existing failures in our real estate and housing market place the cost of land and home ownership out of the reach of the vast majority of our citizens. We are therefore committed to doing whatever is necessary to address this historical failure of the real estate market in Tobago. In this regard, Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025 we propose to:

- start construction of fifty-four (**54**) housing solutions in the Riseland Housing Development in collaboration with the InterAmerican Development Bank.
- Begin infrastructure works for four hundred and forty-seven (**447**) housing units at the 46-acre Shirvan Housing Development. The infrastructure designs have been scoped at an estimated cost of **\$94.0M** and are expected to be completed in thirty-six (36) months in four phases. We have budgeted **\$20.0M** to do phase one in Fiscal 2025.
- begin the construction of one hundred and forty (**140**) housing units at Adventure Housing Development Phase II at a budgeted cost of **\$7.0M**.

- start pre-infrastructure construction works and the processes for the distribution of the seventy-five **(75)** parcels of land at Bacolet.
- commence infrastructure works and start the processes towards the distribution of thirty-five **(35)** parcels of land at Adelphi, Mason Hall. The designs were scoped at an estimated cost of **\$12.0M** with a completion period of sixteen (16) months.
- complete the infrastructure works and the distribution of thirty-seven **(37)** available parcels of land at Castara Housing Development at a budgeted cost of **\$3.0M**.
- construct and distribute fifty **(50)** housing units under the Social Assistance Housing Programme (SAHP) and the Home Ownership Made Equal (HOME) Programme at a cost of **\$14.0M**.

- 5.74 Madam Presiding Officer, the Executive Council has taken the policy decision to establish the Tobago Urban and Rural Housing Corporation (TURHC), a special-purpose company under the Division of Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development. This company has collaborative functionalities with the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development and has as its primary mandate sustainable urban and rural development, the provision of fit-for-purpose affordable housing solutions, and general improvement of the living conditions of Tobagonians.
- 5.75 Madam Presiding Officer, our strategic approach to the development of the housing sector on the island also includes providing opportunities and financial support for Tobagonians to enhance the condition of their homes. In this regard, we will continue the streamlining of the application process to access the home improvement grants and subsidies. In Fiscal 2025, our target is to process 90 per cent of the applications received under the Home Improvement Programme (HIP) within twenty-one (21) days. We propose to expend **\$15.0M** to the benefit of one thousand, nine hundred **(1900)** applicants.
- 5.76 In addition, we will continue to collaborate with Habitat for Humanity to upgrade our housing stock and increase protection against natural disasters and the effects of climate change. This collaboration will also serve to strengthen capacities and knowledge in risk reduction, mitigation, climate

change, and disaster management. Habitat TT is investing **\$1.5M** to be matched by a similar investment amount by the THA.

5.77 Madam Presiding Officer, a critical component of our housing programme that provides for safety is our Street Lighting & Electrification Programme (SLEP). In Fiscal 2025, we propose to embark upon a street lighting campaign with a targeted installation of six hundred (**600**) lights in the eastern part of the island to the direct benefit of seventy-five (**75**) families at an estimated cost of **\$3.0M**.

5.78 Madam Presiding Officer, please allow me to now turn to community empowerment, youth development, and sports.

**i. Community Empowerment, Youth Development and Sports**

5.79 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration views community empowerment, youth development, and sport as critical building blocks in our development efforts towards making Tobago “*the Greatest Little Island on the Planet.*” To that end, the following priority programmes, plans, projects, and initiatives were selected for execution in Fiscal 2025 by the Division of Community Development, Youth Development, and Sport:

1. Implement the integrated **Spark, Step-up, Take Charge, Innovate, Restore – Monitor and Evaluate (SSTIR-ME)** Operational Plan of the Division. The **SSTIR-ME** is designed to create safer communities and environments for us to live, play, work, and grow in. The following projects and initiatives will be rolled out in thirty-seven (37) communities across the island on a phased basis, under **SSTIR-ME** at a budgeted cost of **\$38.0M**:

- a. Conduct Parenting and Family Management Training with expanded support services in communities. A targeted 20 per cent of families across the island stand to benefit in phase 1 of the programme.
- b. Expand the Community-Based Vocational Skill training programme as a feeder into the TVET Academy, an institutional strategy for developing our handicraft industry to satisfy local market demand and boost exports.

