



PRESS RELEASE

No: 567/2021

Date: 27th July 2021

---

## **Budget Address 2021-2022 - The Hon Paul Balban MP**

Mr Speaker, never before have we needed to focus so much of our attention and resources on something so unexpected as what we have had to endure for close to 2 years now. At the time, I was leading the GHA, when news of the new virus broke out in China. We looked to the east, the news kept pouring in of so much infection and death as a result of this virus but we somehow seemed to look at this as something that was happening far away and that this would perhaps not affect us. Patient zero was our wake-up call to the stark reality that we were not immune to this medical threat and by then the GHA and Government in general had undertaken to be well prepared to take on this formidable opponent. Every reasonable step had been taken, every scenario rehearsed, every preparation done, just to be ready to endure a medical crisis, unseen before in Gibraltar. We braced ourselves but we were confident that we were ahead of the game.

Gibraltar in many respects was thrust into the limelight and was featured in the world media for many reasons. Our small size saw us break many records, sometimes for being top of the league table for positive reasons, at other time for not so positive reasons but all in all we have been an example and a success story throughout most areas and we have shone out and managed to steer this ship away from the rocks. We are all hugely proud of the efforts made, the endless hours spent by our professionals but especially the tireless work carried out by health care workers and the civil service at large, who have had to fill gaps when necessary and carry out duties not within their



normal daily duties, proving that they are all truly able to reach that mark and prove that their skills are transferable wherever they may be needed.

MS, we are not out of the woods yet and prudence and good sense is necessary to see us through the coming months as more cases, mainly attributable to the highly contagious delta variant of the virus continues to spread. The virus trying to outwit us, its host and fight itself to survive through mutation.

It has been a massive challenge and I was proud to lead the GHA at the time of the first wave working with this incredible organisation.

MS, Following the recent partial reshuffle, I returned to the portfolio that I was entrusted with originally in 2011 when we won the election. At the time I did not know that I would become so passionate about the work that was to follow and how important this would become in our fight to create a better environment for us all. In fact, the fight for a healthier community and indeed planet runs parallel to many lessons learnt during this pandemic. Evidence showed that people who were obese, for example suffered greater risk of morbidity and indeed, mortality. The lockdowns brought many people out of their homes in search of respite, and this came about in the form of exercise and in doing so, also acquiring that hugely valuable Vitamin D from the sun which proved so important as a contributing protective factor for our immune system.

MS, I am truly grateful to be able to continue this work in the short time left until the next election. The amount of work necessary to carry out to put Gibraltar on track is so vast that it will take many years to truly see a difference, a difference that depends on change and our ability to change as a



people and see that we need to evolve if we are to stand the best chance of passing on a greener, healthier Gibraltar to our children. This will be all about trying to offer truly, alternative and sustainable choices of moving and finding ways to encourage less car usage via perhaps more palatable means, safer roads for all, liveable streets, something that we should, I am sure, all wish for regardless of our political background and something that I hope will receive the support of all members of this House.

I am truly excited to get started although we must now understand that things will be more difficult, today our economic position has changed unfortunately due to the pandemic and we will need to be more creative, more resourceful while aiming as high and as far as we can.

MS, I will be keeping my contribution to the budget debate this year short and to the point while trying not to do any injustice to any of the Ministerial Portfolios that I am now once again responsible for.

## **TECHNICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

Mr Speaker, during the past two years, the Technical Services Department has continued to provide technical support to Government Ministries and Departments on a wide range of construction and traffic related matters as well meeting their defined responsibilities of maintaining public infrastructure.

During the pandemic, the Technical Services Department also provided advice to the GHA on numerous projects and were instrumental in setting up the initial Drive Through testing facility at Rooke in a very short time-scale to meet the deadlines required.



As a result, the last two years have been very different to previous years and less projects have been carried out. This is particularly true for the 20/21 Financial Year where the department has been prudent in its spending and limited its departmental responsibilities to emergencies or essential maintenance of public assets including the Public Highway and the sewerage and drainage network.

