

STATES OF JERSEY
Environment Scrutiny Panel
Speed Limit Policy Review

FRIDAY, 11th MARCH 2011

Panel:

Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John (Chairman)
Deputy D.J.A. Wimberley of St. Mary
Senator A. Breckon
Deputy S. Power of St. Brelade

Witnesses:

Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier

Also Present:

Scrutiny Officer

[11:00]

The Deputy of St. John:

Good morning, Deputy. I notice you have put an amendment to the speed limits revised policy, could you give us chapter and verse on what you are trying to do please?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

What I am proposing is that St. Aubin's inner road from King George V Homes, which is the start of the built-up area on St. Aubin's Road, heading out of town, to it is almost Millbrook, it is to the boundary with St. Lawrence, to be designated as a 25 mile an hour speed limited area, and my reasons for putting this particular proposition forward are (1) obviously representations that I have had from residents, plus I might add as a resident as well who lives on that stretch of road, I have personal experience

of the dangers of St. Aubin's Road in the sense that I attended the scene of an accident where one of my neighbours was killed, and secondly I have also been knocked down on that road myself, so from a personal experience point of view, I am well aware of the dangers, and certainly from what residents have been telling me, I am also portraying their views. To give you an example, the inner road is a very high volume ... has a high volume of traffic. The traffic at times can be at snail's pace and at other times is travelling at excessive speed. Since Victoria Avenue was worked upon last year, we have noticed an increase in the volume of traffic on the road, although I have checked with the T.T.S. and they have no up-to-date figures, and the figures that I quoted I think in the proposition were based on historical data they had. But it was certainly one of the busiest roads leading into town. In addition to that, what we do find is that cars, even in a very busy period, the cars are bunched up and people cannot get across the road, or alternatively, if there is a gap, when people do attempt to cross the road the cars seem to accelerate to fill the gap, so it is a highly dangerous road and there are, as I say, a lot of apartment buildings, there is a school, there are churches, there are a lot of kids cross the road and there are a lot of elderly in the area, and I honestly believe that, unless some steps are taken to reduce the speed on that road, there will be more deaths.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, the issue is the safety, is it not? Would it surprise you to know that the working group said that, when asked whether safety was a sort of major concern of theirs, they seemed to be even unsure that was what their review was about?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I am surprised. Well I should not be, with being in the States for 3 years.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

No, coming to the point, have there been any discussions with yourself or other Deputies of the district about this road?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, I have. I might add that I am also ... in fact I am not, but we have just had an A.G.M. (Annual General Meeting), I was the Chairman of the First Tower Committee Association and we have had some discussions there as well. There have been no sort of public meetings on the issue, but certainly there have been discussions about the road and about speeds and I know my colleagues, the other Deputies, do not think I will be successful in getting 25 miles an hour, but at the same time I think they accept there is an issue on the road.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

No, what I meant was, have there been any discussions from the working group specifically, or T.T.S., which is a separate question, about ... with Deputies or other organisations in the area, about the road and its record and whether there was an issue there around speed limits?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Let me speak from my personal knowledge, there has certainly been no communication with the First Tower Committee Association, there has certainly been no communication, other than I instigated with the department to get some

information to do with the proposition, and there has been no discussion, and I am not aware of any discussions with the other Deputies, certainly none of them have mentioned it and I think they would have done had there been any.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

So no request for views about this road?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No.

The Deputy of St. John:

Did you see the original adverts put in by the working group in the newspaper?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I have to be honest and say I did not.

The Deputy of St. John:

You mentioned that you had representation from residents of the area, is it written representation, or verbal?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, it is verbal, it is just people I meet on the street and they talk, in fact I have helped a few old ladies across the street and in fact someone said in the States: "But did they want to go", well they did, and they had difficulty getting across, and at times you get

halfway and you are almost standing in the road hoping someone on the other lane is going to stop to allow you to get across the road.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Might there be an alternative of having crossings at fairly regular intervals that people know are there, or they end up knowing they are there, and if they are pretty well either instant push button, or even zebras, then that gives that safe crossing. Is that a possible way to go?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