- c. Implement the Promoting Real Opportunities for Youth (PRO YOUTH) Programme – an extensive Tobago Youth Internship and Apprenticeship Programme designed to centralise the management of all internships currently being executed across the Divisions, towards ensuring the exposure of our youth to local, national, regional, and international opportunities for real industry exposure, experience, and employment. In Fiscal 2025, an estimated two hundred and seventy (**270**) young persons will benefit directly from this programme.
- d. Execute an extensive Capacity Building Programme to assist our community, youth, and sporting organisations to take charge of their organisations and communities in a managed and coordinated response to crime and violence, and to promote the sustainable development of our people.
- e. Introduce a Community-Based Management System that will be resourced through collaboration with civil society organisations, the private sector, and the THA.
- f. Implement the Electoral District Development Fund to activate the THA’s commitment to inclusive and participatory governance and ensure that community-based development initiatives are funded. In Fiscal 2025, we have budgeted **\$3.0M** for this programme with an allotment of **\$150,000** per electoral district and the remaining **\$750,000** earmarked to meet administrative costs, based on available resources at this time. It is calculated that this programme will deliver community-based solutions to some deep-seated community challenges.
- g. Enact the Tobago Youth Empowerment Strategy aimed at mainstreaming youth development priorities and co-creating sustainable futures for our youth.
- h. Implement the Tobago Community Safety Programme, with the tagline “**When you are safe, I am safe**”, as part of our crime prevention strategy alluded to earlier.

- i. Complete the upgrades of existing sporting, community, and youth facilities and initiate a continuous programme of maintenance.
2. Madam Presiding Officer, in terms of ongoing projects, we propose to restart construction works on the following:
    - the Bacolet Indoor Complex, with an extended scope and projected completion in 2026. We budgeted an expenditure of **\$24.0M** in Fiscal 2025.
    - the Charlotteville Community Centre, at an estimated cost of **\$10.0M** and a completion time of twelve (12) months.
    - the Goodwood Pavilion, at a cost of **\$7.5M** with completion earmarked for December 2024.
    - the Courland Beach Sport Arena Phase 2, which provides for the construction of restrooms, concession booths, and players' facilities, and the installation of lights at a budgeted cost of **\$5.0M** and a completion time of nine (9) months.
  3. Madam Presiding Officer, the following projects will also be initiated:
    - Plymouth Pump Track as a vehicle for improving community safety, entrepreneurship, and professional sport development in the area of cycling and related sports.
    - the Scarborough Community Centre upgrade works at a budgeted cost of **\$2.0M**.

5.80 Madam Presiding Officer, in addition, we will:

1. Establish the Tobago Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Academy. The Academy will provide for CVQ and TTNVQ certification at all levels.
2. Launch the Youth Agriculture Training Programme and Tobago Youth Shade House Project to introduce and up-skill our young people in modern agriculture practices to boost food production, processing and export, and engender sustainable development practices.
3. Initiate plans to set up the Tobago Sport Company by the end of Fiscal 2025. The company will be charged with the mandate to professionalise sport to allow for realised economic benefit on investments.
4. Implement the Active Involved Citizen Programme to provide ongoing programs and support services at all community, youth and sporting facilities to actively engage residents and cater to their personal growth and development.

5.81 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to now look at our plans for strategic investment in physical infrastructure.

**j. Strategic Investment in Physical Infrastructure**

5.82 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration places great socio-economic value and importance on its policy agenda to develop a modern, safe, and green physical infrastructure landscape in Tobago. To initiate this ambition, we have strategically selected some key infrastructure projects for execution in Fiscal 2025. In this regard, we propose to execute the following projects:

1. The **Bad Rock Roadway Realignment and Improvement** project. It is critically important to the restoration of the integrity of Windward Main Road in that area, which was significantly affected by a landslip in 2022. The technical assessments, feasibilities, surveys, and designs have been completed. The project is now shovel-ready at an estimated cost of **\$15.0M**.
2. The **construction of the Turpin Bend Bypass Road** at Charlotteville. This is another high-priority selected infrastructure project. The area is prone to serious accidents and poses a continuous

threat to the safety of commuters. When completed, this long-promised project will also create safe access to lands for village expansion. By design, this project will be completed in fourteen (14) months at a cost of **\$10.0M**. We have budgeted for an expenditure of **\$8.0M** in Fiscal 2025.

