

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

4.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Now that we have a purpose-built bus station and the former station at the Weighbridge is closed down, does the Minister have any intention to relocate the covered bus shelters from the former Weighbridge area to other sites in the Island?

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

Yes, Sir. It has always been my intention to want to see those bus shelters reused as best we can. Regrettably, the situation is out of my hands. The Weighbridge site is in fact the property of W.E.B. but I am led to believe that a number of the Weighbridge bus shelters have now been seen in various locations around the Island, primarily, I understand, in various Parish yards and I understand that there must therefore be some process of likely planning application, site assessment going on in order that the bus shelters can be reused, which I am very pleased about indeed.

4.2 Senator L. Norman:

I wonder if the Minister could tell me, is Liberation Station a bus station or is it a transportation centre and what is the difference between the 2? **[Laughter]**

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It is more like an airport departure lounge, Sir. It is, of course, primarily a bus station, although I understand that in the original propositions brought to the States the site was, on early plans, described as a transportation centre. Indeed, Liberation Station is a transportation centre though I am sure Members will all have their own interesting and subjective views as to what constitutes a transportation centre, but I am personally satisfied that Liberation Station fulfils that criteria.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Does any other Member have any questions?

4.3 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Would the Minister advise the House when he expects the new Transport Policy to be lodged in draft form for Members' and the public's attention?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am currently reading the final draft, Sir, and subject to any amendments that I wish to make and clearly any views that my senior officers care to make on the amendments I have been making to the plan, I expect the draft to be available to Members very shortly.

4.4 Deputy R.C. Duhamel of St. Saviour:

Would the Minister give an undertaking to this House to accept the invitation to personally visit the kindling wood plant in the west of the Island?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I think the kindling wood plant is based at a farmer's premises, and I am aware of it, I have had a look at it, and would be very happy to go and see it again.

4.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Is it the intention of the Minister to press Connex to install proper luggage racks on the airport buses?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The Deputy raises an interesting point and it is a source that has exercised the Minister's mind at some length. The difficulty with simply installing luggage racks, clearly for buses on the airport route, which would be of convenience to passengers alighting the bus at the airport with luggage, is that clearly luggage takes up space on buses that would otherwise be used for passengers to have the comfort of seating. So, one is faced with a difficult problem here as to what extent there should be luggage racks at the expense of comfortable seating for passengers. There is a secondary issue and that is that buses do not necessarily run on the same route, therefore, by installing luggage racks on buses that perhaps generally service the route 15, for example, it may be they will be taken to serve a different route at different times. There is a problem in terms of redeployment of the rolling stock. I have considered this at some length. It does seem to me that it is a matter for commonsense, both to be exercised by passengers, the holders of luggage, and the individual driver. The current state of affairs is that normally passengers alighting at the airport with luggage are effectively first on the bus and, in some cases, although I am glad to say it is very rare cases, they have been rather selfish in taking up a number of seats with their own personal belongings.

The Deputy Bailiff:

If I may, Minister, we have probably had a fairly full answer on that question.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I think the point may be made, Sir, yes.

4.6 Deputy J.B. Fox:

I wonder if the Minister could clarify in relation to the question asked by Senator Norman originally. I understand that the proposition brought to the States was that this was going to be a transport centre, which includes the picking up and the setting down of passengers, that were buses, that were coaches on Island tours and also for taxis. Clearly, at some point in time, this policy changed to become a bus station and only that used predominantly during the day and early evening. I wonder if the Minister could advise subsequently - he may not have the information to hand - when this policy was changed and if this was brought back to the States for their consideration?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am not aware that the concept of a transportation centre constituted a policy but, Sir, Deputy Fox is a politician of some veterancy compared to me and I am sure I do not have to remind him that politicians make promises and sometimes those promises do not pan-out. Quite what the promises were relating to the transportation centre, it is a matter that is rather before my time, but it would seem that as far as Deputy Fox is concerned, those political promises certainly did not pan-out. In respect of what might be seen as the obvious linkage between buses and taxis, I have to say that in the generality people who are taking a bus to town do not normally alight and then catch a taxi from the taxi rank, and vice versa. Similarly, I want to remind Members that the reason that the taxi rank has not moved is because it has got a good position on what is the remains of the Weighbridge and that because of security issues indicated to us by the police, including the installation of C.C.T.V. (closed-circuit television) cameras, they and indeed the rank drivers, would prefer to stay where they are.

