

STATES OF JERSEY

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PROVISION OF PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Lodged au Greffe on 23rd May 2006
by the Connétable of St. Helier

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Minister of Transport and Technical Services to provide unlit pedestrian crossings ('Jersey Crossings') at –

- (a) the junction of Burrard Street and Halkett Place as shown on Drawing No. 2006/05/a; and
- (b) the junction of Mulcaster Street, Wharf Street and the Weighbridge as shown on Drawing No. 2006/05/b.

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

REPORT

I regret that it has proved necessary to use the time of the Island's Assembly to debate this matter, but my efforts to secure simple, inexpensive improvements to the town's walking routes using the obvious channels such as letters to and meetings with the relevant Department and Committee have failed.

As long ago as 1997, I showed a number of States' members, including former Senator Dick Shenton, around the town, highlighting the difficulty pedestrians were experiencing in moving to and from the town's major facilities, the central library and the Bus Station. This concern was shared by Senator Stuart Syvret, then Senator Paul Le Claire, Deputy Scott Warren, former Deputy Jennifer Bridge and then Deputy Paul Routier, to name but a few. The then Deputy Routier was particularly concerned that there was no pedestrian crossing between the town and the Bus Station, and he forwarded to me a letter about this from a concerned constituent. I also received a telephone call from a woman who had been struck by a vehicle while crossing to the library, sustaining the loss of several teeth in the collision. Later, the Manager of the café on the corner of that junction was featured in the Jersey Evening Post calling for pedestrian facilities to be provided.

Before proceeding further it is worth explaining that the Jersey Crossing differs from the pelican crossing and the conventional zebra crossing in that it is unlit, consisting only of white lines. Highway Engineers favour its use on single carriageway streets in preference to button-controlled Pelican crossings. In some cases, especially where vehicle and pedestrian flows are heavy at times, a lit or Zebra crossing is provided, while access to the Waterfront has been markedly improved by 'in-ground' flashing lights. New 'Jersey Crossings' have been provided relatively recently on Beresford Street and York Street to improve pedestrian routes. Nor are such crossings unique to Jersey: at the APF conference held at Delemont in the Swiss Jura, I noted that they were provided regularly along the length of every single street of the town.

In 2004 I submitted a draft Report and Proposition which sought to remedy this state of affairs to the Environment and Public Services Committee. To avoid a States' debate, the Committee of the day offered to make certain improvements to the junction of Burrard Street and Halkett Place but would not go so far as to entertain the idea of a simple Jersey solution to the problem – and one which, indeed, is practised in many European towns and cities. At the time I believed that the Committee had less of a problem with the installation of a Jersey crossing at the bottom of Mulcaster Street, but here again, although a pavement build-out was constructed in conjunction with the provision of extra taxi rank spaces, the crossing itself has never materialised.

Recently I attended a meeting with the Minister of Transport and Technical Services and his Assistant Minister, together with various officers of the Department. I was encouraged to take up this issue again by concerns expressed to me by Deputy Mezbourian of St. Lawrence, who also attended the meeting, as well as by repeated calls for improved pedestrian facilities in Burrard Street from the proprietor of the café.

At the meeting I learned that the Department did not favour the provision of Jersey crossings in either location. In relation to Mulcaster Street, the Minister argued that as the Bus Station would be moving in due course to the Transportation Centre, this lessened the need for a Jersey crossing in this location. Presumably, once this happens – and one assumes it is at least a year away – no pedestrians will need to cross the bottom of Mulcaster Street, neither to the refurbished Weighbridge, nor to the Museum, nor indeed to the Old Harbour and Commercial Buildings beyond.

More startling (although I should perhaps have ceased being surprised by advice emanating from the Island's highway engineers) was the news that if any 'fixed' pedestrian facilities were to be provided in order to secure a reasonable level of service for pedestrians crossing between the town and the Central Library, the Mechanics Institute and the Methodist Centre, then they would favour a pelican crossing.

A pelican crossing, for the sake of clarity, such as has been recently installed in lower Bath Street in a position where there is no obvious pedestrian desire line, involves a large equipment box, traffic light poles, lights and push button controls, and costs in the region of £25,000. Pelican crossings, where installed in positions such as the Burrard Street/Halkett Place junction lead to frustration on the part of all users: pedestrians having pressed the button find it unacceptable to wait the length of time deemed acceptable by traffic engineers and will try to cross the road in advance of the pedestrian phase, leaving busy motorists fuming to see the traffic lights turning red

when there are no pedestrians wishing to cross the road. The next pedestrian wishing to cross the road has to wait the requisite delay before the pedestrian phase is activated, does not see why they should and so crosses early, and so on.