3. The **Realignment of Northside Road in Runnemed** in the area of the Silk Cotton Tree. This project is urgently needed to sustain safe traffic flows to and from the villages in the Northern parts of Tobago. The roots of the Silk Cotton Tree have affected the structural integrity of the road and must be removed. The project by design includes realignment of the road and construction of retaining structures. The project will be ready for execution in Fiscal 2025 at a budgeted cost of **\$5.0M**. Approximately fifty (50) persons will be employed during construction.
4. **Completion of the Easterfield Road from Mason Hall to Studley Park**. This is a selected priority project for Fiscal 2025. It will enable quick and safe traffic to and from Mason Hall to Studley Park, thereby facilitating commercial vehicular access to the Hillsborough Water Treatment facility. It will also improve the commercial and residential investment viability of the lands in these areas. The project by design and scope is estimated to cost **\$28.0M** and has a construction period of twenty-four (24) months. Over a hundred persons are calculated to be employed during the life of the project.
5. The **Cove-Claude Noel Highway Roundabout**. This roundabout will serve as the primary traffic management system for the safe integration of traffic to and from the newly constructed Friendship-Canaan Connector Road and the Claude Noel Highway. The project will also positively impact the anticipated increase in traffic that will come with the operationalisation of the new airport to the benefit of thousands of commuters and other users on a daily basis. In Fiscal 2025, an expenditure of **\$7.0M** has been budgeted for this project, which is expected to be completed in nine (9) months and twenty (20) jobs will be generated during construction.

6. **Upgrade of Secondary Roads programme.** This programme is designed to effect major upgrade and improvement works to the secondary road network across the island. In the main, it involves the construction of drainage and retaining systems, realignment, and surfacing works. The programme is designed and scoped to intentionally enhance safety, commuting comfort, and the overall integrity of our secondary roads to the direct benefit and joy of every Tobagonian. We have calculated a spend of **\$200M** on this project over a period of thirty-six (36) months. In Fiscal 2025, we have budgeted for an expenditure of **\$35.0M** and it is estimated that approximately three hundred and fifty (350) persons will be directly employed in this programme.
7. **Claude Noel Highway Rehabilitation and Upgrade Works.** Madam Presiding Officer, this project is designed and scoped to restore the overall integrity of the island's main roadway. The core of this project will be the areas along the highway that are showing signs of significant structural deterioration. The scope of works includes milling, compacting, resurfacing, installation of guardrails, and civil infrastructure works. This project will be hugely impactful on the safety and comfort of the entire population and visitors alike. We have budgeted to spend **\$40.0M** on this project in Fiscal 2025. It is estimated that approximately one hundred and fifteen (115) persons will be directly employed during execution.

5.83 Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn to our strategy for the environment, climate change, and energy.

**k. Environment, Climate Change and Energy**

5.84 Madam Presiding Officer, environmental sustainability is one of the core priorities of Tobago's development agenda. Currently, the departments and units with the mandates for the environment, energy and coastal management are resident in different divisions across the THA, which make policy coordination and integration difficult. Only recently, the Executive Council approved the policy decision for the establishment of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Energy (DECCE) in the Office of the Chief Secretary (OCS). This institutional arrangement through which the island's



environmental integrity and credentials will be managed and monitored integrates the functions of the following four units:

- Environmental Management Unit,
- Climate Change Unit,
- Energy and Energy Transition Unit, and
- Coastal Zone Management Unit

5.85 Madam Presiding Officer, this pioneering move in the local, national, and regional context, which aligns Tobago's institutional responsibilities for the environment with the direct executive oversight of the head of the island government, is indeed a unique and significant development. The integration of the four units allows for the development and implementation of Tobago-specific policy prescriptions related to the sustainable management of land, air, and water resources, carbon neutrality and green energy transition, coastal zone monitoring and management, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