In addition to the proposition I am putting forward for St. Helier, I may have mentioned it to the Connétable of St Helier in passing, we have not had a full discussion at a Deputies meeting, but I would like to see more crossings. I also want to see the smiley face speed signs, because I think people do respond to those, and so, yes, we do need more crossings on that road, and certainly that would help as well. So it is not just looking at a speed limit reduction. I'd better explain slightly why I have gone for 25 miles an hour so it is clear. The road at the present time, I do not believe cars are doing 30 miles an hour, I think they are doing in excess of that, when they get the opportunity. I also think again, as I have said earlier, that there is a higher volume of traffic than there was previously, and the idea of reducing the speed limit is hopefully to divert some of that traffic back on the Avenue where it belongs. Secondly, although 25 miles an hour seems like an odd figure, the truth of the matter is a 20 miles an hour speed limit, which is what I was thinking about originally, I think is impractical, and the reason why is that I have tried going through St. Aubin's Village at 20 miles an hour with my car and it is very, very difficult to maintain a 20

mile an hour speed limit, and you spend a lot of your time looking at the speedometer trying to keep your speed to that limit, or below it, and I think the stretch of road that I am looking at, motorists will not obey it, and I really do not believe they would obey it, it is very, very hard to maintain 20 miles an hour along that entire stretch. So 20 miles an hour I think is out of the question; 25 is manageable in a car, you can do that and maintain that speed. The truth of the matter is, psychologically, a lot of people do travel at 5 miles an hour over the limit anyway and it will bring it back to 30 miles an hour like it was posted at.

Deputy S. Power:

Would you acknowledge that the average speed during peak traffic times, morning and evening on the inner road, is below 25?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

It is when obviously the traffic is bunched up, and you still have the problem with people trying to get across the road when that happens because I park my car on St. Aubin's Road, I do not have a garage or anything else, and I have great difficulty getting across the road even to get to my car, so when the traffic is there, yes, it can be slower than the speed limit, it is bunched up, when you do get a gap, I was not joking when I said people do seem to accelerate to fill any gap that happens to be there, they want to catch up with the cars in front, and it can be quite dangerous at that particular point.

Deputy S. Power:

Is there a noticeable difference between average perceived speeds during the peak commute times and the non-peak times, as a resident of the inner road, do you notice it yourself if you are working from home or something?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

You can definitely see variations in the speed during the day. Obviously rush hour it does bunch up, I mean it is more the difficulty getting across the road at that particular point. Later on ...

Deputy S. Power:

Is it reduced or the same or increased?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

What I am saying is, when the cars are bunched up, sometimes it can be a crawl as it goes by and then there will be a gap, then you see them racing to fill the gap, and the speeds increase at that point, so you cannot say there is an average speed, it does not work out that way. Later on, when the rush hour has gone, speeds do increase, and I am definitely convinced they are doing more than the speed limit, and, short of having laser to laser them as they all go by, I cannot confirm it, but my perception is that they are in excess of the speed limit. When you are trying to cross that road at times, it is almost as if they are oblivious to the fact that anybody is on the road, because they do not seem to slow down at all, even when pedestrians are crossing.

Deputy S. Power:

Why do you think there has been no request or no installation of a pedestrian crossing of any type between King George V Cottage Homes and say the pub, the traffic lights at the pub.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well the only one that there is at the present time is the one for the school crossing, and I might also add, by the way, speeding and drivers' behaviour is also an issue on some of the other roads around ... other than St. Aubin's Road, for example the crossing on Bellozanne Road, I think it is Bellozanne Road, that leads into the first set of traffic lights, they have to have 2 lollipop ladies on the same crossing, one for each lane, because, as they have been on the road stopping one, they have been whizzing by them on the other side, and this is a fact, and also on some of the roads around, I know that Deputy Green has been concerned about Tower Road, and we also have some concerns on the (inaudible), as people are trying to use the rat runs to get around some of the traffic. So we do have an issue here, but my prime concern obviously with the proposition is St. Aubin's Road itself.

Deputy S. Power:

Outside First Tower School, during the school hours, there is a manual ...

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

There is a manual one there, and then there is the traffic lights, but they are not evenly phased, so between King George V and almost First Tower itself, there is no crossing, and one of the worst areas ...

Deputy S. Power:

That was my question, why do you think that has not happened over the years, because there is a seriously busy road.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I cannot explain why before, but I have to confess I have not done anything in my first few years in the States, it has now become so bad that I recognise it myself and people come to me, and certainly the junction of ... I always get confused, there are 2 Bellozanne Roads effectively, there are 2 roads leading towards Bellozanne, but the one that is near my own home off the First Tower for example, had numerous accidents, and you also find, there was a lady talking to me, she was in her 80s, and we were discussing the speed, and she said it is terrible, because you are trying to get across from the shop to go across the road, which is opposite what was Pinocchio's, and she said, although they may slow down on the main road itself, they then come whizzing out of Bellozanne Road to turn left to head to town and accelerate, and very often ... she said she had one, and she is a very old lady, and I would not say particularly agile, but she said if she had not arched her back she is convinced it would have taken her back off her as this vehicle came around the road.

