



National Trust for the Cayman Islands

Cargo Port OBC Feedback

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands is tasked with the protection of Cayman's native flora and fauna, as well as our natural and built heritage under the National Trust Law (2010), and we appreciate the opportunity to exercise our powers under that same law to advising government and other relevant parties to the effect of fulfilling our duties.

Population prediction used to drive GDP and cargo volume forecasts

The Cayman Islands are small and have traditionally had very low populations, reflecting the scarcity of natural resources and low sustainable carrying capacity. This has changed in the past few decades with rapid population growth driven by a desire for economic growth. This population increase has strained the natural environment and necessitated major infrastructure projects.

For this independent OBC to be of most use to CIG it should provide options based on differing population scenarios, rather than use the highest projection discussed at a CIG departmental charrette. This is weak scientific logic and yet it is used as the foundation for the whole report.

Population growth in the Cayman Islands is entirely driven by government policy, not the birth rate (which is currently below replacement level of ~2.1 births per female, at 1.1) and as such can be controlled with immigration policy. This is tacitly admitted in the presentation with the assumption of capping the population at 250,000 which makes it sound like this is the number that has been decided upon for Cayman.

The current ratio for Caymanians v Non Caymanians has just dipped under half (46.5% v 53.5%) for the first time, so Caymanians are now a minority in their own country – which is of great concern to many. At 250,000, Caymanians would represent an even lower percentage of the overall population. Nevertheless the CIG has the power to implement, and the electorate should have the right to request a population cap at a lower point; where generational Caymanians can remain closer to 50% of the population and also have a chance to ensure that Cayman is able to have long term sustainability; environmentally, economically, and socially.

Therefore, the report should include options for differing population scenarios which clearly show: how the population ratio would change as it grows, related cargo volume predictions and estimated costs. This would allow CIG and the electorate to make an informed decision about how they develop the cargo port based on a population level they have chosen and save the country an enormous amount of cost and degradation from unnecessary construction and development.



The table below as an example:

Population	Caymanian*	Non Caymanian*	Cargo increase	Port Option	Cost
80,000	38,500	44,500	-	No change (Option 1)	0
100,000	44,000	58,000	-	Upgrade (Option 2)	\$10-\$40 million
150,000	58,000	93,000	x 50%	Upgrade (Option 2)	\$10-\$40 million
250,000	80,000	168,000	x 300%	Relocate (Options 3,8,9,10)	\$X00 million

**estimates based on population growth rates since 1990 taken from the CI Compendium of Statistics 2022*

Another issue with the population growth and attendant cargo import increase estimates is that every item imported to the Cayman Islands must be disposed of eventually. The current landfill is nearing capacity, with no plan for future waste management at the present time. Cayman cannot plan to bring in more and more cargo that will need to be disposed of without a plan. There should be an assessment of how much additional waste will be generated over the course of operations of a larger cargo port and how that will be managed. Failure to plan for this will leave Cayman in the position of having additional mountains of waste with nowhere to put it.

Other assumptions may not be valid, one of the main ones being auto imports. This is another issue that is policy driven, with the benefits of import duties to government funds and the cost of transportation falling on individuals. Cayman's lack of transit options are a driver of the car import industry and can be adjusted. If population nears 250,000 a completely rethought transportation system will likely be necessary, as our roads are already congested past the point of comfort at the bottlenecks. Perhaps there would need to be further restrictions on how easily cars can be imported but to implement this would require reliable public transport.



These same population parameters could also be used for other capital projects currently being considered so that our development plans for the island are more correlated than the current silo approach.

Existing GT Port and “Do Maximum” Option

George Town has been the site of Cayman’s port for hundreds of years due to its favourable conditions; it sits in the lee nearly every day of the year, deep water comes close to shore, and after all this time as the port its proximity to population and man-modified status make it an appealing location to remain as the port into the future.

The OBC shows that the GT port with upgrades will suffice for a population level of 133,000 up to 2039. With a more thorough review of how to optimise the current site (increase CDC space, dedicated route between Port and CDC managed with traffic lights so that it could be operated during the day, relocation of cruise etc.) it would most likely be able to support a population capped at 150,000. We would like to see an estimate of the maximum population that could be carried at the current port, if all area was devoted to cargo operations by removing the cruise terminal completely and the port was run at the same level of efficiency as the top ports in the world. Any project building a new port is going to carry significant costs, so investigations of outside the box solutions to maximize the current location should be performed; for example an elevated transportation corridor from the port to the upland storage area to remove all conflict with road traffic. Cost savings can be found in other places, as major ports worldwide upgrade their facilities for the largest ships, used cranes and other equipment that would serve as major improvements to Cayman are available for purchase.

If via a transparent process it is determined that a major expansion of cargo capacity is necessary, then It also seems prudent to at least investigate what a **“Do Maximum”** option in the current port would look like. Despite the impacts to the marine life in the harbour there should at least be an investigation of building out more working space in the current location. While the people of Cayman may decide that these environmental costs in George Town are not worth it, it is also quite possible that they may decide that those environmental costs would be far less damaging than the far-reaching and long-term environmental destruction that would result from accepting any of Options 3, 8, 9 and 10; accordingly, there is no doubt that the people of Cayman deserve to have that choice, rather than a decision made unilaterally by the CIG.