5.86 Madam Presiding Officer, the new department will also allow for the bridging of governance arrangements through which the private sector and civil society can directly influence climate change policy and actions through the Climate Change Standing Committee and the Climate Change Working Group. The bridging of governance arrangements is in line with the THA's recognition that effective environmental and climate change management necessitates a whole-of-government/whole-of-society approach. The deliberate alignment of climate policy with disaster response and climate financing is another critical functional requirement. In this regard, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Energy will be strategically aligned with Tobago Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) and the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy (DFTE).

5.87 Madam Presiding Officer, TEMA's work will provide invaluable data and support for the new Department, including institutional synergies between climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster management.

5.88 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025, the DECCE will develop and produce the following:

- An environment-scoping method and associated reports;

- A climate change-scoping method and associated reports;
- An energy and energy-transition-scoping method and associated reports;
- A coastal protection-scoping method and associated reports.

- 5.89 Madam Presiding Officer, the findings and adjacent recommendations of the reports will inform the THA's strategic institutional responses to the island's ever-evolving environmental, climate change, energy and coastal management challenges. We propose to expend **\$5.0M** on these initiatives in Fiscal 2025. Additionally, Madam Presiding officer, the DECCE will assume a leading role in the ongoing works emanating from the oil spill in collaboration with TEMA and other state agencies.
- 5.90 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing constitutes our underlined policy focus and associated programmes, projects, and initiatives for Fiscal 2025, selected and developed to move Tobago along the path of becoming the 'greatest little island on the planet'. The respective line Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries will elaborate on the details of our 2025 proposed programme of works during the ensuing debate.
- 5.91 Madam Presiding Officer, I now present the draft Estimates of Expenditure for Fiscal 2025.

## **6 THE 2025 EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES**

- 6.1 Madam Presiding Officer, it is important that the contextual issues and data that informed the expenditure estimates for Fiscal 2025 be presented here. A deliberate and careful study of the September 14<sup>th</sup> 2000 Report of the Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC), which was adopted by our Parliament after debate, revealed the following:
- a. The Commission considered 4.03 per cent, which was Tobago's population as a share of the national population, as a minimum per capita starting point in determining what was fair and practicable in the allocation of financial resources to the Assembly in the national budget.

- b. The Commission recommended an upper limit of **6.9 per cent**, which they felt spoke to the legal considerations listed under Section 43 of the THA Act, which include:
- Physical separation of Tobago by sea from Trinidad and Tobago's distinct identity;
  - Isolation from the principal national growth centres;
  - Absence of the multiplier effect of expenditure and investment (private and public) made in Trinidad;
  - Restricted opportunities for employment and career fulfilment; and
  - The impracticability of participation by residents of Tobago in the major educational, cultural, and sporting facilities located in Trinidad.
- 6.2 Madam Presiding Officer, notably, the Commission also recommended that it would be necessary to review this percentage from year to year in the light of prevailing circumstances. The Commission further noted that whatever percentage was arrived at should be reflected not only in the parliamentary allocation but, critically, in the releases made by the Government to the Assembly.
- 6.3 In the revelation of the foregoing, Madam Presiding Officer, it is pellucid that the Central Government stands in breach of the Parliament-authorized recommendations of the DRC in that it has not released the full parliamentary allocations to the Assembly from fiscal 2017-2023, with the result that there has been an accumulated shortfall of **\$166.4M**.
- 6.4 Adjacently, Madam Presiding Officer, successive Central Governments have refused to provide any allocation to fund the Section 43 considerations listed above and for which the DRC recommended the upper limit of 6.9 per cent. Additionally, over the past twenty-three years, there has been no review of the percentage range as recommended by the DRC. This static state of affairs has left the THA allocations locked at the minimum of 4.03 per cent for the past twenty-three years when so much has changed.
- 6.5 Madam Presiding Officer, it is important to note here that Tobago's population as a share of the national population has grown continuously from **4.58 per**

**cent in 2011 to 5.05 per cent in 2022.** What this is saying, Madam Presiding Officer, is that in keeping with the underpinnings of the recommendations of the DRC, the THA share of the National Budget from Fiscal 2011 should have been a **minimum of 4.6 per cent** and growing annually to a **minimum of 5.1 per cent** in Fiscal 2022. It is in this light that I indicated to the Minister of Finance and his team from the Ministry during our 2024 pre-budget consultation that the 4.03 per cent minimum share was insufficient and grossly inadequate.