Nevertheless, during the course of the last two financial years, the Technical Services Department has been involved in a large number of projects covering a wide range of responsibilities which have included cliff and slope stabilisation schemes within the Upper Rock and Little Bay, the repair of a number of retaining walls, carrying out highways resurfacing works, highways maintenance and major relining works of a section of the Main Sewer and general sewer maintenance and improvement works. In addition, the department has also provided support on the implementation of several projects related to the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking plan launched in March 2017.

This coming year will see the continuation of our road resurfacing programme, albeit in a reduced scale. Our very successful road resurfacing scheme was commenced by the Department in an effort to tackle the never ending need to repair and maintain our roads due to the large amount of vehicles but especially Heavy Goods Vehicles that frequent our roads.

MS, You will recall that in May 2019, the Technical Services Department embarked on the largest road resurfacing scheme ever undertaken and saw many roads being fully resurfaced.



This year will see the continuation of this never-ending task making the best use of the funding being granted and voted for this year.

MS, The replacement and enhancement of pelican crossing lights and equipment has continued during the past couple of years working jointly with the Gibraltar Electricity Authority. During this time three more light-controlled crossings, inclusive of countdown timers, have been installed at Europort Avenue by GASA Swimming Pool, at Waterport Road by the access road leading to Varyl Begg Estate and finally on Rosia Road adjacent to Jumper's Building. The Government will continue to review all existing light-controlled crossings and provide further countdown timers in areas where these are not present.

MS, the Department also continues to successfully manage road closures and diversions on the Public Highway, both for its own in-house works and for all other utility companies and contractors. All road closures are assessed and carried out in a manner that allows essential works to be undertaken whilst allowing vehicles and pedestrians to circulate in a safe manner with the minimum of disruption. The increased construction activity generated by new projects over the past few years makes this task increasingly difficult. In order to reduce the impact as much as possible road closures continue to be avoided during peak times wherever possible, and after hours and weekend work is a condition that is normally imposed on contractors in order to minimise inconvenience to the public.

With regards to Coastal Engineering works the department continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair works as and when required. The department also continues to provide advice to developers and the Development and Planning Commission on all aspects of coastal



engineering as and when required. During this financial year Technical Services will be reviewing the existing coastal defences at Eastern Beach and Sandy Bay with a view of carrying out essential maintenance works.

With respect to cliff stabilisation and rock fall protection projects during the 2019/21 Financial Years the department has been involved in numerous schemes located within the Upper Rock. This has seen stabilisation works being carried out at the Apes Den, Windmill Hill and St Michael's Cave. These areas are all located in areas frequented by locals and visitors to Gibraltar alike and it is important that within the limitations of living in a place like Gibraltar, where rock falls are inevitable, that these areas are kept as safe as possible.

During the past year the Technical Services Department was also involved with works to a number of retaining walls. These have included works at Blackstrap Cove, Europa Point, Jew's Gate and Witham's Road. During the current year the department will continue to monitor our retaining walls and effect repairs as necessary.

MS, Moving onto sewers, during the past year the Infrastructure Section of the department have continued to maintain the public sewerage network as part of HM Government's commitment in this area.

The major desilting and relining works of the Main Sewer, commenced several years ago, continued with the successful relining of the section of sewer running under Lover's Lane towards the College of Education. These works are considered essential given the age and condition of the sewer in this location and the disruption that can be caused in the event of a failure of the sewage network. The



department is currently undertaking camera surveys of the main sewer in order to prioritise the continuation of this essential maintenance work.

Works were also completed at Rosia Bay and at Devil's Gap where a new drainage system was installed to overcome a historical issue of blockages as a result of the poor condition of the existing network in the area.

The condition and upkeep of Gibraltar's main sewer and storm water drainage networks continues to be a matter of great concern for the Government to what is arguably the most important part of our infrastructure. The Department will therefore this year be continuing its major desilting and cleansing works of the sewer network and will be carrying upgrade works where necessary.