Deputy S. Power:

Bellozanne Road, is that the one that goes up towards Pandora Flats?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes. There is the other one, which I have the correct name of it, but it also leads to ...

Deputy S. Power:

Is the other one by Charles ...

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Charles Le Quesne one, I am not sure ... I have always called that Bellozanne Road as well.

Deputy S. Power:

Where the car park is?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The one I am talking about is the one that is opposite First Tower and Pinocchio's.

The Deputy of St. John:

I just wonder, Deputy, I think it might have been better if you had put, within your Parish, a proposition or an amendment to the proposition to cover more than solely the road that you live in, given what you have told us this morning, given it could be perceived to be that, as an elected Member, you are trying to bring something forward to help yourself because of what you have said. If you had, along with your fellow Deputies, have put a proposition in, and the Connétables, to cover Bellozanne Road, Tower Road, et cetera, if you think that the problem is larger than solely this particular road, because I could see the media picking something like this up, depending how the debate goes, that this Deputy here, who has put in a proposition, or amendment to a proposition, to help himself and his immediate neighbours, but he has

forgotten, after what you have just said, about the bigger picture in the roads immediately around you.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, I do not think that is the case. Let me just give you 2 examples why I do not think it is the case. One, I did a radio interview with Mike Jackson on the radio and my proposition came up and there were people phoned in along the street who had said about the dangers of Bellozanne Road in particular, which had also included a reporter from BBC Jersey, who also said she had almost been killed on the road, she lives on the road further down towards Millbrook, so it is not just my own view. Going back to the idea of the other roads, basically we have had some discussions, the person taking the lead, each of the Deputies in the area, there are 4 of us and we take the lead on different issues, we work very closely together. Mine was that particular one, Deputy Green was given the Tower Road, we have been doing some studies. There were problems with Tower Road, there were some discussions on that one I think with T.T.S. and so on, I was expecting Deputy Green to bring that one forward, so it is not a question of us not working together, we do, we support each other, but each person has a lead on a particular topic, depending on who has taken it up.

[11:15]

The Deputy of St. John:

So, on a different topic, but this, the speed of roads surely is one topic, and it should all, in my book, all be encompassed under the one ... Deputy Green and yourself, it seems odd that you have one member representing the people from Tower Road and

somebody else representing the people from this particular area, and, further to that, why do you stop at King George V Cottage Homes and not down at the ... further down at the roundabout?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well it may well be that would have to be necessary to start having a proliferation of speed limits, the only reason I was concerned from King George V Home onwards was that is where the residential area starts. The other area is along, above the lower park, and there is no real issue there, plus there are 3 lanes there and it is normally ... I think that part is quite acceptable. I think there should be a crossing right there, there is a bit of an island in the middle, which is a bit dodgy as well, but at the same time that is not really an issue. The sidewalk is on one side of the road and that is where the people should be walking, they should not be on the road in the first place. So going back to the point, just to make the point, perhaps we should have co-ordinated a bit better, to be perfectly honest, when this particular thing came up there was a rush to get my amendment in on time and I did not have that much time to consult with my colleagues, as is usual.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Yes, I have a question sort of before you started about the relationship of what you are proposing your amendment to the working group's position, which is leave urban at 30; that is their blanket approach. Would you like to comment on that blanket approach of urban is 30?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well I think it is wrong; I think you have to look at the particular stretch of road. I think the proposal, as I understand it, is 20 miles an hour within the ring road, and ...

The Deputy of St. Mary:

That is another amendment; that is not theirs, that is another amendment.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well the point is that, leading into St. Helier, I do think there is probably sense for that within the ring road, I cannot even imagine doing 30 mile an hour within the ring road myself with the traffic there is, and what we are doing is we are leading into the ring road system, and you could argue it is a step down from say 30 miles an hour further out where you can do 30 in the country, stepping down to 25 miles an hour on the approach, stepping down to 20 miles an hour further in. I think ... I can imagine the opposition to it, people do not like the proliferation of signs, but the truth of the matter is, if you sign it, and if you enforce it, if you have the smiley cameras, which ... not the smiley cameras, but the smiley faces, most people try to drive ... it is a good recognition of what the speed limit is and you try to keep it within that speed limit.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

Especially if they know about the accident record, and I am quite concerned about that, as you obviously are. Do you have figures for the accident record?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I asked the department to supply me some when I was doing my proposition; they gave me some figures, which I quoted. I think, if I remember correctly, they were all

major roads where there is lots of traffic have lots of accidents, as a summary. There is no real up-to-date information that I recall from the conversations I had.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

The department have told us that they have a map of all the accidents in the Island and it is quite hard to understand but they do have a map and a database of all accidents, why can they not provide you with the information?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

At the time I was seeking it, they did not. I did ask for that information.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

When did you ask for the information?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

It was probably within days of putting the proposition, I was basically against the clock.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

So before you lodged it you mean?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Yes, and I have had no further discussion with them.

