

THE FRAGMENTED ICT OVERSIGHT IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

GOVERNMENT E-SERVICES
MORE THAN ICT - **PART 2**

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Part 2: Government e-Services – More than ICTs

A 2009 Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) report speaks of **ttconnect** - the umbrella Government e-services project - as follows: “[the initiative] served as a first step to realizing the concepts of Integrated Service Delivery and ‘No wrong Door’ delivery of Government Services in Trinidad and Tobago”.

A senior **ttconnect** representative states that, “**ttconnect** needs to be that buffer to protect the citizen from the runaround. **ttconnect** can take the headache on behalf of the client rather than the citizen keeping track of changing portfolios of Ministries.”

With the motto “Government at your service”, **ttconnect** is a statement of intent by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to put the citizen first.

In Trinidad and Tobago [as in other countries around the world], access to Government services and the ICT savvy in rural populations tend to be lower than in their urban counterparts. In this regard the **ttconnect** Express Bus service, which combines an ICT driven back-end with a mobile service unit (Bus), is conceptually well designed. Personnel on the service bus help the citizen navigate both the technology as well as Government bureaucracy, thus making Government services more accessible. As such, conceptually, the multi-channel architecture of **ttconnect** has many of the characteristics of a best-practice offering – catering for the different intended target markets for Government Services.

Resource and Initiative Duplication

The reality in implementation is however, that the services that are offered on **ttconnect** online are also offered independently by the various originating Ministries on their own websites. More troubling though, is the fact that many of the e-services offered by the various Ministries on their Ministry sites, are not offered on **ttconnect** online.

Additionally, there are also other mobile Bus Units branded with individual Ministry branding [e.g. the Job and Career Coach Bus of the former Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training] which also go out to rural communities to deliver Ministry information and services. Kiosks have been deployed by the Ministry of Labor to deliver labour-related information to citizens, while the **ttconnect** sponsoring Ministry itself – the Ministry of Public Administration – at one point had separately put on its “one-stop-shop” Government service initiative (circa 2014). These and many others over time, represent both a duplication of infrastructure and Government fragmentation from the view of the citizen.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Science and Technology – another former parent Ministry of **ttconnect** – was at one point on a drive to rollout “Community Access Centres”, through an initiative branded “**Star.tt**”. One of the main attractions of these Centres was the ability to access Government Services on-line. These centres were targeted for rollout in rural areas and, at one point, forty-four (44) centres were earmarked to be built¹.

Clearly these many instances represent resource duplication and overlap of objectives with **ttconnect**’s multi-channel infrastructure which already features an Express Bus, physical Citizen Service Centers and Self-Serve Kiosks.

The Role of iGovTT as GoRTT’s Lead Ministry and Agency with Oversight of ttconnect

A 2014 World Bank Report on the Trinidad and Tobago ICT Sector stated that “*The policy-making function for the ICT sector in Trinidad and Tobago is very fragmented, as it is currently shared among multiple ministries and agencies, with a weak coordination mechanism in the form of an ICT Inter-Ministerial Committee*”.

About this Series

*This is **Part 2** of a five-part series in which we investigate the national e-services infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically **ttconnect**, to draw out the pros and cons, successes, and areas for greater attention.*

Future editions in the series will continue dive into this analysis, and draw out conclusions and recommendations relevant for any emerging economy-state seeking to build-out a national /citizen e-services framework.

¹ For further information, please see reference at <http://www.trinidadexpress.com/business/ICT-centre--launched-in-Penal-245069301.html> and at the iGovTT website at: <http://www.igovtt.tt/content/official-launch-startt-ict-access-centre>

Indeed while the Ministry of Public Administration has historically housed the national ICT mandate inclusive of e-Government, other Ministries play [and have played] significant policy-making and oversight roles in the area of ICT. The Ministry of Science and Technology had, at one point, oversight of the National ICT Company (iGovTT) as well as the regulatory body for the telecommunications sector, TATT. The Ministry of Trade and Industry manages TTBizLink² and e-Teck.³ The Ministry of Public Utilities oversees the state-owned telecommunications and electricity providers TSTT and T&TEC⁴. The Ministry of Finance at one point had been given the mandate to oversee the roll out of a national Broadband Strategy, while the Ministry of National Security is traditionally the lead on piloting the National Cyber-Crime Bill and related issues.

About the Author

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Thus, even though there are Cabinet Minutes which confirm i-GovTT's central coordination role for implementation of strategic ICT initiatives within GORTT, there is no policing of this Policy. Indeed there are other Cabinet Minutes which allow Ministries to act entirely on their own.

The Citizen Loses

Despite the intent by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to put the citizen first at the declarative and conceptual-level, it is clear that the objectives and target populations of these various initiatives overlap with **ttconnect** service channels and serve to undermine its effectiveness.

All of the above factors re: channel duplication, initiative proliferations and policy vacillation over time regarding the governance of ICT and e-Service matters, promote confusion in the minds of citizens as to where and to whom they should be looking to access Government information and services. This confusion reduces the overall effectiveness of all programs and militates against **ttconnect**'s original aspirations to insulate citizens from the vicissitudes of government portfolios and make life easier for doing business with Government.

² TTBizLink is the name given to the national trade single electronic window (www.ttbizlink.gov.tt) –

³ e-Teck is the name given to the State Company, under the Ministry of Trade and Industry which manages Industrial and Technology parks in Trinidad and Tobago

⁴ T&TEC – The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company – in June 2012, the second largest deployment of fibre optic cable in Trinidad and Tobago