Other works will include gully cleansing, manhole repairs and the general upkeep of the public storm and sewage networks.

Given the sharp rise in developments in Gibraltar the department continues to provide advice to both developers and the Development and Planning Commission on the impact that these various developments can have on our existing sewerage network.

Finally, funding is once again being sought for the purchase of equipment to allow the Sewer Infrastructure Section's to continue to expand and provide an enhanced service in respect of its inspections of the sewer network. This also applies to the Garage & Workshop where funding for new equipment is also being sought. They will continue to provide a service to maintain the fleet of Government vehicles, including the refuse collection vehicles. As in previous years the situation



with the Garage & Workshop remains under review and expressions of interest were sought to explore the possibility of the leasing and future maintenance of Government's fleet of vehicles. As yet no final decision has been made on this option.

I would once again also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Infrastructure Section and On-Call Officers of the Technical Services Department for their hard work and commitment during those times in the past year where Gibraltar has suffered from storms and very heavy rain. It is thanks to the very hard work and dedication of this team, whilst most of us are at home, that the impact of these storms is not greater on both our sewerage and road networks.

Mr Speaker, the Technical Services Department is one of those Government departments who are rarely in the limelight but who work tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their defined responsibilities maintaining public infrastructure and to support and provide technical advice to other Government Ministries and Departments.

As can be seen, they will continue to do so this coming year in all manner of projects in order to deliver on the Government's extensive and comprehensive programmes.

## **TRAFFIC & PARKING**

MS, I will now report on the progress made during these financial years on initiatives that were already in motion together with new projects commenced by my colleague Minister Vijay Daryanani whilst Minister responsible for Transport.





MS, Parking will always be a problem in Gibraltar unless we can work together to reduce our need for it. There is a very tight balance to achieve with respect to the revenue and employment potential there is within the local car sales market and our need to look at our small town as a place totally overtaken by the car. Even though more parking is created each and every time a new estate is built and in theory those that buy into these new estates will invariably move their cars within the new parking areas within the estate, we still do not see more on-street parking space available. On the contrary, there are more and more cars and vans taking up space further away from people's homes. The reality it seems is that we have a problem letting go of our cars. This is something that we will need to tackle eventually, we have no other option.

Nevertheless, MS, During the past 18 months 3 new Pay & Display parking zones became operational on Harbour Views Road and Europort Roundabout, providing a total of 37 pay parking bays, operational between 9am to 10pm daily. These areas include free parking after the stipulated hours except on Harbour Views Road which will operate on a 24-hour basis, daily with peak and off-peak tariffs. This also includes Public Holidays and weekends. This provides parking turnaround and access to the areas in close proximity. This is the first Pay & Display that charges users around the clock 365 days a year.

MS, A further new Pay & Display parking zone was established at the ex-Queen's Cinema site and became operational on the 12 March 2020, providing 21 parking bays, active between the hours of 9am and 10pm daily with free parking after 10pm. In addition to this, one new disabled parking bay and a motorcycle bay were demarcated within the site. This now provides parking turnaround and access to businesses, places of work and popular tourist hotspots in the nearby area.



### **Pay & Display - Coaling Island**

Another new Pay & Display parking zone was also established at Coaling Island becoming operational on the 8 June 2020, providing 105 parking bays, operational between 9am to 6pm from Monday to Friday. The area continues to provide parking at NO COST after the stipulated hours and during Public Holidays and weekends. This provides parking turnaround in an area commonly used to park vehicles on a long-term basis, with a minority left unattended and derelict for long periods. This area also provides additional parking opportunities for nearby leisure areas such as the Small Boats Marina, Coaling Island Marina, and Commonwealth Park as well as increasing the overall parking stock to the City Centre for visitors and commuters.

MS, Even though hugely unpopular at the beginning Pay & Display is one of the only ways to guarantee parking turnaround. It is impossible to have free parking without having cars block these spaces indefinitely. It is by seeking a parking fee that people will use that space for as long as they really need to, leaving that same space available to another user in short time.

