

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

The Bailiff:

That concludes Oral Questions With Notice. We come now to Questions to Ministers Without Notice and the first question period is of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and I invite further questions.

3.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Would the Minister advise the House when he decided to change the policy in relation to the release of documents to the Scrutiny Panels, in order to make it difficult - if not impossible - for scrutiny to do the job properly?

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

I cannot advise on that because I have not changed the policy.

3.1.1 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In that case would the Minister be able to give comfort to those Members on the Environment Scrutiny Panel as to when the documentation, which makes the schedules in relation to the new proposition for the proposed Energy from Waste, when those proper cost schedules will be made available to the House. The Scrutiny Panel has made repeated requests to the department for this vital information on which a very large decision will be made in this House and we are meeting with extreme difficulties in getting this information to us in the right timeframe. We would, if the Minister could agree, like to have it before the debate rather than after.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Unlike the Environment Scrutiny Panel the department has not stood in the way of giving information to Scrutiny whereas we have been requesting now for some time further talks with the Environment Scrutiny Panel's consultants which have been flatly refused by the panel. I have to say, in view of co-operation like that I am not quite sure what the chairman expects.

3.1.2 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Could the Minister advise the House whether or not these cost schedules in relation to the comparisons between alternatives that provide an alternative route to waste management for the Island, whether or not those schedules have been produced and have been produced by the department's officers or, indeed, whether or not they are going to be produced by the department's consultants?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

If the Deputy would be kind enough as to provide me with me a comprehensive e-mail with all the details that he wishes I will pass it on to the relevant officers in my department.

3.1.3 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

Can the Minister assure me that if I do send him a comprehensive e-mail, as opposed to speaking to him on several occasions asking for his assistance to release these documents through the department, that, indeed, that will be the thing to tip the balance? If I do do that can the Minister advise the House as to the turnaround for when the Environment Scrutiny Panel will be able to receive these documents so we can perform our function, as mandated to do so by the House?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

If it is reasonable and appropriate to do so I have no hesitation in assuring the chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Panel that he will have the information he desires. As to the turnaround,

given that his panel cannot turn around a 3-page document in 8 weeks, I have no idea what the turnaround is likely to be for the Environment Scrutiny Panel and they may well miss the debate.

3.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister explain what steps have been taken to remedy the situation at Bel Royal, in terms of emergency service usage?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

The Assembly will recall that I apologised to the House for a failure by the department to properly consult the emergency services during the design phase of that particular project. Since that time I am pleased to say that the emergency services have not only been fully consulted but I am aware that on at least 2 occasions now both the Ambulance and the Fire Service have driven down, on a practical test basis, around the particular area in question using every conceivable vehicle that they are likely to use, this includes the Fire Service truck towing the inflatable dinghy behind it. The reports coming to me are that some adjustments have been made and, to all intents and purposes, it is my understanding the emergency services are currently entirely happy with the situation. The only remaining issue is that I want some official confirmation from the appropriate senior officers and it will be my intention to issue a press release to that effect with, indeed, further details about the works because, I regret to say, the idea that this particular section of the project is costing £1 million is entirely erroneous information and that is something I wish to correct.

3.3 Senator J.L. Perchard:

In the Minister's opinion, is the £1 million being spent on the Bel Royal road modifications a priority when compared with investing in our woefully inadequate recycling systems and mechanisms?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, it is a priority and it is a priority because in this particular case Victoria Avenue has not been properly resurfaced for 40 years. It is our experience as we are carrying out the work that the original work was not carried out to the sort of specifications that one would expect. Recycling is, of course, also important but it is one of the other priorities of the department services. We do have to put things into perspective and the fact of the matter is that Jersey's roads infrastructure has been allowed to deteriorate over decades by previous authorities and it is well past the time that we seek to redress the balance.

3.4 Deputy S. Power:

The Minister will be aware of a recent incident at West Park whereby one of the new ferries ended up straddling the wall of West Park Pool. The Assistant Minister with responsibility for Harbours has asked his department to investigate the vehicles and the incident. Has his D.V.S (Driver and Vehicle Standards) Department considered an investigation of that?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

As I am sure the Deputy will be aware, it is the responsibility of Driver and Vehicle Standards to licence vehicles and these particularly unusual vehicles were licensed by Driver and Vehicle Standards. However, I need to make the very relevant point that the Transport and Technical Services Department, and D.V.S. as its subsidiary, only licenses those vehicles for their roadworthiness. Consequently, the test undertaken between West Park and Elizabeth Castle involving the vehicles in question was undertaken at low tide. Anything to do with seaworthiness is not in the remit of the Transport and Technical Services Department but comes entirely under Harbours. I would add, though, that the vehicles are currently classified as P30s and, therefore, liable to annual inspection so they will, in due course, come in, I assume, for either their first or second annual inspection and clearly if they fail that they will be failed.

