

2020.09.08

4 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour of the Chief Minister regarding when will Broad Street reopen: (OQ.207/2020)

Will the Chief Minister advise when Broad Street will be reopened to traffic, if at all; what specific medical advice, if any, determined the decision to close it; and the job titles of the officers who advised that this street should close?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré (The Chief Minister):

I want to be very, very clear. We are not yet back to normal and we are unlikely to be back to normal for many months. We do remain in a good position but to use possibly a football analogy, we are now at half-time. We have the next half to play. The reason I use that analogy is that we must continuously remind the public that we still need to take care, we still need to maintain the basic hygiene measures we have been talking about for months and also that the advice categorically remains that physical distancing continues to be recommended at a minimum of one metre, with 2 metres wherever possible. Therefore we are also keeping an eye on the coming winter months, which may require more stringent measures, if needed, to be able to maintain as much as possible of our normal way of life, including visiting the town centre. So by keeping Broad Street closed one of the key arteries of shoppers has in effect been widened to enable social distancing to be maintained. In terms of how long, I cannot give a definitive answer today, it will continue to be kept under review. I have just given the current advice, and Broad Street was closed after consulting with the Parish of St. Helier and G.H.E.'s (Growth, Housing and Environment) engineers.

4.4.1 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

I wonder if the Chief Minister could just touch on the part of my question, which was not covered, which was the job titles of the officers who advised that the street should be closed.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think in terms of the how it was done - I do not know who it is consulted with in St. Helier - it is G.H.E., I presume traffic engineers. In terms of the advice, as I understand it, it came up through S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) but also S.T.A.C. have given some generic advice, they do not advise on specific street closures. I think it is worth making the point that what is generically referred to as Broad Street is not just the area outside the Post Office. It goes all the way up to the Co-op at Charing Cross and then to York Street towards the Town Hall. There are a variety of pinch-points along those roads which do create narrowings for pedestrians and it is all about giving people space and confidence. I will say that anecdotally, and certainly I have had some feedback from pedestrians walking into town who welcome that move, and it is about giving comfort and assurance.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Morel asks the question as to whether or not this was a question directed to the Minister for Infrastructure. That was so I think on the original Order Paper, Deputy, but not on the Consolidated Order Paper, which is the one of course we are following.

4.4.2 The Connétable of St. Helier:

My question also was ... perhaps the Chief Minister will pass it on to the Minister for Infrastructure. My concern really is that now that the Council of Ministers have decided to keep Broad Street closed

for longer will they do something about the signage, which is not only ugly but is extremely uninformative? It gives no direction to cyclists about pedestrian priority in the now closed Broad Street. There is a real opportunity I think here for the department to be far more helpful to people who are hoping to use Broad Street for the very safety purposes that it has been closed. I have had many complaints about people nearly being bowled over by cyclists and other people on wheels using Broad Street. Will he undertake to review the signage and to put proper signage in place please?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I shall raise that with the Minister for Infrastructure and I see no reason why it cannot be done. I will say, in fact I am in agreement, that the area is getting busier, which I take a degree of comfort that some more people are coming to town, although numbers are still down. It is about reassurance that it is safe and comforting for them to do so. I think it is helpful, and I am sure the Connétable will be aware of this, that at the end of July there were some counts done, I believe for 2 weeks for every day, and of all the pedestrian traffic using Broad Street and King Street, the split was approximately 42 per cent and 58 per cent respectively. In other words, I believe that is probably over the entire length and probably up at the pinch-points. But the Connétable is absolutely right. Where cyclists and pedestrians are mixing in all areas, not just in the area we are talking about, in my view should very much be priorities for pedestrians and the cyclists have a duty of care to them. We will endeavour to correct the signage there, if that is possible.

4.4.3 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Chief Minister mentioned reassurance. I would like reassurance that our decisions are being based on medical advice. The Chief Minister said “general advice”. Was the specific advice about Broad Street because in future if we are being told we are being advised on medical grounds I want to see it in writing.

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

If it helps the Deputy, I will read a quote directly from an email from the Medical Officer of Health.