Parking fees should reflect the needs in a specific area. Quicker turnaround requires higher hourly rates such as at Line Wall Road, giving more opportunities for people to go shopping for specifics, having lunch or running errands. Lower hourly rates allow for longer parking for people who need to go to work or spend longer in the area for perhaps recreational purposes. Without well planned parking fees, parking is impossible and more time needs to be spent driving around looking for space leading to increased emissions.

### **Changes to RPS Zone 1 - Additional parking in Grand Parade**



MS, Amendments to the parking configuration within Grand Parade was announced on 8 July 2020. As a result, Zone 1 parking for permit holders saw an increase to the existing stock from 127 to 211, giving a 60% increase to the current residential parking stock in Grand Parade. These changes formed part of the ongoing consultation process with stakeholders and are constantly monitored and reviewed with the aim of providing more efficient use to the existing parking stock within the car park. Care MUST be taken when seeking the views of stakeholders as usually every action will have an equal and opposite reaction. Finding the right balance is the hardest challenge.

All parking facilities throughout Gibraltar will continue to be constantly reviewed to ensure that the limited space available is put to the best use.

A new Transport Advisory Committee was set up providing advice on traffic and transport related matters to the Government. This Committee seeks to provide the views of stakeholders, the public and representatives bodies in Traffic and Transport locally.

Following the advice and in consultation with the Gibraltar Bus Company a new school bus service was introduced and became operational as from 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020. The School bus departs from Elliot's Battery Bus Stop at 820am during school term. It is hoped that this may encourage fewer car trips with this dedicated bus service exclusively for school children.

Bus Route 7 (Mount Alvernia) also sees an extended service time until 8pm Monday to Friday.

Following the success of the first phase of the Old Street Signs project which was brought to life with the idea of preserving our spoken heritage, that of our old street names which was slowly being



lost, phase 2 which had already seen the groundwork done, was launched in February 2020. 5 new plaques were unveiled containing a short description of the origin of the colloquial name so that we never forget our past. The new plaques included those at Library Ramp, New Passage, Boschetti's Steps, Town Range and Crutchett's Ramp.

### **New Automatic Security Bollards at Casemates Gates**

MS, The installation of a new sliding security bollard system at Casemates Gates was completed on 20 November 2020.

This innovative surface mounted bollard system consists of two fixed bollards on a plate with a single central sliding bollard to provide access into Casemates. The low-profile configuration of this system allows the installation of these bollards in areas where deep excavations are not feasible due to existing infrastructure in the ground. The configuration also allows constant pedestrian access even whilst closed.

This new hostile vehicle mitigation device at Casemates Gates is the first of its kind in Gibraltar and its performance will be monitored before more locations are rolled out to safely and effectively secure the Town Centre from unauthorized vehicles. The road space between the fixed bollards also acts as a speed calming measure meaning when the sliding bollard is open, vehicles would need to reduce their speed to transit through.

MS, It came as a personal disappointment to see that the Main Street and Irish Town Cycle scheme was suspended. The intention of such a scheme was to allow cyclists to use this area after the busy hours so as not to need to cycle on roads during the late evening or night when roads generally



become less safe for a number of reasons. The reasons for the discontinuation of this scheme will be looked at carefully in the context of the larger plan for encouraging cycling as an alternative means of transport to the private car. The greatest concern highlighted at the time of suspension was the lack of policing in the area where cyclists and e-scooters were found using this area during the restricted hours, therefore creating a risk to pedestrians. It should not mean that because of a few, disrespectful users all other law-abiding user groups especially families and children should need to stay without. It was stated that this scheme saw low uptake which is in fact what was expected in a place where commuting cycling is not commonplace. Most cyclists anyway would use other roads as they are quicker and more direct. The intention of this area in town was to create a quiet area to encourage families to try cycle, young children to be able to enjoy their bicycles in safety and people to be able to ride to work in the morning or home late evenings.