3.4.1 Deputy S. Power:

Is the Minister aware of the fact that there are some reports that the air brakes on these vehicles are not fit for purpose and that they may need investigating?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am aware of that because it was the Deputy himself who informed me that the air brakes may be defective. It is currently a matter for the maintenance of whoever is providing maintenance provision for that particular vehicle to ensure that it is in proper working order and, as I have said, if at such time the vehicle is presented to Driver and Vehicle Standards for its annual licence and it fails to come to the expected standards, it will not get a new licence.

3.5 Deputy R.C. Duhamel:

In answering the previous questions the Minister failed to answer what I had asked. To remind him, I asked whether or not the cost schedules that should really be accompanying P.72 have been completed and work has been undertaken by the consultants to the department; whether or not this work has been done in-house or whether or not this work is intended to be done, and if so what date will it be finished by?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I really do think I have expended some time in responding to the chairman of the Scrutiny Panel, I reiterate, if he cares to e-mail me with the details of what he wants I will take it from there.

3.6 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Some months ago I contacted a senior officer at T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) regarding a traffic issue that we have on the La Grande Route de St. Laurant and I was told that all resources had been diverted to organising the traffic flow for the master plan on the Esplanade development. Is the Minister able to advise me whether, as the elected representative for St. Lawrence, if I contact that officer again he will be able to help me with my request?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It is with great regret I have to inform the Deputy from St. Lawrence that now we have completed our works on the master plan the relevant officer is going to be working for me in order to complete my Integrated Travel and Transport Strategy, and I also further need to inform the Deputy we simply do not have budgets available at the moment in the current annual round to sustain any small road works. But I will be happy to entertain the Deputy if she would care to discuss with me outside the Chamber what her issue is and I will see what we can do.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

May I thank the Minister for his response.

3.7 Connétable T.J. du Feu of St. Peter:

Is the Minister made aware of all the consultants appointed, either by himself or officers, during 2007 and is the record of all fees paid to these persons noted?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It is difficult to answer that because if there is a consultant of whom I am not aware then I am not aware. But, to all intents and purposes, I believe I am aware of all the consultants that the department has used. I am not aware of the fees paid but that, of course, is a matter that will be recorded appropriately in the accounts.

Deputy J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

I regret to say I was having technical difficulties with my light and was thinking the Minister of Technical Services could help me with that.

3.8 Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

I was wondering if the Minister would be very kind and share with the Assembly his opinion of the provision for taxi services in the Island with specific attention to the quality of service provided at Jersey Airport where a regular feature is long queues that occur when people arrive in the Island. Clearly, it is not a very satisfactory situation; I would be interested in his views on that matter. Also, provisions that are made for parking for taxi drivers when the ranks are full because I believe a number of them end up down at the harbour, I would be interested in his views on that matter.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am afraid I have to inform the Assistant Minister that I suspect it is the quality of the coffee that is affecting the availability of taxis up at the Airport. I understand that the rank drivers are boycotting the coffee being served on the premises and that may not be quite such a popular destination for them to go to for business. However, I have to point out to Members that the taxi industry is divided into 2 sections. There are the rank drivers and the ranks are at the airport, the harbour and down at the Weighbridge outside La Cala during the evening; and then, of course, the radio-operated cab business over which I have absolutely no control whatsoever. I have no reason to believe that the service available to the airport is any different now than it has been over the last few years and every time we investigate this matter in any level of detail it appears that the stories one hears reported about a dearth of taxis are relatively rare and one-off events. I would also point out to the Assistant Minister that the matter of parking up at the airport and the harbour is a matter for him and not for me. I understand that both the Airport Commandant and the Harbour Master have almost dictatorial powers about how those arrangements are carried out and I would refer him to them.

3.8.1 Deputy A.J.H. Maclean:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Just one point, the coffee and the price of coffee at the airport may well have deteriorated in recent times; nevertheless, the problem with provision of taxis at the airport has remained a problem over the last few years. It is a problem that is significant and certainly we will be providing some more evidence in that regard and I wondered if the Minister would undertake to take the review seriously.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I would be very happy to take part in any review that the Assistant Minister is carrying out. My understanding is that the Jersey Taxi Drivers Association do regularly maintain one of their members up at the airport on, effectively, a stand-by watch and that whenever there is a shortage of taxis up at the airport then the rank drivers as a whole are notified immediately by radio. Any delays are simply the fact that taxis are probably on their way. I know there are issues with occasional conflicts the cab operators and there are issues about parking up at the airport which I am aware of and consequently I will be...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry; the time allowed has expired for questions to you.