

4. Questions to Ministers without Notice - Minister for Transport and Technical Services

The Bailiff:

Now we come to questions to Ministers without notice. The first question period is of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.

4.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Further to news that several lorries were ordered off the road last week by the D.V.S. (Driver and Vehicle Standards Department) due to defects, surely part of the answer would be to remove the Vehicle Registration Duty thereby encouraging people to import newer, more efficient vehicles that are safer and less polluting. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

The matter of the removal or not of Vehicle Registration Duty is not a matter for me. It is a matter for the Treasury Minister who I am sure will consider all issues pertaining to vehicle registration when he reviews that issue. I am currently very satisfied with the particular and perhaps unique way that the Island deals with monitoring defective vehicles by on-the-spot road checks. The penalty for failure is very severe. Vehicles are immediately impounded and occasionally almost immediately scrapped if they are in particularly poor condition. It is a system that I believe works well. However, if I can advise the Deputy and the House, I will be expecting a report from Driver and Vehicle Standards Department that will look into the possibility of regular licensing requirements for heavy vehicles that would be similar in concept to the United Kingdom practice of the M.O.T. (Ministry of Transport) but probably not on such a regular basis and certainly not extending itself as far as private motor vehicles.

4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister inform Members what consultation and what progress has been made with the representatives of the taxi and cab drivers associations towards unifying and simplifying the taxi and cab registration process on the Island?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Quite significant progress has been made in this direction. A number of policy matters have now been thoroughly considered by my department and also by an inter-departmental officer group. In a matter of a week or so it is my intention to sit down with the leading representatives of the taxi and cab industries and in an open consultative process I will be presenting the various policy issues to them and I expect a full and wide-ranging discussion to ensue.

4.2.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister inform Members when any consultative meetings have been held prior to the finalisation of his policy which he is now going to present to the taxi drivers?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I regret I cannot give the Deputy the exact number but very early on in my role as Minister I set up a consultative board which comprises representatives of the rank industry, representatives of the cab drivers and also representatives of the cab operators. I have met with them myself initially. Subsequently that group has had reasonably regular meetings with officers in my department. They have outlined all the issues that they feel are important. Those are the issues that we have carried forward.

4.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

What does the Minister believe will be the likely impact on motorists, the economy and St. Helier of the loss of 350 car parking spaces at Gas Place during the development of the town park? Also does he have a view on the impact of losing in excess of 500 car parking spaces

during the construction of the Esplanade Square development and the new lowering the road project? Is his department planning now for this loss of in excess of 850 car parking spaces? Will he inform us as to what plan he has?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, Sir, the plan is extremely simple. My department in co-operation with other key bodies such as the Parish of St. Helier will find alternative car parking spaces. It is a very simple approach. I can also assure the Senator that I feel confident that at this stage the residents of St. Helier and indeed commuters into St. Helier should not expect to suffer any inconvenience because we will be instituting plans to find appropriate alternative car parking places which will in due course almost certainly involve the construction of new, multi-storey car parks in key locations.

4.4 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Driving in town at the moment is absolute chaos. There used to be a policy where road works were not carried out during the summer months. Is the Minister of the opinion that tourism is in such decline that he can clog-up the town for the summer months and, if not, what is he going to do about it?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am afraid I simply reject the Senator's analysis that driving into town is chaos. On numerous occasions now when major road workings have been put into place by the Transport and Technical Services Department, the media have speculated widely on the basis that road chaos predicted and in every single circumstance bar one there has been absolutely no difficulty at all. In fact over the last 18 months or so my department has received a series of warm accolades and congratulations from all quarters about how well road works are being carried out. So I simply reject the Senator's assertion in the first place and, therefore, there really is no point in answering the remainder of the question.

4.5 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Will the Minister advise the House when he intends to returning to the House with his Integrated Travel and Transport Plan?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I regret that the Integrated Travel and Transport Plan has taken so long in its generation but it is, as I am sure Members will be aware, being victim to effectively changing external circumstances such as the determination to produce the EDAW Report which itself was backed by a specific report on transport strategy by Peter Brett Associates. It really would have been fairly improper of me to have attempted to foreshadow those reports with the transport strategy. Indeed it makes absolute sense to me to delay a finalisation of the Integrated Travel and Transport Strategy until the whole of the implications of EDAW and its impact on St. Helier have been thoroughly fleshed-out. That, in effect, has now happened and I am fully looking forward to seeing the final form of the Integrated Transport and Travel Plan being presented to this House in a matter of a month or so.

