

STATES OF JERSEY



MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND TECHNICAL SERVICES: VOTE OF CENSURE

Lodged au Greffe on 14th October 2013
by Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of St. Clement

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to censure the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour, for his failure to deal adequately as Minister with the 11 matters listed in the report of Deputy Gerard Clifford Lemmens Baudains of St. Clement dated 14th October 2013.

DEPUTY G.C.L. BAUDAINS OF ST. CLEMENT

REPORT

I know from the days when I served on Transport and Technical Services' predecessor – the Public Services Committee – that this department is politically challenging. I note too that all previous Ministers for Transport and Technical Services have struggled to the point they failed at re-election time. It is clearly a difficult job but, that said, I believe the present incumbent's performance is no longer acceptable.

Members will note I have asked several questions of the Minister over the last year and, almost without exception, the answers have been department-speak – evasive and padded with superfluous detail. The Minister has become, in my view, merely a spokesperson for the department where, instead of leading, he simply endorses whatever his department tells him. I was minded to bring a proposition of no confidence, but decided a censure motion should come first as a warning that his performance falls far short of what is expected of a minister. A few examples of my concerns follow in alphabetical order –

Asbestos

The storage arrangements at La Collette are not only an eyesore, but, with the material stored in rusting containers, it is a disaster waiting to happen. I consider TTS's refusal to work with the Environment Department towards a satisfactory solution unacceptable. Another case of TTS's 'our way or no way'.

Bellozanne

Scrap metal. After years of excellent service by Rouillé and Picot, TTS decided to put the scrap metal business out to tender. A UK company, in conjunction with a local scrap dealer, won the contract and the incumbents were required to vacate the premises on Christmas Eve. The idea that the site could be cleared for the new firm in anything less than several months was laughable – but that is what TTS believed. As of writing, the new firm is still working out of a temporary site. What has been achieved? Recycling has stopped: one can no longer buy second-hand spares – even taking a car to the yard and asking to keep, say, a front wheel, is no longer possible. To cap it all, the department cited environmental improvements as a main reason for putting the business out to tender. The industry advises me that the department now want cars to be compacted and exported in cube form. The same department who requested Rouillé and Picot to stop using that process and buy a very expensive fragmenter instead.

The old incinerator

The site is being decommissioned and the chimney taken down brick by brick. Answers to my question as to why the more economical process of felling the chimney was not used received excuses rather than answers. Demolition experts can drop chimneys into unbelievably tight spaces, yet here it is discounted. Why? The one building that might potentially cause a problem is due to be demolished anyway.

The bus service

Changing from one operator to another was bound to create upheaval. Why, then, not simply take over existing routes and timetables until such time as improvements were identified? Instead, TTS, in conjunction with the new operator, decided to introduce

major changes concurrent with the takeover. A recipe for the disaster that was foreseen by everyone except the Minister and his department. For example, the No. 18 bus was axed on takeover – despite being the second most popular route on the Island. The excuse given was that the Housing Department was going to extinguish the road during the redevelopment of Le Squez Estate. However, when I contacted the Housing Department, I got a completely different picture. They stated that it was TTS who had decided to discontinue the service, whereas they (Housing) would have preferred it to continue. I dislike being misled. To replace the No. 18 (bus station to Le Squez/Le Marais and back to the bus station) TTS and CT Plus re-routed the Airport bus (No. 15) to serve Le Marais. The result was complete chaos. Other bus services across the Island were a similar disaster, with bus timetables irrelevant and drivers frequently getting lost. During my 12 years in the States I have never had so many complaints on one subject.

Death by careless driving law

This identified loophole in the law, for some curious reason, comes under TTS. There are, however, other departments (such as Home Affairs) involved. I was anxious that this new Law should not disappear into the long grass, but I am advised that is just what has happened, and that TTS are predominately to blame.

Harbour cycle track

I was amazed when I first heard about the plans to build a cycle track across the French and English harbour slipways. Leaving aside the dubious safety implications, whereby cyclists at some point would need to ‘mix it’ with heavy commercial traffic at La Collette, what about the damage to heritage and access to harbours? A metre-plus cycle path would, for example, render access to the English harbour nigh impossible by cranes or emergency vehicles, and the French harbour (South Pier to La Folie) not much better. Why was there not consultation? The Marine Traders Federation could have offered advice, but was never consulted; just one member was approached. Even more alarmingly, the Harbours Department was not consulted. Fortunately, as soon as I lodged a Proposition to overturn this nonsense, the Minister withdrew his planning application.