To install a pelican crossing at either of these junctions would be to use a sledge-hammer to crack a nut; not only would the equipment be aesthetically damaging to the area but the facilities would rarely be used. What pedestrians want is for vehicular traffic to slow down as they approach these junctions so that pedestrians arriving there are able to cross conveniently and quickly, thus minimising the delay to drivers which is created by pelican crossings.

The improvement of the Island's pedestrian facilities is a recurring theme in successive strategic reports debated by the States: 2000 and Beyond, the Sustainable Transport Policy, the Tourism Strategy, the new Island Plan – all of these strategies recognise the various benefits – health, social, environmental, economic benefits – that will accrue from making this particular mode of transport more attractive.

To the layperson it beggars belief that anyone should doubt that a town's library and Bus Station should not be readily accessible by pedestrians, especially the most vulnerable road users, the young and elderly, who may also be said to be the most frequent users of these facilities. Yet time and time again, most often as a member of the then Public Services Committee, I was told by the Highway Engineers that such measures could not be provided.

The basis of the Public Services Department's opposition to improving pedestrian facilities is, I believe, simply explained and fundamentally flawed: crossings are dangerous. Unless they are used with sufficient regularity the inattentive motorist may be forgiven for crashing into a person attempting to cross at such a junction. Analysis of so-called 'accident' statistics will confirm their opinion – because there are more pedestrian 'accidents' on pedestrian crossings than at other locations along the length of a given street, crossings make accidents happen. What the Highway Engineers prefer is to rely on 'platooning' of vehicles, that is to say, the bunching of vehicles that produces gaps in the traffic which the pedestrian must judge whether they are sufficiently wide for them to attempt to cross the road. The logical outcome of such a point of view would be to remove all pedestrian crossings of all types throughout the Island, so that the onus of responsibility for a safe passage across the road always lies upon the pedestrian.

There should, as I say, be little argument that the route to and from the town centre, and the markets, and the Central Library, the Mechanics Institute and Wesley Grove Chapel, is a major walking route. It was because of this that I was not surprised when the Public Services Department officers agreed that reducing the carriageway at this junction to provide pedestrian facilities would be 'acceptable'. Other benefits were envisaged by the Committee of the day, including wider pavements along Burrard Street, as the current ones are too narrow to accommodate the volume of pedestrians which uses them, together with the potential to provide much-needed unloading facilities, cycle parking and so on.

The Committee was less enthusiastic when it learned that in order to achieve the crossing and the required road-narrowing, the direction of traffic along Halkett Place south would have to be changed. This was necessary, we were told, as there was insufficient room for large vehicles to make the right hand turn. More recently, the justification for the reversal of Halkett Place has been, variously, that the junction with Beresford Street would be 'unsafe' due to the new 'Jersey Crossing' in the vicinity, and more recently still, that the reversal will make the creation of a pedestrian priority zone in that section of Halkett Place more feasible. I find it ironic, to say the least, that the highly contentious reversal of Halkett Place which is still the subject of opposition from some motorists was accepted by the Committee of the day as a necessary evil to provide the essential pedestrian facility, but that the latter has now been ruled impossible.

To make matters worse, the person attempting to go to the library or to Wesley Grove, must negotiate a much faster and more continuous stream of vehicles, the 'platooning' beloved of Highway Engineers having been reduced by the narrowing of the carriageway and the increased use of Union Street following the change of traffic flows in Devonshire Place.

The road-narrowing at the bottom of Mulcaster Street was achieved in a similar fashion to that provided in Burrard Street, providing useful extra space for taxis and the potential for wider pavements and part-time

unloading bays. Again, the assumption on the part of the Committee of the day was that a Jersey Crossing would be set down to complete the work. However, the Highway Engineers would prefer to keep the pedestrians going to or from the Bus Station in a state of high alert, waiting for a gap in the traffic which might be sufficiently wide for them to dash across to the other side (assuming they are sufficiently able-bodied to do so).

It is accepted that the Bus Station will, one day, be relocated to the Island Site. However, this is no argument for delaying the completion of the pedestrian improvements at this junction, given that when it is no longer the Bus Station it will become an attractive public space which the public may be forgiven for wishing to access without having to wait until the traffic down Mulcaster Street slackens in volume and speed.