Nevertheless the concept of a cycle lane through town was due to be reviewed as most other cities adopt shared spaces as opposed to a separate painted lanes.

MS, The use of cargo bikes as a form of last-mile sustainable delivery in town will be explored further as it makes huge sense that if possible and with the right encouragement, a cargo bicycle is greener, less bulky and dangerous than a van spewing out fumes in the centre of town.

New bicycle racks were rolled out at ten locations throughout Gibraltar, providing an increase of 70 cycle spaces complementing the existing bicycle parking facilities at key locations within the City Centre and other leisure areas.



Cycling infrastructure by way of safe, secure bicycle parking is critical to help take-up of cycling in cities and is a great investment.

MS, During lockdown, Gibraltar saw a vast improvement in our air quality as my colleague the Minister for the Environment will vouch for. The pandemic saw cities throughout the world transform their streets and improve the public realm. An increase in cycle shared schemes were witnesses and many people took up the shared bicycle or used their own personal bicycle to get to work instead of sharing a car or public transport. It made total sense, the bicycle for certain distances became the perfect socially distant mode of safe travel and transport. Many cities used pop-up cycle lane infrastructure to try to harness this marked social change and help protect cyclists, one that was driven by the different populations themselves. Bicycle rapidly sold out and for the first time, just when bicycle part manufacturers thought that the pandemic would see the end of their business's, a miracle happened. Bicycle spare parts that had been gathering dust in the warehouses of giant cycling part companies started to move. One order led to another as bicycle manufacturer's started to respond to the worldwide astronomical demand for bicycles and they started building bicycles in quantities never seen before. Within months, even the spare parts had been exhausted and even now, there are still shortages of bicycles, and shops are still struggling to get their hands on bicycles especially the most popular brands. Purchasers are now still almost unable to specify colours or accessories at the point of purchase as shops grapple for what was being supplied to them.

MS the pandemic saw much negativity and much tragedy but there was also a lot of opportunity to harness. Many leading environmental experts described this time as an opportunity of a lifetime. The world does not often get these chances, these pauses to life and it was one to grasp with five



fists. All of a sudden, as Gibraltar locked itself down, Mount Sidi Musa in Morocco appeared crystal clear in the horizon, coming out of the perpetual dust that lay before it. I peered at it from then, my offices at St. Bernard's Hospital. The horizon was so clear that the Atlas Mountains behind Sidi Musa could also be seen too. There was that clear sense of clean air and I think we all felt it. Our air monitoring equipment verified this observation.

Yet we have lived and today re-live this day by day, lorries, trucks, HGV's, diesel and petrol cars driving under 1000m to take children to school, to go to work, to drive round and around in circles to find parking, sitting in traffic queues along Queensway, Rosia Road, Main Street. We sit, locked inside our cars, windows closed, breathing through particulate filters and the air conditioning in an encapsulated environment. We have lost and are losing that contact with nature, that need to get the blood pumping, to feel better, fitter, healthier. We now no longer "hunt and gather at the supermarket, today it's so much easier to get shopping orders delivered.

MS, Gibraltar, at the time of the pandemic, grasping at the only legally permitted opportunity of leaving our homes to seek that critical respite from the shackles of our 4 walls, Gibraltar came out in droves, to walk, power walk, cycle and jog. Never have our streets been so vibrant with people exercising, as during the lockdown and in the perfect silence of empty streets. Never have we eroded the soles of our shoes sooner than the fabric that holds them together. The chirping of the birds became audible as the level of noise pollution dropped.

MS, Government at the time also saw that opportunity and tried doing what other cities were doing. The closure of Europort Avenue, Chatham Counterguard and part closure of Line Wall Road was announced coming into force on the 1st June 2020. The intention was to return public space to the



people because regardless of whether we drive, cycle, or catch the bus, the moment we park our cars and work home or walk from Mum or Dad's car to the school gate or from our parked car to work, we are all pedestrians. There was a lot of good in the intention behind the closures of these roads. Chatham and Europort were quite inconsequential to traffic flow but Line Wall Road closure came under fierce attack. This is the normal reaction to change especially when it affects our beloved cars.

