

Barbados Builds Its Own Trade Routes

A concept paper · Ian C. Dash, Champion Maritime Limited · 30 September 2026

The Prime Minister has said it: on 23 September 2026, with the President of Afreximbank at the United Nations, that Caribbean countries have a duty to build their own trade routes and must not remain “merely tenants in their own economies.” This paper completes the sentence. A route is ships, schedules and the ownership of both; Barbados builds all three, in step with a Southern Green Corridor, with the first ships sailing in 2029.

The message

Barbados builds its own trade routes. A route is not a line on a map; it is ships, schedules and the ownership of both. For sixty years the Region has bought its transport from others and wondered why its trade never came. The Southern Green Corridor is the first route Barbados can build rather than wait for, and building it means carrying our own trade in our own bottoms, in ships powered by our own wind and built in our own yard. Food security is the first cargo. Decarbonisation is the means. Owning the trading infrastructure is the prize. The wind and the sea have always been our strategic infrastructure; a fossil-fuel-free fleet turns them into strategic infrastructure assets we own.

Three layers, one thing

Routes, ships and ownership are usually treated as three policies. They are one, because each is worthless without the other two.

Routes. The Southern Green Corridor — Barbados with Guyana, Suriname and Northern Brazil — is the first such route, and the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Regional Integration is building it: production in Guyana, agreements in Paramaribo, a food terminal at Bridgetown, customs and phytosanitary channels levelled. CARICOM has studied this connectivity gap thirty-seven times since 1997. What every study found is that the route exists on paper and fails at sea: it costs the same to move a pallet 1,600 nautical miles from Miami as 160 miles between neighbouring islands, and there is no ship that sails on a published timetable with a refrigerated hold at pallet scale.

Ships. A route is only real when something sails it, every week, whether or not the hold is full. That is what the Region has never had and has never been able to afford, because fuel and the fixed cost of conventional tonnage made a timetable a subsidy. The Alpha Zulu ships remove fuel from the equation: wind as primary propulsion, solar-powered refrigeration, a weekly cash floor an order of magnitude below a diesel ferry, breaking even at a fraction of a full hold. They are not one prestige vessel but a class, serially built, six hulls for six loops in the first network, ten and more as the corridor grows. The first ships sail in 2029.

Ownership. Trading in our own bottoms is the oldest economic principle Barbados has and the one it has honoured least. Ships built at Port Trident, flagged in Barbados, crewed by

Barbadian and OECS seafarers, owned by a regional company whose outside capital enters as debt, grants or a citizen or diaspora bond and never as controlling equity. Every freight dollar stays in the Region; every voyage under sail is foreign exchange kept at home; every hull is a strategic infrastructure asset on a Caribbean balance sheet rather than a charter payment to someone else's.

Take away the ships and the route is a study. Take away ownership and the ships are a foreign service that leaves when the subsidy does. Take away the route and the ships have nothing to carry. Built together, they compound: the ships make the route credible, the route fills the ships, and the yards build the next ones.

In step with the corridor, 2026–2035

The ships sail in 2029. Everything before that is the corridor being built on land and in law — which is the Special Envoy's work — and the fleet arrives one phase after each green corridor gate opens. The timeline is not a delay; it is the sequence in which a route is actually built.

Phase	The green corridor	The ships	What we ask of the Envoy's office
2026 — Recognition	Southern Green Corridor on the PMO agenda; Guyana and Suriname engagement; ferry trial announced	BMTA recognition (v2, 30 June); MTCC Caribbean IMO GMN pilot selection; ministerial permissions sought to apply for Blue Green Bank / CAF, UNIDO SIDS & Digital Logistics, and green climate funds — none drawing on the Treasury	Place a zero-fossil-fuel packet service in the corridor logistics workstream beside the ferry trial; treat the permissions as corridor infrastructure
2027 — Proof	Ferry trial runs; customs, licensing and phytosanitary channels levelled; corridor MOU	Schooner RUTH pilot corridor opens March 2027 (Bridgetown–Portsmouth–St John's); offtake letters for the first 26 weeks; polars finalised; classification pathway agreed	Introductions in Georgetown (Ministry of Agriculture, GMC) and Paramaribo; green corridor status for the RUTH pilot
2028 — Build	Green corridor agreement signed; Bridgetown food terminal operating; regional standards for green corridor commodities	First hulls laid at Port Trident; seafarer pipeline through Blue Star Navigation; women recruited into the yard and crews from day one	Include the yard and the ships in the green corridor's industrial and Bridgetown Initiative finance case
2029 — Sail	Scheduled green corridor service begins	First Alpha Zulu ships in service on the Guyana–Barbados and Guyana–Trinidad loops; further hulls building	The Prime Minister opens the route
2030–2035 — Scale	25 by 2025+5 target; ZeroFF Carriage Standard phased in 25% (2030) to 100% (2035); Protocol to the Revised Treaty	Six-hull mesh (AZ1–AZ6), then ten; Suriname and Northern Brazil loops; Shore Control Centre; hydrogen and autonomy retrofits as the technology matures	CARICOM adoption of the Standard; the green corridors extended to the wider Community

What sits underneath

Each of our existing documents proves one clause of our message.

Document	Audience	The clause it proves
<i>The Ship That Plants a Crop</i> — strategic note, v2	The Prime Minister	Why: decarbonisation is the lever, food security the first cargo; the lineage from Bovell and Dodds to today
<i>Alpha Zulu RoPAC — Decarbonisation Driving Connectivity</i> — brief	Special Envoy Wiggins	The route: what the Southern Green Corridor needs at sea, loop by loop and commodity by commodity
<i>Alpha Zulu RoPAC Class</i> — programme brief	Ministers, MTCC, class societies	The ships: what they are, what they carry, how they are built and crewed
<i>Break-Even Analysis, Galleons Passage vs Alpha Zulu</i>	Finance, DFIs, CAF	Why ownership pays: a fossil-fuel-free fleet breaks even where a diesel ferry cannot; Annex F, the 42 studies behind it
<i>The Caribbean Packet Thesis; Regional Maritime Mesh; Progressive Autonomy; SAR & Disaster Relief</i>	Technical and policy readers	Depth on the network, the timetable, the MASS pathway and the ships' second mission

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