- 6.6 Consequently, I wrote formally to the Minister of Finance indicating that the THA was requesting a fair share of **5.5 per cent**, the mean of the percentage range of 4.03 per cent to 6.9 per cent. I also wrote the Prime Minister in keeping with Part V of the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996 that sets out the procedure for triggering the Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC). In my formal complaint to the Prime Minister in January 2024, I reiterated the matters I had been discussing with the Minister of Finance, to wit, that there was **\$166.4M** in unreleased parliamentary allocations to the THA and that the Tobago population share of the national population had now reached about 5.1 per cent. I made two proposals to the Prime Minister as to how the matters could be settled: (i) that the THA be given **\$166.4M**, and (ii) that, in keeping with the DRC recommendations, the THA share of the 2025 National Budget should be increased in the midterm review, up 5.5 per cent from the 4.30 per cent.
- 6.7 Madam Presiding Officer, the Prime Minister responded indicating that he had sent my complaint to the Attorney General for his advice. However, to date, I have not received any further communication from the Prime Minister on this most important issue of Tobagonians being allocated and given our correct, fair, and appropriate minimum share of the National Budget. I have prepared a missive seeking an update on this matter, which will be dispatched to the Prime Minister soon.
- 6.8 Relatedly, Madam Presiding Officer, it is important to mention here that both the current PNM Administration and the opposition UNC prepared and laid constitution amendment bills in the National Parliament proposing minimum percentage shares of **8 per cent** (2021) and **6.9 per cent** (2013) of the National Budget for Tobago, respectively.

- 6.9 Madam Presiding Officer, I am certain that **ALL, inclusive of the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance**, will agree that the THA's formal request for a minimum share of **5.8 per cent** of the 2025 National Budget is reasonable and just as it is in alignment with the Tobago population share of 5.05 per cent in 2022.
- 6.10 In light of the foregoing, I predicated the Estimates of Expenditure for the THA for Fiscal 2025 on a percentage share of **5.8 per cent** of the projected national budget of **\$65.8B**.
- 6.11 Accordingly, Madam Presiding Officer, the total Estimates of Expenditure for Fiscal 2025 are calculated as **\$3.956B**, of which the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure amount to **\$2.819B**, Development Programme Expenditure Estimates amount to **\$1.002B**, URP Expenditure to **\$ 91.9M**, and CEPEP Expenditure to **\$43.4M**.
- 6.12 Madam Presiding Officer, any allocation to the THA in Fiscal 2025 that is less than the **5.8 per cent** will constitute a non-alleviation of the per capita expenditure inequality that has defined the National Budget since 1962 and, more recently, from 2011. All Tobago is requesting is budgetary per capita expenditure equality, as a minimum revenue share to the THA, which is calculated as **\$5.80** out of every budgeted **\$100** in proposed national expenditure in Fiscal 2025. Madam Presiding Officer, this is a fair and reasonable ask.

**a. Recurrent Estimates and Highlights**

- 6.13 Madam Presiding Officer, the Recurrent Estimates for Fiscal 2025 totalling \$2.817B are disaggregated as follows:
- |                                   |    |               |
|-----------------------------------|----|---------------|
| ▪ Personnel Expenditure           | -- | \$829.8M;     |
| ▪ Goods and Services              | -- | \$855.3M;     |
| ▪ Minor Equipment Purchases       | -- | \$29.4M; and, |
| ▪ Current Transfers and Subsidies | -- | \$1.1B.       |
- 6.14 Madam Presiding Officer, the disaggregation of the recurrent estimates by Division for Fiscal 2025 is as follows:
- |                                 |    |           |
|---------------------------------|----|-----------|
| ▪ Assembly Legislature          | -- | \$24.7M;  |
| ▪ Office of the Chief Secretary | -- | \$193.3M; |

