

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

The Bailiff:

That concludes the first question period. We come to the second question period, which is by substitution in the absence of the Minister for Economic Affairs, for the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and I invite questions.

4.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Since the advent of the Connex contract, one of the vexing issues has been the provision of follow-up buses and there are continuous complaints from areas - for example like First Tower and Millbrook - that rush-hour buses do not have the capacity. Would the Minister acknowledge that this is an issue and would he tell us, in his negotiations with Connex, how far he has got in resolving this particular issue?

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

I am aware that this is an issue, partly because of the current popularity of the existing services, which are being subscribed to on an ever-increasing rate year on year. The figures have effectively gone up from 4 per cent to 7 per cent and we are now looking at double figure increases in passenger volumes. This does create, at peak times only, certain difficulties at effectively the St. Aubin's Inner Road where buses at peak time have already filled-up further down the road, as it were. Connex do use relief buses in an attempt to deal with this matter. It is a high priority of ours to come up with additional solutions. We are working on that at the moment and I hope to announce some progress on that matter in due course. But the simple matter of fact is that we only have so many buses available at peak time and we are using the lot already and to continue further requires additional funding.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge that this is an issue with public transport operators all over the world, i.e. how you deal with the peak and what do you do the rest of the day, and he has mentioned this from time to time. Would he not acknowledge that this issue has been with the contract since its very beginning and that it is now desperately needed that we come up with a resolution? Would he acknowledge that? Secondly, Sir, would he tell us when he aims to put this particular resolution into the public domain and to change the service?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Well, I am not entirely sure what the Deputy means, Sir, about putting this matter into the public domain. It very much is in the public domain. I have been entirely open about the problems that face running public transport services. The Deputy is quite right, Sir. The sort of problems we face here in Jersey in many ways are similar to the problems that public transport services face elsewhere. In other ways they are very unique because of the Island's particular geography and also the infrastructure with numbers of small lanes, no obvious crossroads to the north of the Island, the only main infrastructure, main highways, are along the south. There are numerous problems. We are aware of them and we have attempted to address them. The House will well know that I tried an experiment last year with the so-called Airport Express to see if we could relieve congestion. That is an experiment that was, to some extent, successful. We are still analysing how successful. I can assure both the Deputy and the House that it is my top priority to improve the routes that pass by First Tower - in particular the Route 15 - and also let us not forget that there is a similar problem with the Route 1 to the east of the Island.

4.2 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Will the Minister advise the House what driving qualifications, if any, are necessary in order to drive mobility scooters on Jersey roads and pavements?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am not aware that any driving qualifications *per se* are required to drive a disabled mobility scooter but I will certainly investigate that matter and, if there are requirements, I will inform the Deputy.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Supplementary, Sir. Thank you. Notwithstanding the Minister's reply, I wonder whether the Minister would advise the House whether it is compulsory for the drivers of these vehicles to have any form of motor vehicle insurance?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I do not believe it is a requirement, Sir.

4.3 Deputy S.C. Ferguson:

In view of the substantial road works that have been going on near Beaumont, I wonder if the Minister could give us an idea of the number of complaints he has had regarding this project and will the Minister tell us if the schedule is being met?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

As I am sure Members are well aware, the Transport and Technical Services Department is currently engaged in probably one of the largest highways maintenance projects that this Island has ever undertaken and they are by no means simple projects. They require an awful lot of logistical analysis to make sure that busy traffic can continue to flow adequately. I am very pleased to say that measures that I instituted last year with respect, in particular, to the on-road signage have proved extremely valuable in ensuring that traffic flows continue. Indeed, in the recent statistical report, those changes in how we do things got a 90 per cent positive rating. In respect to this particular project, I am delighted to say that we are currently a week ahead of schedule. I am aware simply of one complaint made to me in respect to phase 1 of the project and that was to do with a local business inquiring about where they could put a sign to indicate they were still open. I believe that matter has been resolved. I have had no other complaints whatsoever and it is my best understanding that this extremely complex road engineering project is in fact running very smoothly indeed.

4.4 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

I have received a prod in my back: mains drains. Would the Minister indicate whether there is a current plan to supply mains drains along the Five Mile Road to serve the commercial establishments like the Watersplash?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

If there is a current plan, all I can say to the Deputy is that I have not seen it and so I am not aware of it but I know that a number of discussions have taken place with regard to a number of mains services, including water, I believe, being provided along the Five Mile Road. I have to say, quite candidly, I do not know at what stage those discussions are at the moment.

The Deputy of St. Peter:

Supplementary, Sir. If there should be plans to supply mains drains along the Five Mile Road, would the Minister please look into the supply of mains drains to the 20 houses that sit at the bottom of Jubilee Hill that have approximately a 200-metre run downhill to a mains drains connecting point. If plant is to go down there, it will be useful to utilise that plant to service those particular houses.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I can assure the Deputy that, if plans of the nature he alludes to do go ahead, those are precisely the sorts of things that my department engineers will be looking at, as they do for any other drainage installation project. These are projects that cause a certain level of disruption, simply by the fact that we have to dig up trenches all over the place, and the department does its best to maximise any opportunities that arise for each project as it comes along. But I have to remind the House, before any other Deputy or Member gets too excited about the prospect of new drainage, we simply do not have the budget for any major extensions to the drainage system at the moment but this matter will be fully reviewed under the Liquid Waste Strategy, which certainly my department will be dealing with this year.