[10:15]

It is obviously a paragraph: “As you may recall S.T.A.C advised against any further easing of COVID-19 mitigation measures and so physical distancing continues to be recommended at a minimum of one metre with 2 metres wherever possible. S.T.A.C. is also mindful that at the coming months the likely result and further challenges to the Island, which may require stringent application of various physical distancing measures if we are to maintain as much as possible of a normal way of life including visiting the town centre.” There is a slight addition in a different one, and what it does clarify is: “While S.T.A.C. is able to drive general advice and guidance it has not been involved directly with decisions regarding specific public roads.” The point is, the principle is about being able to allow people to distance at one and 2 metres but obviously S.T.A.C. are not going to give what we will call traffic-related advice. The general advice is that the ... this is about giving comfort to individuals if they are trying to come into town and allowing them to distance. By doing this, we are allowing probably about half of the precinct for people to spread out parallel to that as they traverse the town.

4.4.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As people are not keeping one metre distance in the main shopping precinct, what further measures will the Ministers be bringing in then to make sure that they do?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

There is a wider point. I do actually welcome this question because we have started again bringing it to the attention of the public. I think the same position is being seen in the U.K. Within the population, this is an opinion, it is not a scientific comment, there are obviously a body of people who remain very cautious and they have got used to where we are. But they are still cautious and careful and concerned around the impact of COVID. But there is a body of people on the Island and nationally who think it is all over, as they say. They think the whole thing has gone away, it is not a problem and then get on with normal life. That is the message we started to put out that this is not the case. That we are not back to normal and that distancing and one metre and 2 metre, as I have already referred to, is incredibly important. So we will be seeing greater public information on that and public reinforcement over the coming weeks. That was one of the reasons I did the press conference the week before last, which is around again just setting the tone, we are finishing summer, you have to get back into that mode, particularly as winter is coming, particularly with the impacts of things like flu and all the other things that are coming through, that we do continue to maintain our basic hand hygiene measures and distancing, *et cetera, et cetera*. We will continue to monitor this very closely and obviously if we did need to go back to those kind of measures or elements of them, which we really do not want to do, then obviously we will do so. But part of that initial side is about reinforcing the public message. I will take the opportunity, because we have said it ...

The Bailiff:

Minister, you are well past the time normally allocated for an oral answer so if something is to be said it can be done in response to a different question. Deputy Alves asked to ask a question. Deputy, I had already called the numbers of individuals who I had on my list and, as you will recall from memorandum sent out at the beginning over the year, that is an indication that no more questions can be taken because of the time constraints.

4.4.5 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

There are some businesses in Broad Street that have as clients, shall we say the elderly or those who are unable to walk to get to their premises. Could I ask the Chief Minister what he is doing or might propose to do to mitigate the effects on those people who just are unable to walk the length of Broad Street to get to those businesses?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

I think that falls down into 2 categories. One is disabled parking. My understanding is that there have been some extra spaces put in Dumaresq Street and the Minister for Infrastructure is also looking at seeing where other spaces can be provided in the vicinity. The second part, which I think is the subject of a second question, is whether something can be done around the buses or not. But I will leave the Minister to deal with that because that is obviously categorically the infrastructure side, whereas I could take this question because it brought in the wider approach, as it were. Can I also just take the opportunity to finish what I was about to say on the previous question, to finish off to Deputy Higgins around spacing and messaging? One message we really want to emphasise is that we are not seeing in every hospitality, so restaurant/pub, the relevant contact tracing measures being retained and taken. So enforcement measures will be being put in place. There will be words of advice given but we really want to emphasise that message that it is incredibly important and that all wraps into the measures we are taking, which brings me straight back to why we are maintaining keeping Broad Street and the relevant streets closed at the moment.

4.4.6 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

This initial question arose out of the comments made by the Chamber of Commerce and I wonder if I could ask the Chief Minister how the Chamber of Commerce will be kept updated and informed about any developments covering Broad Street?

Senator J.A.N. Le Fondré:

We had a video conference with them on Friday and we will be updating them not just on those measures but also on the impacts of the Government Plan over the next few weeks. So we will be doing some further engagement.

The Bailiff:

I will just give Members notice that we have now gone through 4 questions and we have used up more than a quarter of our time allocated for questions. If we are not able to move more quickly through the questions then I will have to reduce or no longer take any supplementary questions, other than the final supplementary.