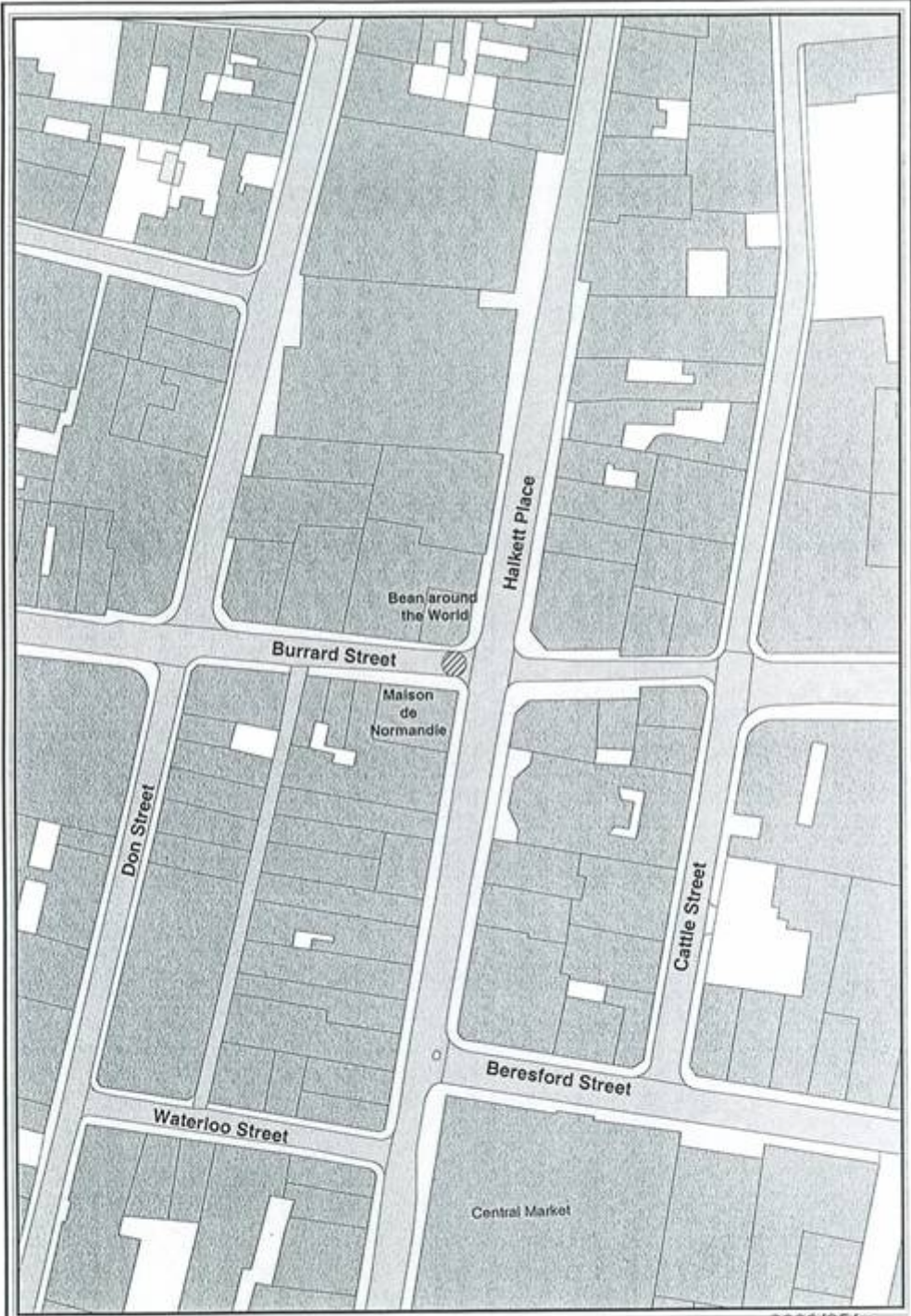
I am firmly of the view that in any other European town of a comparable size to St. Helier, both of these junctions would have pedestrian crossings placed across them.

It does not bode particularly well for the future of the relationship between the Minister of Transport and Technical Services and the Roads' Committee of the Parish of St. Helier, that I have been forced to seek the support of the States in achieving improvements to the Town Centre that have been supported by residents, traders and elected representatives of the Parish.

The St. Helier Roads' Committee is due to compile a list of various other locations in and around the town where it believes that the level of service provided to pedestrians is woefully inadequate for a 21st Century urban environment. I hope very much that it will not be necessary to bring each and every one of these to the States in order to challenge the Committee's refusal to make our town more pedestrian-friendly.