4.6 Deputy J.J. Huet:

Just going back to car parking, Sir; is the Minister aware that the Waterfront Enterprise Board has got it well in hand about the Esplanade Square to emergencies for the cars when development is started there?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am very grateful for that reminder from my Assistant Minister. She does do a very commendable job in her role. Yes, it is in fact the case that all the construction that is going

ahead on the Waterfront, a lot of it involving significant new underground car parking, is in fact being done in a specially phased way to ensure that car parking spaces will be available during the construction phase.

4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I have raised my head because I know you do not like to keep flashing my light and not looking at you at the same time. My question to the Minister, Sir, is yes, we have an Integrated Transport Plan that he hopes to bring to the House yet when questioned about what he will do with the loss of car parking spaces at Gas Place and the Esplanade he answered he will find alternative car parking space. Not any other solution, not even a temporary solution. Please, Sir, could the Minister tell us some alternatives that are in his Integrated Transport Plan that might alleviate car parking all together or lessen it in the longer term?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I would not want to create any panic by suggesting that I intend to alleviate car parking all together. The fact of the matter is that there are some areas over which I have a certain level of control in terms of how the Island adopts its travel and transport and there are others where I simply do not. It is all well and good for me to encourage commuters into St. Helier to walk into town, to perhaps cycle into town or even to use the new fully integrated Island summer bus service. However, the fact of the matter is that there is no getting away from the fact that the bulk of Islanders prefer to drive into town and they prefer to drive into town and find a convenient parking place. So there is a clear onus on me to continue to provide appropriate levels of car parking space and that is certainly what I intend to do.

4.8 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Has the Minister and his department given any further consideration to the parking known as, I believe, automated? I think they were known as “sky parks” which allow a far greater number of cars to be parked with the use of robots in a confined space.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I have to confess I have no personal experience of being parked by a robot but I am aware of these systems and certainly my department is aware of these systems. They have certain advantages but they also, it has to be said, have a number of disadvantages, not least of which is the ability to access your vehicle and also the amount of time that these particular garages take to load and unload vehicles from their stacking systems. I hesitate to suggest this but there are also rather significant problems should there ever be power shortages.

The Bailiff:

A supplementary, Deputy Martin, or not? No?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, I could stretch. It is about a car park but it is more specific.

The Bailiff:

For a supplementary I think I ought to move on to Deputy Scott Warren. Deputy Scott Warren has asked one. I beg your pardon.

4.9 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister assure the House that the bus pass system whereby women get passes at 60 and men at 65 is now human rights compliant?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I do not believe I can assure the House that it is necessarily human rights compliant but I follow simply in the wake of the Social Security Department who issue their benefits in line with the similar age discrimination or however you wish to pitch it. Age advantage, I suspect, perhaps to one gender as opposed to another. We merely follow how the benefits are dealt out. That seems currently the fairest and most practical thing to do. I am very happy to review the situation and I will certainly keep it under scrutiny. But at this particular moment in time I do not see any need for the bus passes in particular to set some trend in the way that they are allocated.

The Bailiff:

Deputy Southern you are next on my list but I also saw Deputy Pitman and as you have already asked 3 questions I do not know whether you want to yield to her.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I believe I asked one of this particular Minister, Sir.

The Bailiff:

Two actually.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

If you say so.

4.10 Deputy S. Pitman:

Will the Minister not agree that if the States continue to significantly increase parking spaces in town this will only encourage more car use and will contravene international government environmental goals in attempting to reduce gases that are contributing to climate change? Will the Minister, Sir, take this into consideration with his Travel and Transport policy?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

As with everything, Sir, how we manage travel and transport particularly around our capital is a matter of checks and balances. Indeed the Deputy is quite right to hone-in on the very important issue of exhaust gas emissions. Unfortunately we have seen recently the public response to early attempts to deal with the exhaust gas emission problem. It is one that I would assure the House is constantly monitored and we do come well within E.U. (European Union) guidelines. But it is a subject that I intend to address and in due course I would hope to find some method of perhaps favouring electrical and hybrid powered vehicles which have significantly lower exhaust emissions but as with everything that may require a little extra budgeting.