It is also important to note that government is planning to hold a referendum on cruise piers. The impact of this, one way or the other, on cargo operations in George Town would be significant. If the piers are approved it will constrict cargo operations even more than the current set up, both in construction and operation. If it is not and Cayman’s future relationship with cruise tourism may change, it may mean cargo operations can be handled very differently. Making a decision about the cargo port before this would be a mistake.



Environmental considerations

There will inevitably be environmental impacts for any port expansion or creation. The NTCI wants to ensure that any work done is shown to be necessary and beneficial to the people of Cayman, and that these impacts are avoided when possible and mitigated when not.

Seeing that Option 9 has been scored almost the same as Option 2, i.e. - The minimal upgrade to GT Port is as damaging environmentally as creating a whole new port at Breakers, - we think warrants additional scrutiny because there are many potential impacts both terrestrial and marine created by the quarry options.

The impacts of induced development around a new port would be highly impactful on the natural terrestrial environment of the area. Other than the quarries, this area has no industrial development. Industries will grow around a port and spread severe impacts towards the Central Mangrove Wetlands, Meagre Bay Pond, and the rare dry forest. The site of upland development in option 9B appears to be on wetland habitat, necessitating more fill than other options as well as releasing more stored carbon during construction and removing sequestration potential. We also strongly feel that the risk matrix does not take into account the higher potential risk of an accident posed by a ship traversing a narrow channel vs the open port in George Town. Cross cutting winds would likely necessitate “crabbing” by the ships, increasing their effective beam and reducing buffer on either side, any drop in wind could send the ship straight ahead into the side of the canal. In addition, containment might be easier if an accident happened within the channel or inland basin, however if it happened on approach to the channel the prevailing winds would spread the pollutants along the south coast towards the west. An accident spilling fuel oil would be a massive environmental disaster, one that is at much less risk in the deeper waters and more favourable conditions of Hog Sty Bay.

NTCI membership is gravely concerned about what the resultant marine impacts would be west of the eastern options. The prevailing wind and waves will carry any particulates and pollution to the west. This will occur from dredging for construction and maintenance as well as disturbance to sediments and pollution in operation. The south coast of Cayman is relatively undisturbed but there is no doubt that such dredging is very likely to constitute severe impacts to the coral and seagrass habitats. The NTCI is equally concerned about the impacts to conch populations in the seagrass beds on the south side for any of the south side options. These seagrass beds are also important for Green Sea Turtle populations and are a major recreation attraction.



The Traffic increase of only 2% is also based on the high-end population option in 2084. When presenting the traffic increase, the impacts of adding cargo trucks must be looked at as higher than their sheer number in relation to total vehicles. They take up significantly more space than a passenger car, require much more time and space to enter a roundabout leading to more backups, they emit far more greenhouse gasses and other pollutants, they are responsible for far more noise especially in Cayman where compression braking is commonplace, they also have significantly more impact on the road surface due to their greater weight.

Conflicts with other proposed projects

The preferred options of the Breakers quarries would have the effect of cutting off the existing coastal road to Frank Sound and East End. Since one of the much touted goals of the East West Arterial Extension is to ensure that there are two routes to East End this would seem to eliminate that added security as it was explained that a bridge over the canal is infeasible. This further demonstrates the problem that we face in Cayman, whereby different agencies and ministries plan projects without taking into account other planned projects in other remits. We already have a massive traffic bottleneck from the Eastern Districts, something that cannot be solved by the East-West Arterial, therefore locating the cargo port east of these bottlenecks will add major truck traffic to the problem.

Weather and Operations Concerns

Based on the NTCI consultation with a shipping and port operation expert, we have concerns about the operation of a North-South channel at the Breakers quarries. The prevailing winds out of the east blowing perpendicular to the channel and the sail area of a container ship will mean that the channel width would have to account for drift and/or mitigation; potentially necessitating a much wider channel than what has been presented thus far, increasing the economic and environmental costs. There must be simulations run to ensure that this is a viable option in the normal wind pattern as well as strong winds. Based on wind and wave conditions, how many days a year could we expect for the port to be inoperable, compared to the GT Port? Are the local pilots independent enough to refuse to bring a ship in or out when they feel it is not safe? If this option is not viable for a significant portion of the year it could well be an overwhelming economic disaster for the island, in addition to the major long-term environmental impacts.

Transparency

A new port would likely be the largest (or at least among the largest) infrastructure projects carried out in Cayman's history. Will the government commit to a full EIA for this project? The consequences of poor planning could be catastrophic environmentally, socially, and economically. Accordingly, if the port were



executed in a way that compromised its effectiveness it could set our economy back, possibly irreversibly, notwithstanding the massive cost to build it. The potential environmental risks, terrestrially and marine, are myriad. The impact to our society via noise, traffic, and other disruptive forces needs to be understood. The CIG must therefore exercise wisdom and caution by committing to the EIA process, as other developed nations have been doing for decades.