▪ Finance, Trade and the Economy	--	\$199.5M;
▪ Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation	--	\$197.9M;
▪ Education, Research and Technology	--	\$565.0M;
▪ Community Development, Youth Development and Sport	--	\$117.6M;
▪ Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development	--	\$389.7M;
▪ Food Security, Natural Resources, and Sustainable Development	--	\$197.1M;
▪ Health, Wellness and Social Protection and,	--	\$879.8M;
▪ Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development	--	\$52.4M.

6.15 Madam Presiding Officer, some major programmed recurrent expenditures for Fiscal 2025 are:

▪ Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA)	\$613.0M;
▪ Tobago Festival Commission Limited (TFCL)	\$50.0M;
▪ Tobago Tourism Agency Limited (TTAL)	\$50.0M;
▪ School Feeding Programme	\$42.0M;
▪ Farmland Development	\$26.0M;
▪ Loan Guarantee Programme	\$25.0M;
▪ Tobago Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO)	\$11.0M;
▪ Tobago Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation	\$10.0M; and,
▪ Tobago Performing Arts Company Limited (TPAC)	\$8.0M.

6.16 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now present the Development Programme Estimates.

### **b. Development Programme Expenditure Estimates and Highlights**

6.17 Madam Presiding Officer, the Estimates for the Development Programme for Fiscal 2025 amount to \$1.002B. Across the sectors, the Estimates are disaggregated as follows:

▪ Pre-investment	--	\$0.5M;
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- Productive Sectors - - \$1.5M;
- Economic Infrastructure - - \$398.0M;
- Social Infrastructure - - \$424.8M; and,
- Multi-sectoral and Other Services - - \$177.2M.

6.18 Madam Presiding Officer, in keeping with our strategic objectives to drive business development and stimulate the economy, the Development Programme Estimates provide support for:

- Venture Capital Equity Fund Limited \$10.0M;
- Enterprise Assistant Grant Programme \$6.6M;
- The Business Incubator Programme \$6.0M;
- Enterprise Development Loan Programme \$4.6M; and,
- The Eco-Industrial Development Company of Tobago (E-IDCOT) \$4.0M.

6.19 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue to develop the island's tourism sector, the Development Programme Estimates cater for:

- Tobago Tourism Agency \$25.3M;
- Store Bay Beach Facility \$15.0M;
- Pigeon Point Infrastructure Works \$8.0M; and,
- Highlands Nature Trail Development \$3.0M.

6.20 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue the programme of modernisation of our education system to improve learning outcomes, our Development Programme Estimates make provision as follows:

- Improvements to Primary Schools \$15.0M;
- Reconstruction of Scarborough Secondary School \$15.0M;
- Improvements to Secondary Schools \$15.0M;
- Construction of Childhood Centres \$8.0M;
- Implementation of Pan in the Classroom \$3.0M; and,
- Resources for School E-Testing \$2.5M.

6.21 Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to provide affordable and fit-for-purpose housing solutions and improve our housing quality on the island, our Development Programme Estimates provide for:

▪ Shirvan Housing Development	\$20.0M;
▪ Home Improvement Grant and Subsidy	\$15.0M;
▪ An Affordable Housing Project	\$14.0M;
▪ Courland Estate Land Development	\$9.0M;
▪ Adventure Housing Development Phase II	\$7.0M; and,
▪ THA & Habitat Partnership for Home Improvement	\$3.0M.

6.22 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue to upgrade and modernise the island's road network, our Development Programme Estimates provide for:

▪ Road Resurfacing Programme	\$40.0M;
▪ Major Improvement Works on Secondary Roads	\$35.0M;
▪ Store Bay Local Road Extension	\$35.0M;
▪ Windward Road Special Development Programme	\$15.0M;
▪ Bad Rock Roadway Realignment and Improvement	\$15.0M; and,
▪ Cove-Claude Noel Highway Roundabout	\$7.0M.

