

2020.09.08

## **8 The Connétable of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the closure of Broad Street: (OQ.221/2020)**

Further to the closure of Broad Street, and the responses to my questions on 30th June and 13th July 2020, that “discussions were ongoing” about a trial to allow the No. 19 bus to access the town centre via Library Place and to pick up and set down passengers by the Le Sueur Obelisk, will the Minister explain why such a trial has not yet been implemented?

### **Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

I can confirm that discussions took place with LibertyBus. The bus schedules and driver duties are complex, which means there is not enough spare running time to add extra mileage on to existing journeys and still enable a bus to be punctual when departing its next trip. Therefore providing a shuttle service between the bus station and Library Place would require an additional bus and an additional driver at a cost of some £2,100 a week or approximately £109,000 a year, with no prospects of being offset by any fare revenue. This can neither be covered by the G.H.E. budget nor absorbed by LibertyBus. But we are still in discussion with the bus company to see what can be done.

### **4.8.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Would the Minister explain how many extra minutes it would add on to the route of the No. 19 if it were to do, as I have suggested, and deposit and collect passengers close to the town centre so they can do their shopping?

### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I would estimate around 10 minutes but because the schedules are so tight, that would be recurring throughout the day, so the first bus will be 10 minutes late, the next bus will be 20 minutes late and the following bus will be 30 minutes late. It would need an additional bus service to run on that. But, as I said, we are still in talks with LibertyBus to see what can be done.

### **4.8.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier:**

I would like to ask the Minister, the consultation with LibertyBus is going for the last 3 months, have you done any trial ride to understand if it is really 10 minutes and if it really will cost as much?

### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

LibertyBus have, I understand, done a trial run and they are used to compiling all the schedules on the Island, so they are extremely experienced in that respect. But I have no reason to doubt that and I know that obviously putting on an additional bus and additional driver is expensive. We have, of course, assisted LibertyBus recently because of COVID. They are not making money at the moment and their ridership is 50 per cent less than it was last year. We are doing what we can.

### **4.8.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Can the Minister please advise what negotiations after 3 months are still going on? What is the subject the decision has been made; it is no and that is it? The Minister indicated that some conversations are still ongoing, so can you please advise around what areas?

### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

We are looking at other ideas and what else can be done to mitigate circumstances. I was hoping that long before now that Broad Street would be reopened and all services would return to normal but, sadly, that is not the case. As we know, we are not out of the woods yet, nowhere near with COVID, so it remains ongoing.

#### **4.8.4 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

This is as much as a clarification of the answer as anything. Is the Minister seriously saying that because the bus journey may take a little longer, it requires an entire new bus route to be produced at the cost of £109,000, I think he said? Is that not a cannot-do attitude, rather than a can-do attitude that he has talked about so much in his department?

#### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

As I have said, that is the figure that I have been given but we are looking at it any other way we can to assist people with mobility problems, not having to walk the extra 250 metres to the bus station. As I have said before, as soon as we can open Broad Street we will do. But in the meantime we are working on everything we can to make life easier for people, like the extra disabled parking bays, cycle routes and we are just trying to make it easy for people but we can only do so much.

#### **4.8.5 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Would the Minister not agree that, and I know hindsight is a wonderful thing but you can do something now, the sort of planning to have the bus stop moved in order to enable people to be closer to the bus stop was what was needed in order to make the closure of Broad Street a success and may have seen off some of the criticism that has happened?

#### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Yes, I suggested this on day one. But, as I have just explained, things are not that easy and it is certainly not easy even getting the smaller buses up Library Place and down Mulcaster Street; it is a very tight corner. There are lots of problems there that need to be overcome but, as I say, we are still working with LibertyBus to see what can be done.

#### **4.8.6 Connétable S.A. Le Sueur-Rennard of St. Saviour:**

I did bring this up at the time when this was first mooted. Surely all these things should have been thought out before we went ahead - not "we" because I was against it - why this road was altered in the first place. If you are doing it for social distancing, what is New Street still open for because that is a nightmare? I am sorry, this is very, very poor and this should never, ever, ever have been closed. Do you not think that next time we are planning on closing roads we look into everything properly before we do something and go at it like a bull at a gate?

#### **Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

We did not plan on closing the road, we were advised that was the best thing to do by the parties the Chief Minister has already described. Part of the problem was that we had maybe up to 40 people crammed together in Broad Street waiting to get on to a bus and that was part of the problem. If they were at the bus station they would be more spread out and less likely to cross-infect each other; that was the advice we were given at the time and then obviously came up with the idea of putting a bus on from the Obelisk. It is great to have hindsight but we are dealing with the problem that we have.

#### **4.8.7 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Has the Minister not betrayed in one of his answers the real reason why very little action has been taken to bring in a trial alternate route and that is because he has been hoping all along to get Broad Street reopened? Now that Broad Street is definitely going to be closed at least for the duration of the pandemic, will this give some urgency to the discussions the Minister is having with Jersey Bus? Will he be willing to exercise his ability to instruct LibertyBus to lay on this extra route for the convenience of passengers?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

No, there is no betrayal of anything. I have said all the way along as soon as I am advised that when it is safe to open Broad Street, Broad Street would open. There is nothing new in that advice that I have given. We can ask LibertyBus to put on this extra service but it will be £109,000 per annum. Perhaps the Constable would like to pay for that out of Parish rates.

**The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Can I have a supplementary, please, Sir?

**The Bailiff:**

No, I am afraid not, Connétable, because that was your final supplementary because there is a further period of questions coming in due course.

[10:45]