MS, The closure of Line Wall Road provided an opportunity to gather data and see at face value what effect it would bring about to local traffic. However, I think that one valuable lesson was learned at that time by the team that spearheaded that initiative, change has to happen slowly, Gibraltar is not a city with many arteries and there were perhaps many better, smaller environmental battles to be had rather than have that one all-out war against the car. But brave, it certainly was, and the plans were impressive and few would disagree that everyone would have loved to have seen those plans materialize but NOT at the expense of our cars and our freedoms to drive them where we please. We were not ready for it at the time, just like we were not ready for the closure of Main Street to traffic when that happened in its day. BUT Our dependence on our cars is something we will need to come to terms with eventually, but once again, alas we may have to leave that one for our children to sort out. Brave leaders get lambasted but those who are not brave will never break boundaries and create a better place for us all to live.

MS, On the 6<sup>th</sup> November, Line Wall Road resumed to normal traffic in both directions, lockdown was slowly released, the cars returned, Mount Sidi Musa slowly retreated back into the haze, the birds stop chirping, it seemed, our air became thicker and any potential positive environmental gain was lost. It was midnight and the carriage became a pumpkin.





MS, and here we are. The new normal, or the same old normal. There are more cars today than during the lockdown. There will be even more cars tomorrow, electric cars predominantly someday perhaps but more batteries and lithium and plastic and rubber to dispose of and contend with, but we will still have our cars.

But we have an impossible task ahead of us, not least because despite of the reality of a horror story as described by my friend and colleague John Cortes which will see within the lives of our grandchildren the rise of water levels that will see our low lands covered by seawater, Laguna, the Reclamation, Glacis, the airport. Is this not enough to realise that we must react. We cannot keep burying our head in the sand, or can we, well if we don't care as a population then we can simply let our grandchildren find a solution. Those of us that care, must work hard to convince those that don't care. As already stated by John Cortes, traffic is the biggest contributor to poor air quality and it is for this reason that Government needs to lead us to a safer, healthier and sustainable future. I cannot stress this much more. Should we work together and embrace change or should those who cannot see past their steering wheels dictate that we head in the direction of climate crisis. Electrification will no doubt help somewhat but it is not the way forward, we need to seriously consider changing the way we live our lives, but it is your choice, our choice. Its up to all of us.

Nevertheless MS, things will need to move on a little slower now, not least because we are not the beneficiaries of a large budget, but because change needs to be looked at within a certain pace. The community needs to be offered options, ones that will not stop them exercising their right to choose but we all need to recognize and be reminded that what we sow we will reap. If we want to be healthier, fitter, live longer, be happier and we want this for our children too, we need to start to



look within ourselves, and support Government led initiatives. We need to stop and wait for a while when projects and initiatives are unveiled and not jump to criticize without giving them time. No Government wants to punish its people, no Government does things to lose votes and lose elections. It's easy to do nothing, few people with overly react if things are kept the way they are. Some NGO's may seek more, some environmentally conscious citizens may also wish for more but popularity is generally not lost. That's the easy way out.

MS, change is good for us all and over the next months until the next election I will try to make inroads into a better, greener Gibraltar. I will be looking at all the projects that are available to us and try to choose the best ones that will make our environment better within our financial constraints. I will seek the support of the population, of my Government and Parliamentary colleagues to start making some changes that will hopefully see us become a better place, an attractive home, an attractive destination for visitors.

## DVLD

MS, I will now turn my attention to the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Department.

MS, this department is the place that churns out that endless supply of car drivers, motorbike riders, the place where all new cars start their life on our roads, the place where new cars become, second hand cars, then third hand cars and the place that checks these cars are in good working order. The latter is environmentally the most important function of this department as it is here that emissions are checked and vehicle roadworthiness approved.



