

Trains to ease commuter inconvenience during gorge closure

Passenger trains will begin service from Charlemont via Linstead, Bog Walk and Spanish Town in St Catherine to coincide with the month-long closure of the Bog Walk Gorge.

Chairman of The Jamaica Railway Corporation (JRC) Barry Bonitto announced on Friday that the trains will run between Monday to Friday with two trains departing from Charlemont at 5:30 and 7:15 in the morning and one from Spanish Town scheduled for departure at 6:25. The afternoon trains will depart Spanish Town at 3:30 and 6:15 and Charlemont at 2:20. Children travelling from Linstead to Spanish Town and vice versa will pay \$75 and adults \$150, while travel from Angel to Spanish Town will attract \$50 for children and \$80 for adults. Executive coach passengers will be required to pay a flat rate of \$300. According to the JRC chairman, plans are afoot to increase the number of trains in the coming months based on the commuting demand. But although the JRC said today's service signals phase one of the phased resumption, Transport Minister Mike Henry yesterday said that the move was not an official return of rail service, but a continuation of the test run which began in April. According to Henry, the service "is in no way shape or form reflective of the pending official roll-out of the rail service, beginning in St Catherine and Clarendon." He said the rail-testing is to help with transportation needs between Linstead and Spanish Town while the gorge is closed to facilitate the completion of a pipe-laying project by the National Water Commission. "The use of the trains during the continued testing period would be of additional assistance in minimising the commuter inconvenience from the closure of the gorge," Henry explained. The minister said with the passenger rail service absent for almost two decades, a lot of very detailed applications were relative to the resumption exercise. He said these would not be rushed, "and the actual roll-out will take place soon enough". One critical element of the overall resumption, he said, was the recent restoration of the integrity of the old May Pen Bridge in Clarendon, to accommodate the passage of trains across the structure. A similar focus is on the long-collapsed Sandy Gully Bridge in St Andrew, which has to be rebuilt to facilitate the return of rail service to Kingston. However, the Sandy Gully project, which has a one-year time-span, has no bearing on the first phases of the resumption between May Pen and Linstead via Spanish Town, according to Henry. Meanwhile, the JRC has urged Jamaicans to refrain from further vandalism of the tracks. "...being closed for some 19 years, there has been vandalism to our property (and) we are calling upon all well-thinking Jamaicans to assist us and work with us to ensure that the safety and integrity of our tracks are protected in order to maintain the safety of our passengers," Bonitto said. The gorge will be closed to vehicular traffic for a month. The alternative routes are through Barry or Sligoville.