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3.3 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding traffic survey reports compiled by Jersey in Transition:

What conclusions, if any, has the Minister been able to draw from the recent traffic survey reports compiled by Jersey in Transition?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I would like to thank the Constable and, indeed, Jersey in Transition for providing my department with the surveys. For the record, they are providing interesting data on how many vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians use Midvale Road, Val Plaisant and Bath Street during the morning rush hour. Last year they also carried out a more comprehensive survey on Conway Street. My department has carried out similar surveys across St. Helier as part of our review of traffic in the town area, which the Constable is well aware of, and we are carrying out on behalf of the Future of St. Helier project. Their efforts are very helpful and complement the data that we already have. The key conclusions with which Jersey in Transition make, and which I would concur with, is that there are significant proportions of pedestrians using the roads as well as cyclists and vehicles. Sometimes the pedestrians and cyclists outnumber the motor vehicle. The aim of the Future of St. Helier project is to ensure that our town is an attractive place to live, work and visit. Traffic was clearly a key issue at last year's public consultation and finding the right balance between the various road users will be essential. To that end, I understand that the group will also be conducting cycle surveys and I would be pleased to see the results of those. I would also invite representatives from Jersey in Transition to meet with the Department of Infrastructure and the Parish to share our collective surveys and to work more closely together in the future.

3.3.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I thank the Minister for his answer. With respect to Conway Street, the survey was very striking in that it showed that approximately a third of the users of Conway Street are in vehicles, two-thirds are on foot or on a bicycle. Does the Minister not agree with me that there needs to be a review of how we allocate road space in congested streets like this, where the majority of road users are being marginalised and pressed into very small areas and the minority of road users have the lion's share of the space? Is this not a good case for improving, in particular, pedestrian facilities in these busy streets?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Absolutely, and the Constable will know that my department is working on a solution for Conway Street, among other areas in St. Helier including Charing Cross, Midvale Road and others. I would welcome the Constable's assistance perhaps with the money that he gets from the States paying rates to fund some of these improvements.

3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is the Minister committed to reducing car usage in Jersey and, if so, what are the main ways that he intends to do that?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Yes, I am, as it has also been a States decision in the Sustainable Transport Policy whereby we want to reduce peak hour congestion. It is an evolution project, it is not an overnight one: there are no silver bullets. It is going to take a lot of work. We need to improve the alternatives. We have

already seen substantial improvement in our bus service along the lines that the Constable has mentioned. Improving the infrastructure within St. Helier will also help that situation. Yes, we should be doing what we can to encourage people out of their motor vehicles and enjoy this wonderful Island of ours in different ways.

3.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is not the reality that while we have seen some very small increase in bus usage we have not really seen any significant decrease in car usage and it is essentially a failure of Government in that respect? Can the Minister specifically say how increasing the bus fares, the cash fares, to £2 as a flat rate for the bus helps encourage people to use alternative methods of transport rather than their cars when petrol is at an all-time low in the last few years?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Several questions there. I will take the first one first. It is not fair to say we have had a marginal increase in bus usage. Bus usage over the last 2 years has increased substantially. The Deputy is correct that unfortunately the peak hour traffic has not reduced but also in that time we have seen the population rise, which was not built into the original target figures for the reduction in congestion.

[10:15]

This is an ongoing process. It does take time. People's love of the motor car in Jersey is a great one and it will take cultural changes to get people to look at doing their transport in different ways.

3.3.4 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary:

Does the Minister consider that the lack of a large public car park, multiple-storeyed perhaps, on the north-west outside of town contributes greatly to the vehicles travelling through town, down Midvale Road, through Bath Street, seeking car parking and, if so, will he be pressing for that solution?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I would want a series in an ideal world. One, I would want an actual proper ring road, but secondly, I would want the car parks to be around that ring road to encourage people to walk from there into the centre. There is one site that will be coming available in the coming years and my preference would be to trial it as a temporary car park and that is the old police station, the old Rouge Bouillon school site, to use that as a temporary solution for car parking in that area and to see if that helps alleviate the issues. If it did then consideration could be made for creating a car park there that had greater capacity, be it a multi-storey or otherwise. But we are looking at, with the private sector, providing a multi-storey car park on the eastern side of town. We have had discussions, although briefly, with the Constable at his request to consider an underground car park, under People's Park with the park going back on top. It was the Constable's suggestion, not mine. So we are trying to alleviate the need for motorists to drive through our town.

3.3.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

For the first time today the Minister has mentioned the population as a cause of infrastructure problems and increased demands in infrastructure. Will he therefore be pressing the Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers to come up with a permanent population policy, migration policy, in order that stresses on his Infrastructure Department are relieved?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

We need a population policy that balances the needs of funding our society and our demographics. We need to maintain that ratio as close to it as we can to those that are in work and those that are retired and out of work because it is affecting those predominantly that are in work that pay our taxes in the whole and therefore that balance is a fine one.

3.3.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Was that a yes or a no? Will he be pressing the Minister?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The population is a complex matter. It cannot be answered in a yes or no question, particularly not from Deputy Southern, if I may be a bit cheeky. We do need to maintain our working population to be able to provide that basis of income to the States to fund the services that we need to provide.

3.3.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is the Minister aware that the flat fare for a bus fare in Guernsey, which is run by the same company as Jersey, is precisely 50 per cent of what it is about to be in Jersey, plus they also have free parking in St. Peter Port. So would he acknowledge that there are alternative ways to affect problems with traffic rather than simply trying to make everything more expensive for everyone and that you can change behaviour by making things cheaper for people as well? Would he agree to investigate this as a potential alternative to his policy in every arena of life, which seems to be to just make things more difficult for people with less money?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

To compare the Guernsey bus service with the Jersey bus service is comparing apples and pears. Yes, they both provide a bus service but they are completely different ... the risks are completely differently allocated. In Guernsey their subsidy is substantial per head of population. Ours is not to be sniffed at either but they are very, very different animals. In Guernsey I believe that the buses are owned by the States of Guernsey, ours are not. We do not have that type of investment. So they are not comparable.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

I would like to thank the Minister for his answers to questions which have ranged widely over the subject of transport policy, which of course has given him a lull in the fighting this morning. I will certainly be happy to pass on his invitation to Jersey in Transition to meet him and his officers. I cannot really turn that into a question, Sir.