

5. Questions to Ministers without notice - The Minister for Transport and Technical Services

The Deputy Bailiff:

Thank you, Minister. We must bring you to a close. That completes the 15 minutes for the Minister for Home Affairs and now it is question time for 15 minutes for the Minister for Transport and Technical Services. The Connétable of St. Lawrence

5.1 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

I am sure all Members and the public will be pleased to learn today that Mount Bingham is due to open to 2-way traffic on Thursday. In the Minister for Transport and Technical Services' press release he has said that all parties concerned worked together to get the required work completed as soon as possible. I do not want to keep going on about Mont Felard but I am being, quite rightly, questioned by my parishioners and I would like the Minister for Transport and Technical Services to tell me how much work his officers did for the Parish of St. Helier as landowner on Mount Bingham and whether the same amount of advice and service has been offered to the landowner in St. Lawrence?

Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Regarding Mont Felard, according to the law, as Minister for Transport and Technical Services I represent the Highway Authority which in Jersey law is the lower landowner. If somebody uphill, as it were, who would be the upper landowner, their land falls on to the highway, I can, in fact, take them to court to compel them to remediate it as soon as possible. As the upper landowner, as was, are trying to fix the land as soon as possible, that would be a pointless exercise. I have spoken to the landowner in question personally and impressed upon him the urgency to remediate this as soon as possible. I have asked the landowner to contact the good Constable of St. Lawrence directly to familiarise her with the exact problems there. But the assistance given to the Parish of St. Helier was predominantly advisory. We did work closely together with the Parish of St. Helier because of re-routing traffic. We had to use several Parish roads and the Parish was very co-operative with this. We had to close Mount Bingham as a safety precaution because quite a bit of rock came down and it would be completely unsafe and unwise to allow that to have remained open. As I say, this is a matter for the Parish of St. Helier but I would like to congratulate the Geomarine road access team who did an absolutely sterling job in removing the loose rock and debris and pinning the existing rocks back in the most extremely appalling weather, wind and rain, people hanging off ropes to do this work. I take my hat off ...

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Sorry to interrupt the Minister, but I would like a supplementary and I am sure other Members want to question him as well. I am assuming he has finished that answer.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I have now.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I was about to stop you myself.

5.2 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, sorry, Sir. I am getting quite impatient with the responses that I am getting from the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and I beg your pardon, I am not trying to do your job for you, although it may have seemed like it. I want an assurance from the Minister

for the other 11 Connétables that his department will give as much advice as possible in instances such as this and that St. Helier is not being given any preferential treatment from his department.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Well, I do hope the good Constable of St. Helier has noted that remark that I give him preferential treatment. I dare say he would beg to differ. But I do my best to look after 12 Parishes of the Island and I like to think I work well with all 12 Constables.

[11:45]

I am not quite sure what the Constable of St. Lawrence wants me to do. We have done as much as we can; we cannot physically open that road on safety grounds at Mont Felard until such time as that structure is secure. If the Constable would like to go up to Mount Bingham and see the work that has been done up there, which is phenomenal with concrete buttresses all finished off in granite. It is quite a structure gone up there. I am not quite sure what else the Constable would like me to do. I cannot compel people to do things more than I have already done.

5.3 Connétable M.J. Paddock of St. Ouen:

Can the Minister for Transport and Technical Services give the Assembly an update on the current situation with regards to the previous tenants of Bellozanne Scrapyard? Who is paying the legal costs recently reported in the local press or any other costs associated with this change of operator?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is my information that the lawyers are still in discussions at the moment. I can only assume - I will need to get back to the Constable on this - that both parties are paying their own costs.

5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister for Transport and Technical Services advise the Assembly to what extent bullying is endemic in certain parts of his department?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am not aware of any bullying whatsoever in my department but should it arise then I would like it stamped out as soon as possible.

5.4.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister for Transport and Technical Services advise whether it is common practice or is it acceptable for manual workers to be sworn at by their bosses and for ritual humiliation to take place on a regular basis? If it is not, will the Minister for Transport and Technical Services make inquiries that this kind of behaviour is not happening and that if it is it is shown to be unacceptable?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

As I say, I am not aware of any such instances, but if the Deputy would like to furnish me with details I will make sure that is looked into.

5.5 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

While wanting to congratulate the Minister for Transport and Technical Services on his team's performance on Mount Bingham and indeed his performance in getting the street lights up so well in St. Helier, I would like to ask him what has happened to the Pedestrian

and Cycling Strategy that was approved as part of the Sustainable Transport Policy several years ago and we still have not seen it. Would he give us an indication of when the strategic approach to cycling and walking in this Island is going to come from his department?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Indeed, all in favour of cycling and walking. As the Constable knows, there were quite a few objections to the work that was going to be carried out in French Harbour and English Harbour that would link up that part of the system. The rest of the Cycling Strategy is ongoing.

5.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Can I press the Minister for Transport and Technical Services, of course the reason that particular scheme failed was it was not part of the strategic look at cycling on the Island. Could the Minister for Transport and Technical Services tell us when the Draft Cycling Strategy is to be presented for consultation?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

As I say often in this Assembly, safety is paramount and that was a safety matter. The Cycling Strategy, I do not have a date for that yet but I am more than happy to get back to the Constable when that is available.