### **c. Other Expenditure Estimates**

6.23 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2025, we intend to spend \$91.9M and \$43.4M for URP and CEPEP, respectively. These figures were calculated based on the increased salaries of the workers in these Programmes.

6.24 Madam Presiding Officer, I now present the financing options.

## **7 FINANCING THE 2025 EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES**

### **a. Estimates of Tax and Non-Tax Revenues**

7.1 Madam Presiding Officer, for Fiscal 2025, the estimates of tax and non-tax revenues are as follows:

1. Taxes on Income and Profits	- -	\$133.9M;
2. Taxes on Property	- -	\$3.9M;



3.	Taxes on Goods and Services	--	\$70.0M;
4.	Taxes on International Trade	--	\$2.6M;
5.	Other Taxes.	--	\$4.2M;
	<b>Total Tax Revenue</b>		<b>\$214.5M;</b>
6.	Property Income Taxes	--	\$0.03M;
7.	Other Non-tax Revenue	--	\$1.31M;
	<b>Total Non-Tax Revenue</b>	--	<b>\$1.34M;</b>
	<b>Total Revenue</b>	--	<b>\$215.9M.</b>

7.2 Madam Presiding Officer, the total revenue projected to be collected in Tobago for Fiscal 2025 is **\$215.9M**. However, it must be noted here that this is NOT an accurate and true picture of the revenues generated in Tobago. As is well known, there are significant revenue streams generated in Tobago that are collected in Trinidad.

7.3 Madam Presiding Officer, permit me at this juncture to discuss the issue of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority and Property Tax.

**b. Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority and Property Tax**

7.4 Act No. 17 of 2021, which legally provides for the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, was passed and assented to on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021, mere days after this Administration assumed office and forty-eight hours before the celebration of Christmas. I am not sure as to whether this development was coincidental or calculated.

7.5 In keeping with the Central Government's recent push to operationalise the Revenue Authority, we have identified several defects in the Act, which were seemingly designed to place Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly at a serious disadvantage. Madam Presiding Officer, the legislation reveals a curious but not surprising insensitivity to the expressed aspiration of Tobagonians for self-determination and it can be justifiably classified as a piece of colonial legislation. For instance, Madam Presiding Officer, the Act does not provide for:

1. the THA to have any legal or formal remit over the establishment of the Authority in Tobago.

2. the organisational structure of the Authority in Tobago, thus creating confusion and anxiety among the staff in Tobago.
3. the functional and reporting relationships between the THA and the Authority.
4. the THA's legal authority over the revenues collected by the Authority in Tobago, which is the first item of responsibility of the THA under Act 40 of 1996.

7.6 Madam Presiding Officer, these are a few of the major issues arising out of the passage of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Act. It is important to note here that the Authority is by nature a legislative creature. As such, the defects identified must be comprehensively rectified before the THA can support the operationalisation of the Authority in Tobago. In this regard, I have formally written to the Prime Minister requesting an urgent meeting to discuss this very important issue.

**c. Property Tax**

7.7 Madam Presiding Officer, after the recent national frenzy to complete the assessment roll, as well as the inconsistencies and anomalies that have characterised the assessments issued to property owners, there has been a deafening silence on this matter. Madam Presiding Officer, my political intelligence has informed me that the intention of the Central Government is to delay its implementation until after the general elections. Let us not be fooled.

7.8 For some of us in Tobago however, our mantra is clear, property tax implementation after we can get our lands in our names. Imagine having to pay property tax on lands that your family for generations cannot remove the colonial masters' name from the deeds. Imagine having to pay for property tax on lands you cannot collateralise or cannot mortgage against. After spending years building your own home out of pocket, and struggling to complete said home, you are now required to pay property tax on said property!

7.9 It is for this reason, that in fiscal 2025, the THA will open a legal property desk staffed with competent lawyers to assist Tobagonians with the burden of administrating for their property. This is a temporary measure until such time as laws are passed to rectify this historical injustice.

7.10 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now turn to our proposed engagement with multilateral funding agencies.