4.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given my desire to see Elizabeth Castle opened earlier this year, I am tempted to ask the Minister whether or not he has any amphibious buses at his disposal. But I rise to ask a question in regard to the compost site and a meeting that took place with Deputy Duhamel, myself and the Minister and his department in relation to the advertisement for the possible interest of private individuals in the countryside in Jersey who might be willing to tender for expressions of interest in taking the compost facility into the countryside. I wonder if the Minister could update Members as to what progress has been made in that area?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, Sir. I am pleased to inform the House that we have now advertised, I think fairly thoroughly, for expressions of interest in the possibility of setting up various locations allied to the composting processes that the Island is going to need over the next few decades. I am pleased to say that there were a number of responses. I have not looked at them in any detail myself at this stage but I know that they are currently being considered by the officers who are directly concerned with composting and I anticipate that we will make due progress on that in the next month or so.

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

The Minister is aware that I have been discussing various new modes of personal transport with the D.V.S. (Driver and Vehicle Standards) Department and am keen to see that legislation is changed, if that is what is required, to enable these vehicles to use Jersey roads. Will the Minister confirm that the Integrated Travel and Transport Plan does not mention specific examples of new types of vehicle but is explicit in its support for less polluting modes of transport and, if law changes are required in order to bring about the use of those vehicles on Jersey roads, then the department will facilitate what is needed as long as safety is not compromised?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Fortunately this is one of those not so rare occasions where Deputy Duhamel and I are singing largely from the same hymn sheet in that we both have an enthusiasm for the potential of new technology, specifically in relation to vehicles. I have to correct the Deputy, in fact he will find that rickshaws are specifically mentioned in the Integrated Travel and Transport Plan. I am sure many Members who are well travelled outside the Island will know, if they go to various capital cities around the world, all sorts of interesting variations on the rickshaw theme - pedalled, electric-powered, glass fibre and so on and so forth - are now in evidence as, clearly, quite useful public transport. All these different options will be looked at but I have to say that they will be looked at in a responsible way that will judge not simply whether they are powered or in a certain style but also what the impact would be if new vehicles were introduced on to our roads and highways and, for example, may be seen in any significant number around town because different types of vehicle, frankly, have different impacts. But I can assure the Deputy that all new technology will be considered very fairly. It will have to ultimately comply to local

construction and use law but I do receive applications from time to time and they will be, and will continue to be, considered on their individual merits.

4.7 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

With regard to the proposed new incinerator, I wonder if the Minister could advise us in the event of an emergency on site, which he assures us is highly unlikely, does he have any figures as to how soon, for example, the furnace could be extinguished and the plant quenched, would that cause any damage to the plant and would such a problem affect his choice of type of plant?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I regret that I have no figures immediately to hand relating to the sort of questions that the Deputy is posing. I can certainly say and reiterate that the question of safety down at La Collette in relation to all the matters pertaining to the various sites and installations there is one under constant review. I am sure it will be of help to the House to know that, since I spoke on this matter only 2 weeks ago, it has been brought to my attention that the U.K. Health and Safety Executive are continuing their investigation into the Buncefield Depot fire and have indicated that they will be reviewing their guidelines and that will be a process that I imagine will take another 18 months - possibly 2 years - to come to final conclusions. Now, clearly any implication in changing guidelines has implications for...

The Bailiff:

Concisely please, Minister.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

We are keeping the situation under continual and constant review, Sir.

4.8 Deputy A.D. Lewis of St. John:

During correspondence with the Minister's department over the past 14 months concerning traffic calming and management issues, I have been consistently advised, due to numerous similar requests from other parish Deputies, that I, like others, must join the queue for attention. Sir, could I ask the Minister if he would be prepared to publish some sort of timeline whereby reasonable requests for assistance and advice can be met? Thank you, Sir.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Very early on in my understandings with the workings of the Transport and Technical Services Department, I was informed of an unusual phenomena that occurs every election time, if the Deputy is looking for timelines, and that is that almost immediately after successful elections for Deputies in particular, it turns out, there is a sudden flurry of applications for various traffic calming measures - road widening schemes, speed limits and so on - doubtless all very well intentioned. Unfortunately, the procedures run in such a way that I still have on my books requests from very worthy Deputies who are now no longer Deputies but nevertheless who put forward ideas that are probably good on highway infrastructure. I have, as a result of this entirely haphazard scattergun process that I was faced with, instituted a new procedure so that the bulk of all road safety issues of this nature are funnelled, and I am very grateful to the Comité des Connétables for their help on this, through the Comité so that they can have a level of priority. That meeting will be coming up soon and we will see how the Deputy performs under that process.

The Bailiff:

I am afraid that concludes oral question.

The Deputy of St. John:

He did not even answer my question, Sir.

The Bailiff:

We are overtime already.