Financial and manpower implications

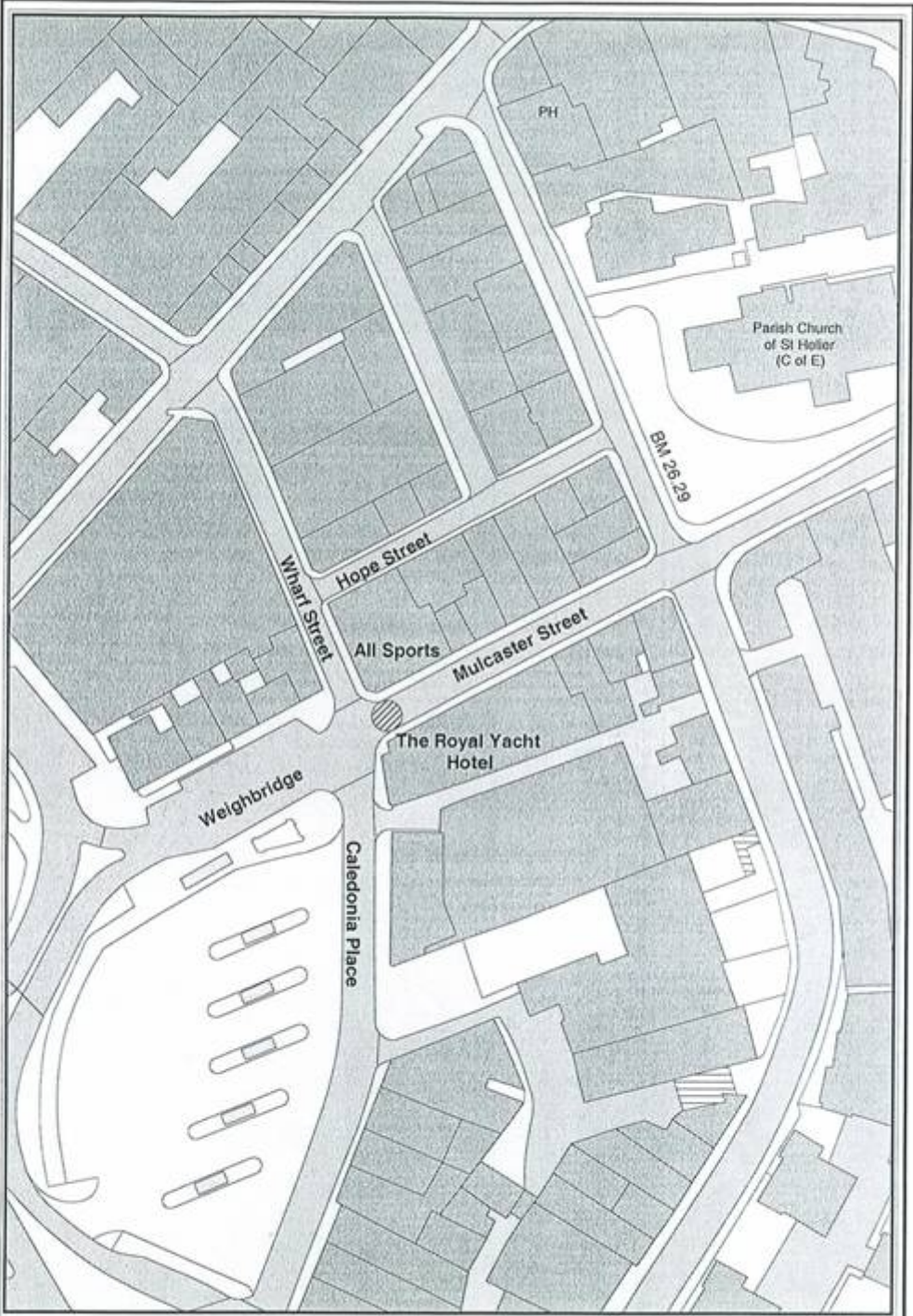
The above are negligible.



States of Jersey
19-04
19-05
19-06
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Proposed Crossing
Junction of Burrard St. & Halkett Place

2006/05/a
Scale:1:1000
Date:19:05:06



States of Jersey
18th May 2006
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Proposed Crossing
Junction of Mulcaster St. & Wharf St.

2006/05/b
Scale:1:1000
Date:19:05:06