4.7 Deputy S. Power:

The Minister made reference to the fact that buses are not exclusive on any one route. Can the Minister undertake to look at this because if a dedicated bus was available on the 15 route, it may be easier to consider perhaps a luggage trailer to be towed by a bus, and I have seen this is many airports. Can the Minister undertake to look at the possibility of a luggage trailer to be coupled to the No. 15 bus? Finally, Sir, it is my belief that bicycle racks could also be fitted to the front

and rear of other buses on Island routes to enable people to cycle to town and to take a bus to go up the hill afterwards.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

My experience of luggage trailers attached to the rear of buses is that normally those are dedicated to vehicles that operate around airports themselves. However, I will undertake to have a look at that possibility. In respect of bicycle racks, I have been pursuing the question of bicycle racks and their attachment or not to the front or backs of buses now for some years with, so far, no resolution and that again is a matter that I will be continuing to pursue.

4.8 The Connétable of St. Peter:

Now that the major road works running through St. Peter have been completed, could I ask the Minister to take back my thanks to his management team responsible for the work that has gone into the organisation of the re-routing and all the requirements while the contract was in progress because, while there have been one or 2 little difficult moments, on balance I think it has been a very well organised effort and I would like to accordingly show one's appreciation towards it.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am very grateful to the Connétable of St. Peter for those kind words and I certainly will pass on his thanks and appreciation to the appropriate members of the department. We did encounter some unexpected difficulties ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think, Minister, that was a very benign question, but there are others waiting to ask questions so I think if I could persuade you to shorten that if I may.

4.9 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Not wishing to extend the Minister's agony on the buses, but he will be aware that the first flights out of the Island tend to leave at 7.00 a.m. and check-in time tends to be an hour before at 6.00 a.m. The first number 15 arrives at the airport at about 6.45 a.m. Would the Minister consider asking the operators to bring that service forward to enable Islanders to jump on the bus from town to get the first flights out in the morning?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am happy to consider that proposal, Sir, although I should warn the Connétable that I am a little concerned as to quite what the demand will be for an early bus. I am not sure whether the business community, who normally catch the 'red-eye', is up for bus travel yet but, if they are, so be it.

4.10 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Could I ask the Minister to confirm whether or not he has recently made a Ministerial decision to introduce a gate charge for particular waste delivered to La Collette and, if so, what particular waste this is and what are the reasons for doing so?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

My recollection is that I have put a number of increases on the variety of charges that apply. These are nothing new and have been going for some time. If the Deputy would like to tell me which particular charge he is concerned about, I will look into the detail.

4.11 Senator F.H. Walker:

It is now I think nearly 3 weeks since Liberation Station began operations. Would the Minister inform the House, after such a period of operation, the feedback that he and his department are getting from both users, i.e. passengers, and the operator?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The feedback has been extremely positive indeed, certainly from the operator. There obviously are one or 2 minor teething troubles, as with any brand new operation, but my understanding is everything is now working extremely smoothly. For those who do use it, there has been also a very positive reaction. Indeed, it has been mooted to me that in the early days, following the opening of Liberation Station, I should perhaps have been at the door selling tickets for people who wanted to come in and have a look round because the response from the public has been quite phenomenal. We have had very large audiences down there, not all of them travellers.

4.12 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

During evening performances at the Arts Centre at St. Helier, Sir, people with mobility problems cannot utilise the upper floors of Minden Street car park if the lower ones are full because the lifts are shut down at around 10.00 p.m. I am aware of the Minister's fears regarding the lifts, of some people, shall we say, indulging in antisocial behaviour, but if the conveniences were left unlocked on the premises and the lifts were left on for an extra hour, this would improve the quality of life of theatre goers with mobility problems. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

There are always 2 sides to every coin. While I agree with Deputy Lewis, it is quite clear, from advice received from my department, that there are particular issues relating to the use of lifts in multi-storey car parks late at night. The Deputy referred to antisocial behaviour. Frankly, he is really touching the tip of the iceberg here. The experience of my department is that when we left the lifts open later than 10.00 p.m., they were very badly vandalised and in many cases put out of operation. It is a difficult balance. I regret that one or 2 people who suffer from mobility problems have been compromised and I would simply suggest that there are other places to park around town at that time of night for people with those types of difficulty.

4.13 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Will the Minister state whether or not the new and excellent recycling centre on the Bellozanne site has led to an increase and, if so, does he have percentages to give us and can he offer us the hope that it will ultimately become self-financing and, if so, at what point?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am afraid I do not have any up-to-date figures. The site is relatively new in operation, although the anecdotal evidence is that it is very popular with the public so I am anticipating that we will see some enhanced recycling figures in due course. I do not have any information on that at the moment. In terms of whether it will ever become self-financing, I, like Deputy Le Hérissier, live in hope but I think it is something of a hope. The site cost £150,000 to set up and we will have to do an awful lot of reuse and recycling and somehow find some charging element within that if that money is to be recouped. I do remind Members that recycling and reuse is not necessarily a pot of gold by any stretch of the imagination. Recycling costs money. It is an expensive exercise.

The Deputy Bailiff:

That concludes the period for questions to the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.