The Deputy of St. John:

Introducing 25 miles as a speed limit, what other roads in the Island currently carry 25 miles an hour?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

None.

The Deputy of St. John:

Therefore we are talking about yet another speed limit in the Island.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I can see the ... there is the argument that we should not have all these different speed limits, but the truth of the matter is one size does not fit all, and if you think of the country lanes, 15 miles an hour, to be honest, at times, trying to drive at 15 miles an hour is exceptionally difficult. I can see, yes, we want the peace in the countryside, we want other people to be able to walk and cycle as well, but they have the lesser volume of traffic than we do perhaps on the lead-in to St. Helier and so on, and the idea of 30 miles an hour everywhere, or 40 miles an hour, just does not work. You have to look at the circumstances of particular roads and the problems that are faced by the residents. I can say, right here and now, that I think the residents of First Tower, certainly all the people who live on that road, would be quite aggrieved if the States did not agree to reducing the speed limit on there, but I can also say, a lot of the motorists who use that road, who do not live there, and do not understand what it is like trying to get across the road and so on, would be aggrieved at it being reduced to 25 miles an hour, they think it is just the States doing another stupid thing, another speed limit. But if you look at it from the point of view of the people living in the

area and the problems they face, the speed needs to be reduced on the road. In fact ... and we also try and do ... we need to try and divert some of the traffic back on the Avenue, certainly goods vehicles, there are some heavy vehicles coming down there and there are also a lot of vans coming down there, which also drive, I think, rather quickly. Certainly, if you look at the volume of heavy goods vehicles going to Bellozanne, I think it should be down the Avenue and through the traffic lights that way, rather than down the inner road.

Deputy S. Power:

That is really a separate issue.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

It is a separate issue, but I am just saying, just trying to illustrate some of the problems of the road from a constituent's point.

Deputy S. Power:

Have you given any thought to road design and the inner road, as distinct from a flat 25 miles an hour, do you think there is anything that could be done to alter the design of the road to calm it, to reduce speed?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Very little. Well, not to reduce speed, but in terms of the design of the road, unfortunately we have the roads we have, and I think the bottom line as far as I am concerned is we have far more vehicles on the road that we have ever had before, and I enjoy using my car and I like the ability to just get in it and the freedom to go when I

want to go, where I want to go, but the truth of the matter is we have far too many cars on the road and the roads were never designed for it. In terms of the road itself, I believe, and I may be speaking out of turn here, but I believe that Constable Jackson would love to get rid of parking on the road, because it makes it easier for the buses to travel down there. The only problem is, that is a totally separate issue as well, because there is very little parking in that area for residents. There is a car park, which I use sometimes, or I can use the school on occasion, but there is very little parking and everybody is ... it is almost a lottery whether you are going to get a space or not. If there is a gap, it is filled very, very quickly by someone, so there is a major problem with parking there, so taking the cars off may solve one problem, in fact it will speed it up I think in one sense, but equally it will cause problems. In terms of ... and again I will be accused of looking after my own interests here ... where I do park my car, there is perhaps scope for encroaching a little bit into the sidewalk area and taking the cars in slightly off the road, it is wide enough there that you probably could go in about half a car length to do that, but again, all that would do is I think increase the flow of the vehicles going down the road.

The Deputy of St. John:

When the deputy put his question, I think that was quite a good question, if you look at green streets, where you have put alternative ways of going up and down green streets, if you go to St. Martin's Parish Hall there you have flower tubs in the road, et cetera, as traffic calming. Have you not given that any thought for that particular road, a priority road? In your district you have a priority road that comes down below the school from the back of the power station, it comes down into Bellozanne, where

they have street furniture in there that gives you a priority, traffic going up or traffic going down, and it alternates.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Are you talking about West Hill?

