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**HIGHWAY OPENING DELAYED - SEPTEMBER 2006**

NEWS DESCRIPTION

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**The Esterley Tibbetts Highway extension from the Hyatt Regency Hotel to Raleigh Quay will not open for at least two more weeks (September 2006).**

The Esterley Tibbetts Highway extension from the Hyatt Regency Hotel to Raleigh Quay will not open for at least two more weeks.

Speaking at the Cabinet press briefing Friday, Minister of Works Arden McLean said the unfinished construction of the bridge over the canal at The Ritz-Carlton, Grand Cayman was the reason for the delay.

The latest scheduled opening date of the road had been 4 September, after having been moved back from 30 June and then 31 July and then to early August.

"The National Roads Authority and the Developers of the Ritz have worked assiduously toward the soft opening of the road for limited traffic and reduced speeds.

"I optimistically hoped and eagerly anticipated the road opening on schedule, but this will not happen," Mr. McLean said.

Although the bridgework is holding up the opening, Mr. McLean did not criticise Ritz-Carlton developer Michael Ryan as he has done in the past.

"I believe in giving credit where credit is due," he said, noting that Mr. Ryan had gone to great lengths to try and get the bridge parts here, but a delay in its shipping from the manufacturer prevented him from getting it here on time.

"Mr. Ryan has put extra crews on the site and they're working late hours," he said.

"He also hired aircraft to fly in sections of the bridge to the Cayman Islands," Mr. McLean said.

Mr. McLean said the bridge underpasses were now in place and that an engineer was on the site to ensure the backfilling was done in a way that would not compromise the structural integrity of the bridge.

Because the new highway will have a chip and spray surface initially rather than an asphalt surface, the speed limit will be 25 miles per hour at first.

The road will also only be open from 6a.m. to 7p.m. initially, with one lane of traffic in each direction.

While the 25 mph speed limit might make the trip on the road take five minutes, Mr. McLean pointed out that it was still much shorter than the 45 minutes it currently takes to drive the same distance along West Bay Road.

Mr. McLean stressed that the chip and spray surface was only temporary.

"I'm hoping we don't have to leave it there very long," he said.

In the mean time, Mr. McLean urged caution when driving on the road.

"That's why I'm telling people to be very careful," he said.

Mr. McLean said there will be signs posted warning motorists of the loose gravel on the chip and spray pavement.

Before the road can be paved with asphalt, the curbing will have to be installed. As work progresses on the project, Mr. McLean said the National Road Authority will assess the speed and time limitation.

Because of height of the road in relation to surrounding areas, 300 water-filled plastic road barriers will be used for safety reason.

Mr. McLean was apologetic for the delay.

"I don't like to set deadlines I can't keep," he said. "For that I apologize to the country. But conditions beyond my control prevented the road from opening on time."

Mr. McLean was hesitant to announce a new date for the opening of the road.

"The road will open, hopefully within the next two weeks," he said. "I hope."