Incinerator

One could write a book on this unhappy saga, but I will be brief. TTS insisted on having a plant considerably larger than currently needed. The main reasons given were increasing amounts of rubbish to be disposed of (presumably from unfettered immigration) and in order to have spare capacity for maintenance. The department had even been in contact with Guernsey regarding burning their rubbish. I wondered why this was not at political level, but anyway – the problems with the plant have been considerable. Far more, in my view, than one might expect from a commissioning process. The trees designed to alleviate the eyesore that the new structure is, are, we are told by TTS, difficult to establish due to the exposed position. Who would have thought that? The problems inside the building have been numerous and, at times, major. The fact that thousands of tons of rubbish are stockpiled in the Island because the incinerator cannot function long enough to dispose of it (an incinerator that was supposed to handle twice our rubbish quantity) says it all. And not forgetting TTS

would not even countenance procuring a more modern plant (such as many countries have now moved to) because, according to them, they were less reliable!

Mount Bingham road closure

The Minister cannot be blamed for the rock-fall which caused the closure of the road. However, traffic chaos could have been alleviated by using the eastern side of Mount Bingham and South Hill. I appreciate that the JEC were working on duct-laying in South Hill at the time, but why was the road not opened as soon as that section was completed? Contrary to what the Minister told me, the JEC was not working 'in the middle of the road because of all the other services' when they laid their ducting in Mount Bingham itself. They laid it in the west-going carriageway, so single-line traffic routed via South Hill would have been possible. When I visited the site on Thursday, 3rd October, all work had been completed; trenches re-instated and tarmacked – even the road marking were re-painted. Why then, when work had been completed, was the road still barred off at both ends?

Road resurfacing

The quality of resurfacing has failed to match the standards of previous work for some time. St. Clement's Coast Road, from Pontorson to Green Island is an example of the new 'rumble strip' resurfacing that I brought to the Minister's attention. Rue des Prés is another, more recent example – and now Rue à Don follows in similar vein. Why bother to resurface a road when the finished result is worse than before? Why do the Minister and his department continue to accept sub-standard work, especially after the Minister recently assured me that this would not continue? The problem is easy to understand and easily rectified, so why does the Minister sit on his hands and do nothing about it?

Route du Fort / St. Clement road junction

When this no left turn from Route du Fort into St. Clement road first became apparent, I e-mailed the Minister to find out what was going on. He in turn got one of his officer's to reply. Whilst the answer was helpful, it was incomplete, so I sought further clarification. There was no response (I had anticipated this as I was requesting information about research I do not believe the department has done). The reality is that St. Luke's School requested TTS to put a pedestrian crossing at this junction, but, in order to do so, the pavement alterations necessitated curtailing traffic from turning left from Route du Fort. The department ran a vehicle count during certain hours (but not including lunchtimes or comfort breaks for the person counting) and came up with a figure of approximately 7 vehicles per hour turning left. My concern is that the department failed to adequately analyse the issue. Vehicles that use to turn left into St. Clement's Road will now use Dicq Road, Elizabeth Street or Beach Road – all roads that present a greater danger to St. Luke's children than previously. Was a pedestrian crossing near Dunnel Road considered? It would be much safer for everyone, but, as I cannot get a satisfactory answer I can only surmise the department failed to analyse the safety aspect adequately.

Snow Hill – no left turn

For decades motorists exiting Snow Hill car park have been free to use the traffic island to exit by whichever route they chose. Then, a Ministerial Order at Christmas from TTS suddenly created a 'turn left only' into Green Street. They had no record of

any accidents caused by traffic leaving the car park over several decades, so why do that? After lodging a proposition to overturn the Minister's Order, he subsequently agreed to re-instate the previous situation.

Of course, there are other problems attributable to TTS, but I believe the ones listed above are sufficient to demonstrate that the Minister has failed to discharge his responsibilities adequately and deliver an economical and quality service to the public.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no manpower or financial consequences arising from this proposition.