

2025.01.21

Deputy S.M. Ahier of St. Helier North of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding the Future Fit Retail Roadmap (OQ.7/2025):

Is the Minister fully aligned with the strategy proposed within the recently published *Future Fit Retail Roadmap*, R.190/2024, and does he consider the cost of its production to be justified?

Deputy K.F. Morel of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development):

I am pleased to say that I am aligned to the *Future Fit Retail Roadmap*. It has been a Ministerial commitment of mine to design and publish such a roadmap, and it addresses the rapid shifts in customer behaviour and technology that are affecting our retailers. This roadmap was produced entirely in-house, without the use of any external consultants. We are fortunate to have a very strong expertise among our sector officers, and they have engaged heavily with members of the industry in developing this strategy, including, of course, as well as individual retailers, but also organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Hospitality Association, and so forth.

3.3.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

The roadmap that has been described in the media as having the turgid prose being beyond rubbish, junk and laughable, how does the Minister respond to these accusations?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I would ask those people to actually read the roadmap.

3.3.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Is the Minister saying that the person who made those comments, and I will read them, which is that: “This is beyond rubbish and to think we have paid civil servants to write this junk.” Does he think that that person has not read the retail strategy? Is that what he is telling the Assembly?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

It strikes me that that is possible.

3.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister consider the counterfactual that we have an experienced businessman in Jersey who has read it and that he simply thinks that this is as he says it is, and would he seek to consider engaging with both that author who wrote those comments and the wider community to see if in fact the retail strategy could be enhanced?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I always am happy to engage with any businesspeople on the Island, and I do so. I believe, in this case, the person being spoken about, I have engaged with in the past as well. I think if we are talking about the letter in the paper, I think most of the comments that were there were about a frustration over a lack of deregulation that was proposed in the roadmap. So that would be around things such as minimum wage, et cetera. This Government is clearly committed to increasing the minimum wage, so having a retail roadmap which spoke about the opposite would be contradictory and highly problematic. It is not what this roadmap is about. This roadmap is about talking about the retail ecosystem. It is about recognising that retail is private businesses selling things to the public and it is for their own private gain, but that the public sector has a role, particularly in the environment of the

town, and can provide an enabling role for those retail businesses to thrive upon that. It is also about enabling those businesses to access greater technology, access better data and access better skills training so that they can have much higher performing businesses at the same time. I would suggest that this retail roadmap, when read with the right intent, speaks to what the public sector can actually deliver. Beyond that, it is absolutely up to the private sector to make sure that their business is thriving.

3.3.4 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade:

Perhaps coming at it from a slightly different angle: is the Minister at all concerned by the negative reaction from the retail sector to the retail roadmap?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Absolutely. I am always concerned, and it did come from a perspective ... when I read some of the commentary, I did sit there and think: "Hold on a sec, this is about the Government saying we can play a really key role in helping this ecosystem work in these areas." Other areas the businesses have to take responsibility for themselves, and it felt to me as though just because certain particular elements of regulation were not addressed in the roadmap, such as the minimum wage, which obviously it could not be, that the roadmap was, from some people's perspective, turgid, as Deputy Ahier said earlier. I strongly disagree with that. This is a retail roadmap, which is about trying to help those businesses to give them a better platform upon which to thrive. We have a really good town centre in Jersey. It faces challenges, but it is doing much better than most other town centres. There were comments that I read in the paper which were just unrecognisable. I would say go to any town of 40,000, 50,000 people in the U.K. and show me a thriving town centre in the way that Jersey's is. Jersey's has 7.5 million people footfall; that is absolutely superb. It has extremely low crime; that is absolutely superb for retailers. My officers, upon my instruction, have gone and spoken to retailers in the U.K. They spoke to 5 or 6, all of those 5 or 6 said: "We have not thought about Jersey." When they looked at the stats around our town centre, they suddenly said: "Hold it, we should be looking at Jersey." Those 5 major retailers are now looking at and interested in potentially opening stores in Jersey. That is because they see that the town centre has a huge amount to offer. But we need to work with the Parish, as Government, and work with those businesses to make sure that the town centre is an even better place for the future.

3.3.5 Deputy J. Renouf:

Does the Minister have anything to say about the criticisms that some of the bigger issues were ducked; for example, empty retail space, improvements to the material infrastructure of the town and so on?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

It is when I hear comments like that, that I think people have not read the retail roadmap. The retail roadmap absolutely addresses empty retail spaces, absolutely addresses town centre infrastructure. Those are very much in the retail roadmap. So anyone who comes to me and says it does not address those issues, in my mind, has not read the document.

3.3.6 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

I hope the empty spaces will be addressed because I was really surprised to see most of the Queen's Road of the left-hand side completely empty for a long time and hope we will see the solution. I would like to check with the Minister: what are the concerns did he hear from the retailers and the Chamber of Commerce follow the publication of this roadmap, apart from the minimum living wage, and what he is going to do to address it?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I have spoken to the Chamber of Commerce. I do not recall them raising any issues with me. They were consulted throughout the development of the retail roadmap. If I am mistaken, but I do not recall them in the last few weeks raising any issues with me.

3.3.7 Deputy I. Gardiner:

One of the issues that was raised in the public domain by retailers and various business people is to create a P.R. (public relations) agency to enhance the retail, which retailers will be expected to contribute after paying the tax, the rates and the other levies. Does the Minister rethink this part or he has positive feedback from most of the retail space?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

Okay, and again this speaks to the people have not read the document perspective. The officer has written in my notes here: "There is not one reference to business owners paying for a P.R. company in the retail roadmap. This is inaccurate. There is an action to be delivered by the town team, which is to look into what funding would be required for them to promote the town beyond the destination marketing that Visit Jersey does for our Island to attract tourists. If funding was sought, it would need to have a business case put to the Minister or the Parish to consider."

3.3.8 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

The Minister mentioned that he intends to help retailers. Will the Minister advise shop opening hours to include all retail units being able to open on Boxing Day, one of the busiest high street sales days of the year, to aid local retailers?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

That's absolutely something that I would be pleased to consider and it is referenced - not specifically Boxing Day - but opening hours regulation around opening hours is referenced in the retail roadmap as something that we would be happy to do to make it wider. I know in the last few years, I believe when the Chief Minister was Minister for Economic Development - I think it was in the last term rather than this term, my memory is failing me - we revised regulations around Sunday openings to make it easier to open on Sundays. I am pleased again to liberalise that further if that is something that would be preferred and required.