The Deputy of St. John:

Yes, West Hill.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

To be honest, I think the volume of traffic on that road would render it a nightmare. I tend to look at it from 2 different views, I look at it from the point of view of the residents on the road, I also look at it from the point of view as a motorist, and this is why I came up with the idea of 25 miles an hour because I am looking at it again from the point of view of a driver, trying to drive at 20 mile an hour over an extended period is very difficult, but at the same time 30 miles an hour as it stands at the moment is not good enough. So I am trying to look for a compromise so it is the driver being able to drive his car at a speed that he can sustain and does not have to be constantly looking at his speedometer, and the flow of traffic continuing, as well as looking after the needs of the residents. I do not know; the truth of the matter is I think it has to be a combination of things: dropping the speed limit, plus the smiley face speed signs, and some crossings.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

It seems to me that the case you are making is a road safety case, and there are various ways of doing that, and the problem is that nobody has come around the table and talked about it, the speed limit group have not asked for an opinion, so you have produced an amendment, and I suppose my question is, if the policy is debated in the States and if the policy stays at 30 blanket for urban, will you and your colleagues be bringing a case for an exception to the Minister?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Again, we will have to wait and see what the findings are, but my own view would be, I would not be happy with a 30 mile an hour speed limit in that area.

The Deputy of St. Mary:

So the likelihood is that you would get the backing of the residents and get the traffic figures and go along and say: "Please, Mr. Minister, we demand a review."

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I think for example that the First Tower Committee Association would call a public meeting, get the public onboard, and one thing about the Deputies in the area, all 4 Deputies that work closely together on these issues, and I think we would come together and I would imagine, from the Deputies meetings that we have within St. Helier, we would probably call on the other St. Helier Deputies as well, and the Constable. We tend to work very cohesively as a group.

Deputy S. Power:

May I ask another question on road design, if one were to consider 2 pedestrian crossings, one say somewhere between the Cottage Homes ... the George V Homes and the cemetery, and another one further down near the school or maybe just west of the intersection with Bellozanne, or just east of the intersection, do you think that ... because there was a new pedestrian crossing put in at the co-op at Red Houses, and it did have a traffic calming effort there, because people tended to zap past them, now they do not, because they are pelican lights, people will not go through them. So I am just wondering, did you give any consideration to that being an alternative to a 25 mile an hour limit?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I think it is a combination of things. I do not know whether things are done in stages or what, we can experiment with one thing or another, but the point is I want to see the speed brought down and people being able to get across the road safely, that is the bottom line. So personally I do not mind what basis we try, as long as we achieve that particular objective. I put this point forward because at the present time that is what is being reviewed, speed limits.

The Deputy of St. John:

Do you believe lack of enforcement could be an issue?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well certainly, when I was having the debate ... or not debate, the discussion on the radio with Connétable Jackson, I had sight of some papers, I think I took them with me, and there was a reference from the police saying that enforcement of speed limits

was not one of their high priorities in terms of what they believe their manpower is going to be used for, this was not one of their priorities, and we have a new Police Chief, who seems to sort of pick on particular issues, I know they are having a splurge on speeding and so on at the moment, but again it is just a one-off, it is looking forward to the future, it may be a different attitude, maybe he will take a different approach, but at the present time, or up to the present time, there has not been the emphasis on dealing with these types of issues.

Deputy S. Power:

Can I ask a question, in relation to the time you have lived at your address?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Thirty years.

Deputy S. Power:

How often have you seen the police with a speed gun on the inner road? How often have you seen the police on duty?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I have only seen the police with a speed gun on the stretch from the roundabout to the King George V Home, I have never seen them anywhere else along that road.

The Deputy of St. John:

The views you have been expressing, are those your views or your witnesses' views that were supposed to come along with you today?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The only person I was going to bring with me did not have a view on St. Aubin's inner road, he had a view on the Avenue, which he also felt should be monitored and policed more effectively. He has one of the homes at Bayview Apartments, and he was ... in fact, had he been here, he would have been advocating an average speed limit camera on the whole of the Avenue, so in other words as people enter the Avenue and they leave it, it would be a 40 mile an hour average speed, and that is what he would have been putting forward had he been here. But he did not express any particular concerns about the inner road, because he is not facing it for a start, and when he goes out, he drives out of his home.

The Deputy of St. John:

Do you have anything else you would like to tell us before I declare the meeting closed?

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

No, other than the fact that I wait with interest to see what happens and if I am still in the States when this comes before it I will vote accordingly.

The Deputy of St. John:

Could I thank you for attending, Deputy Higgins, and I will declare this part of the meeting closed at 11.29 a.m., thank you very much.

[11:29]