5.7 Senator L.J. Farnham:

Would the Minister for Transport and Technical Services confirm that the work that is going into the production of the Road Safety Strategy is on target and still on time to be produced in the first half of next year?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

My information is that is the case, yes.

5.8 Deputy J.H. Young of St. Brelade:

Will the Minister for Transport and Technical Services confirm that the recent very successful auction of vehicle number plates, which raised £267,000, was originally budgeted to generate £100,000 under the Medium-Term Financial Plan? What were the expenses paid by his department and will he be prepared to discuss with the Minister for Treasury and Resources how this windfall amount will be spent and including whether he will include charitable purposes, as was previously on the last auction?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes. The previous system was abolished under the Comprehensive Spending Review, so the money got from the auction now goes back into general revenue. I cannot, under the law as it stands, give away States money but it will go back into the economy; it will go back into good works done by T.T.S.

5.9 Deputy T.M. Pitman:

With the couple of accidents reported this morning on icy roads, is the Minister for Transport and Technical Services confident that his department has everything it needs to ensure that we do not have the problems of the past couple of years with regard to iciness, gritting and even flooding which was a problem?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, the department is very well equipped. We have taken possession of 2 extra snowploughs which fit on the front of trucks for next winter should snow arise, and we are well stocked with grit.

5.10 The Deputy of St. Martin:

On the Consolidated Order Paper today under Tabling of Subordinate Enactments, we see that the Minister for Transport and Technical Services is proposing to increase the administration charges at D.V.S. (Driver and Vehicle Standards). I would like to ask the Minister for Transport and Technical Services why he is happy to increase the compulsory basic training charge by 1.2 per cent but he feels it necessary to increase all the other charges by 2.5 per cent?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I do not believe they have gone up for a while, it is just a fact of life, I am afraid.

5.10.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Sorry, I just come back to the Minister for Transport and Technical Services on that. It says here the fees were last increased on 1st January 2013.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It was a recommendation from the department. The fees charged were not enough.

5.11 Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:

On a similar subject to the Constable of St. Lawrence: is the Minister for Transport and Technical Services aware that we also had a road collapse in Grouville on La Route des Cotils, which is the road that approaches Fauvic crossroads. I think it collapsed well over a year ago and I wonder if you could tell us why it is taking so long for that to be resolved.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am aware of the collapse and I need to get back to the Constable regarding details why.

5.12 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

A few weeks ago the Minister for Transport and Technical Services seemed to have acknowledged slippage in the Sustainable Transport Plan. What is his plan B, given that the numbers moving, for example, to the use of buses and cycling are not as great as were anticipated in the plan? What is his plan B?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would dispute that. In fact buses are up approximately 13 per cent, which is excellent. Traffic, obviously through Mount Bingham, and other reasons, has exacerbated many people but I think we are pretty much on target for that. I would like to encourage more cycling. We are going to make more cycling racks available. As soon as money is available we are putting up more and more bus shelters to make the bus ridership more comfortable for the bus riders.

5.12.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

It is very easy to use the word "average". Could the Minister for Transport and Technical Services say whether this growth is confined to certain routes or it spreads across the network, in an average sense?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would say predominantly on the southern routes east and west, but everything is up.

5.13 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Just in time to continue with the theme. Disabled Transport, when are we likely to see a Hoppa bus around town or its equivalent? Not just words, but are there any plans in hand?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would like to see it too; I think Deputy Southern and I share a wish there. I cannot give a date at the moment, but as soon as the accounts are done with Liberty Bus and we see what the percentage is shared then I think things will start to move forward in that direction.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could he say when that is likely?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Before the end of the year, I believe.

5.14 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

Would the Minister for Transport and Technical Services support the installation of some form of pedestrian crossing on the roads which intersect with King Street? I am talking about New Street and Halkett Place?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, it is what we call a shared area. I would not have a problem with that but with the shared areas people do drive very slowly and, on the whole, traffic are giving way to pedestrians crossing. But that is something I am more than happy to review.

5.15 Deputy M. Tadier:

What plans does the Minister for Transport and Technical Services have in order to find funding to remediate the asbestos material stored at La Collette?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Sorry, was that "what funding"?

Deputy M. Tadier:

That is correct.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes. We have funding for this remediation plus if we are not digging extra pits then that money can be used for remediation. We are in contact with several companies who are keen to do this but we have a very strict protocol in place for the tendering process and that is ongoing.

The Deputy Bailiff:

You have 30 seconds, Senator Ferguson, question and answer.

5.16 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Given the militant approach by the lycra-clad cyclists, will the Minister for Transport and Technical Services consider bringing back registration for cyclists?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I take it the Senator is not including herself in that.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Not this time.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would encourage more and more people to cycle for health benefits and obviously it helps with the traffic flow. I think cycle registration would not really be feasible. I would advise that all bikes are marked in case of theft where they are registered. But cycle registration I do not think will be practical.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Bailiff:

That brings Question Time to an end.