

NEWS



NGC Group chairman Gerry Brooks at the the sod turning ceremony for the construction of the Preysal flagship service station on Wednesday.

Preysal flagship service station by year's end

LAUREL V WILLIAMS

GEARED towards reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants from conventional transportation fuels, Energy Minister Franklin Khan on Wednesday turned the sod for the construction of the largest multi-fuel service station in the Caribbean.

Phase one of the \$30 million flagship service station at Preysal interchange in Couva is expected to be completed by the year's end.

The initiative is a collaboration among the National Gas Company (NGC), one of its subsidiaries NGC Compress Natural Gas (CNG), and National Petroleum (NP).

This state-of-the-art facility located off the southbound lane of the Solomon Hochoy Highway will be equipped with solar panels and 20 dispensing points, 10 of which are for CNG vehicles of all classes. It will be operational 24/7 and

will housed a mini convenience store. In 2014 the previous administration had proposed the Couva/Preysal interchange beautification projection which would have included ponds, a museum and recreational and retail areas.

Delivering the feature address at the site, Khan said after the PNM won the general election in 2015, the Government began investigations of several projects including the Beetham wastewater plant and the site which would now house the flagship station.

Saying the result of the latter investigation left a "bitter taste" in his mouth, Khan said he wanted to "express it" so that his conscience would be clear.

Pointing to tanks on the site, Khan said: "That monstrosity you see out there, it looks like a tank farm from Pointe-a-Pierre. It cost \$40 million.

"Today, we are going to build the largest gas (CNG) and liquid station for \$30 million. When I became minister, I was



DIRT MEN: NGC/CNG president Curtis Mohammed, Energy Minister Franklin Khan, NGC Group chairman Gerry Brooks and NP chairman Sahid Hosein turn the sod for the start of construction of the Preysal flagship service station on Wednesday. **PHOTOS BY VASHTI SINGH**

at a loss as to what to do with this site."

He said the design concept for the new initiative will develop the site into a sustainable one that is aesthetically pleasing, comfortable and safe to use.

Khan said the Government has approved several CNG fiscal initiatives including the removal of import duty on components for the retrofit of vehicles to use CNG and for non-business use, 25 per cent tax credit for conversion cost up to a limit of \$2,500 per vehicle.

The overall programme, he said, would be implemented in two phases, estimated at a total of \$2 billion.

"Of this, \$1.4 million will be allocated for the conversion of 100,000 vehicles, \$552 million for the construction of 72 CNG stations and \$55 million for the ancillary costs which include public education and marketing, provision of mobile CNG stations, expert and technical

support and Radio Frequency Identification system," Khan said. The CNG programme is an initiative to reduce the emission of pollutants from the transportation sector.

Khan said after five years, the overall CNG programme has accrued benefit to the country via the reduction in the liquid fuel subsidy.

With the possible imminent restart of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery, CNG as a transportation fuel would continue to provide the opportunity for increasing the receipt of foreign exchange earnings from the sale of displaced liquid fuels in the region and international markets. He emphasised it would also significantly reduce the emission of carbon dioxide as well as other pollutants from conventional transportation fuels.

The Government, Khan said, continues to play an active role in placing the environment at the centre of social and economic development for a clean

and healthy environment and reducing the carbon footprint.

Khan highlighted that because of population shifts, the Government has to come up with a policy for a model for rural service stations. Referring to Mayaro as his hometown, Khan said when NP tucks full up the tanks in the stations in that community in the morning at 7 o'clock, by lunchtime, all the gas is sold.

"It has to be that the next two projects I want to turn the sod for are for the gas station for Sangre Grande and the other at Mayaro. It has to be, because it is unfair to the residents of these communities. There must be a balanced approach to development. It cannot be simultaneously, but it must be strategic."

Also speaking at the event were NP chairman Sahid Hosein, president of NGC CNG Curtis Mohammed and chairman of the NGC group Gerry Brooks.