**d. Multilateral Engagements**

7.11 Madam Presiding Officer, we intend to deepen our relationships with our multilateral funding partners such as the IDB, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) towards enhancing access to grant funding and technical assistance. It was only recently that the IDB made a two-day learning journey with sector and subject matter experts to discuss ongoing projects and future initiatives. It is worth noting here that the THA has secured US \$50,000 in grant funding from the IDB to develop a new Public-Private Partnership (PPP) policy framework that meets the standards of the new procurement legislation. Another US \$100,000 was recently approved by the IDB to assist us with some of the preparatory work for the Tobago Development Fund.

7.12 Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, we had a recent meeting with the UNDP to discuss areas of ongoing project collaboration and future joint initiatives. As regards the CDB, on coming into office, my Administration had meetings with senior officials of the Bank in relation to the conceptualisation, design, and funding for the new Scarborough Secondary School and our coastal restoration and protection programme. Unfortunately, Madam Presiding Officer, these initiatives were summarily discontinued by the expressed desire of the Minister of Finance. Notwithstanding this, it is our intention to purposefully engage the CDB with the aim of exploiting opportunities for grant funding and technical assistance. In addition, we will continue to pursue access to the approved loan of **\$100M** from the Development Bank of Latin America / Corporación Andina de Fomento (CAF) which is earmarked for coastal protection works.

7.13 Madam Presiding Officer, the Assembly has been actively engaged in discussions with CARTAC, the regional technical assistance arm of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to avail ourselves of their expertise in providing much-needed capacity building and technical support. I am pleased to report that CARTAC has agreed to conduct three (3) initial support missions during Fiscal 2025. These are in the areas of financial budgeting and project management, public sector accounting (i.e., transitioning to a more

streamlined accounting system), and strengthening of the internal audit processes. These missions are at no cost to the Assembly, and reviews will be conducted to determine the further areas of support to be provided.

**e. Long-term Borrowing.**

- 7.14 Madam Presiding Officer, we will continue our programme which is geared towards the development of sustainable revenue streams in our special purpose companies, thereby enhancing their ability to engage in long-term commercial borrowing.






## **8 CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 Madam Presiding Officer, as I conclude, in the ever-evolving panorama of socio-economic development, peace, justice, and safety, our pursuit of constitutional transformation, social justice, and economic development is not a destination but a journey. Nothing we do now is for today but all for tomorrow. Therefore, what is required is unwavering commitment, bold vision, and collaborative action on a scale that transcends political borders and ideologies. It calls for leaders who are not only adept at navigating the intricacies of geopolitics and global markets but who also possess the empathy, foresight, and sensitivity to address the needs and aspirations of all people.
- 8.2 Tobagonians, as we stand at this juncture, the path forward is illuminated by the flickering flames of hope and tempered by the sobering realities of the present constitutional construct and political culture. It is a path that we know is fraught with challenges but yet laden with opportunities. Together, let us embark on this journey with resolve, recognising that the true measure of our success lies in the deployment of more sustainable practices and the legacy of peace and prosperity we leave for generations to come.
- 8.3 Madam Presiding Officer, this is why I am committed to leaving Tobago as the **“Greatest Little Island on the Planet”** for generations to come.
- 8.4 My team and I will remain laser-focused no matter what. Tobago Must Develop! And, I daresay, develop in the shortest possible time! Our development as an island has been held back for far too long. We must break the shackles with which we operate and, as our anthem says, declare with boundless faith in our destiny that Tobago will become the “greatest little

island on the planet”. As Tobagonians, we must band together and fight against the common threats we face. Our cooperative spirit, our resilience, and our tenacity – all qualities for which Tobagonians are well known – are what we require to surmount the challenges we face as a people. I remain eternally confident and optimistic in the wisdom, understanding, intelligence, and decisiveness of Tobagonians.

- 8.5 Madam Presiding Officer, with that said, let me thank the members of this House and the listening public for commuting with me during the presentation. It is my sincere hope that the essence of this presentation will generate new positive energies and excitement that will power and drive our collective efforts, thereby unlocking the socio-economic development of our great little island.
- 8.6 I beg to move.



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