

2.9 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the opening hours of the new bus and transport centre:

Will the Minister undertake to open the new bus and transport centre beyond 7.00 p.m. to enable waiting bus passengers to shelter from the inclement weather. If not, why not?

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

In planning for the opening of Liberation Station the opening and closing times of the facility were discussed on many occasions between Transport and Technical Services and Connex. It was quite clear that a balance had to be struck between the service to the customer and the potential risk to the facility as well as the cost of keeping it open. I should point out that, currently, on the winter service, only 3 services operate throughout the entire Island after 6.30 p.m. They are the Number 1, Number 3 and the Number 15. That constitutes a total of 14 departures from Liberation Station after 7.00 p.m. On Sundays that is halved to 7. However, Liberation Station is still new and both the operator, Connex and Transport and Technical Services are refining its operation. If, at some time, it is felt that later opening could be safely and reasonably achieved, I would be happy to consider the implications and review the position. I would also remind the Deputy that the facility will, in fact, close at 8.00 p.m. in the summer, although I acknowledge that the weather is likely to be more favourable later in the year.

2.9.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for his reply, Sir but even though it is not a full service after 7.00 p.m., it is a bus service and we must have a service for the community. I have been contacted by many people who have to wait on the pavement for a bus in wind and rain, who can only gaze longingly through the windows at the new comfortable transportation centre. With several car parks due to close and people being encouraged to use the public transport, this is a ridiculous situation. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It is essentially a matter of funding, Sir. I would be delighted to open the Liberation Station longer than currently but, as I have said earlier to the Deputy, it is a question, ultimately, of balance of how funds are expended.

2.9.2 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I had the pleasure of using that new facility for the first time on Saturday evening, when I counted as many as 70 plus young people using it as a meeting place. At my age and my size I do not get easily intimidated but I do think that perhaps some older people in our society may well feel that way if they encountered as many youth in one place. The Minister mentioned in his response that his department had had discussions with Connex and they considered the risk to the facility, as on Saturday evening the station was being used as an indoor football stadium. Would the Minister please advise the House what is considered a risk to the facility?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I regret to say that one of the risks that has to be considered is what I will broadly describe as the exuberance of local young people, but I shall qualify that by saying that we do have very significant problems with the youth of the Island and their use of Liberation Station. There have been incidents of unacceptable behaviour. For example, it seems that our local school children think nothing of lighting-up cigarettes inside the premises, which is one of the matters that has had to be dealt with. They also like to play football, throw plastic bottles at each other, indulge in racial abuse and they insult our elderly commuting customers. I have to say that, in the light of that, that is one of the factors that we have to weigh about opening the building up in the evening, when there is a strong suspicion it would probably be abused by young people who gather there, already, in significant numbers.

2.9.3 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

In follow-up to that response from the Minister, he is talking about keeping the bus station closed, but these problems are taking place during the day and the Minister has not told us what his department or Connex are doing about preventing these problems from taking place at any time of the day.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Well, Sir, during the day there are clearly staff on hand and, in some ways, forming a security element to the behaviour that goes on at the station, but clearly the circumstance I have outlined indicate the problems that do beset us and also indicate the importance, I believe, of having some dedicated youth facility down in the Liberation Square waterfront area which would not result in a bus station being used as a glorified youth club.

2.9.4 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

I probably feel I know the answer to this question but I must ask it anyway. Given the explanation of the youth, which I am told lead by example, I think the description that the Minister made probably could describe many people of well over 21, 31, 41 who are standing at the taxi rank on a Friday and Saturday night. Are there any plans to make this what Liberation Station should have been; a transport centre? Move the taxis and get these people off the street and somehow police it much more satisfactorily.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I cannot remember how many times I have been over this particular issue but clearly Deputy Martin has not got the full picture yet. The issue of the taxi rank at the Weighbridge has been the subject of very high level intense discussions across a number of departments. It has been made quite clear that the police prefer the taxi rank to stay where it is because of the location of closed circuit television cameras. It is also perhaps worth mentioning that the recent initiative of Safer St. Helier of installing security guards who monitor the Weighbridge taxi rank on Friday and Saturday nights has proved to be extremely successful and cut down very dramatically on the trouble that was being created there and indeed has, as I understand, anecdotally, has encouraged more rank drivers to come out and offer their services to the public because they simply feel safer operating at the Weighbridge. The future of the Weighbridge taxi rank will clearly have to come under consideration at some point in terms of whether it stays or goes because, as Members will be quite well aware, there are discussions about a linkage between Liberation Square and the piazza on the Weighbridge that has now been freed-up due to the removal of the former bus station and, obviously, a linked square would prevent the current convenient exit of taxis turning east through Fort Regent. So, obviously, there will be further consideration of that rank in due course.

2.9.5 Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Will the Minister advise the House whether any consultation has taken place between his department and Education in order to ensure that an outreach worker for young people spends some time at the bus station on weekend evenings? They have a captive audience there, Sir.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

There have been no direct discussions between Transport and Technical Services and the Education Department as far as I am aware, Sir. However, certainly the result of my involvement with the St. Helier Youth Committee, which fund - courtesy of funding from the ratepayers of St. Helier - outreach work to youth. I am satisfied that at the appropriate juncture, that type of outreach work will take place.

2.9.6 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for his reply, Sir but with any sort of bad behaviour, we must bring them up to our standards, not us down to them by closing the facility down early. Will the Minister undertake to review the situation?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am sorry if the Deputy had not heard me earlier. I said that I am very happy to review the position on an ongoing basis.