MS, The DVLD has seen a massive increase in workload recently. Apart from the challenges of the pandemic, this department has had to pull out all stops due to Brexit and has been working very closely with the Government Law Offices and DVLA (UK) ensuring that we will be able to continue to drive throughout Europe as we transition out of the EU. The staff has managed to step up to the mark and has managed to meet all targets set upon them.

### **DVLD Online services**

MS, I am proud to say that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department continues to embrace and use information and communication technology as a tool to achieve a better and more efficient service to the customer. In fact, this department was one of the first, if not the first to add on-line Government services some years back.

The public is now able to access a total of 13 online DVLD services and applications via the new e-Government portal, these include:

Applications for

- Compulsory basic training
- International Driving Permits
- Driving licences, and
- Learner's licences

It is also possible to book



- Driving tests
- Driving theory tests
- Roadworthiness or MOT tests (MOT)

online.

And:

- Buy a personalised registration number
- Change an address
- Change vehicle ownership
- Arrange for the Disposal of a Motor Vehicle
- Request a Duplicate logbook or road worthiness certificate

And to:

- Register a new or imported used motor vehicle

Furthermore, new e-services will be introduced shortly making the DVLD one of the Government departments with the most services available online. The DVLD is working on a service to allow individuals to purchase personalised number plates online. This service will allow people to access and pay for their chosen number plate at any time and from the comfort of their own home. The service will cater for the increased demand in personalised number plates that generates additional revenue to Government.



The DVLD is a very busy customer-facing department and it has had very high demand from the community which is to be expected in a population with a penchant for its cars and one of the largest vehicle ownership rates per capita in the world. The DVLD staff claim that they can safely say that it has been their busiest period in recent history for the department especially with the need to allow for the application of International Driving Licences in preparation for Brexit. The increased demand for Driving License and International Driving Permits together with the backlog of MOTs due to the suspension of services during lockdown has been an immense challenge, one that is very difficult to appreciate from the outside. Government had to redeploy extra staff to the department with an average of 100 applications being received daily both online and via the counters and over 60 MOTs have been carried out daily by our hard-working qualified testers.

### **Temporary Counter at the Post Office**

Due to the nature of the department, the Driving Vehicle and Licencing Department found itself operating a temporary counter at the Royal Gibraltar Post Office in Main Street in order to serve members of the public that required personal assistance during the lockdown.

Printed application forms were made available at this point and personal assistance provided. Furthermore, in order to guarantee a prompt delivery of important documents, items like Driving Licenses, Log Books, International Driving Permits, MOT extensions and Blue badges were sent by registered post at no additional cost.

The staff at the Driving, Vehicle and Licencing Department worked hard to manage the increase in workload whilst making sure that the necessary safety measures for all involved were in place at all times.



I am very pleased to report that counters will soon be opened at the Eastern Beach MOT Test Centre A total of four counters plus an additional collection point for business and express service will be made available at this location.

Recently a further counter for the purposes of the DVLD was opened at the one-stop shop in Main Street, opposite the John Mackintosh Hall.

### **CBT Compulsory Basic Training**

MS, the introduction of the Motorcycle Compulsory Basic Training Course for riders by the GSLP Liberal Government is a success story, especially for our 17-year old's who are now more confident and feel safer before driving on the road. It continues to be delivered by qualified driving and vehicle examiners with the course structure covering a mix of verbal instruction and practical training that has proven to be a tremendous success. Feedback from the public at large continues to be extremely positive, especially from concerned parents who feel that the basic course helps their children have a better understanding of road safety.

### **MOT Emission testing**

The MOT vehicle-testing Centre boasts of the latest equipment to test vehicle emissions. The equipment fully complies with the very latest EU testing legislations and is in line with the Manifesto commitment for a Green Gibraltar. The vehicle testers are able to find out if any part of the emission system have been tampered with or removed. As part of this new test, vehicle testers are now able to retrieve generic and manufacturer specific diagnosis trouble codes.



With a view of improving our carbon footprint, stricter emissions checks are underway. The new rules were first introduced in 2018 and apply to diesel vehicles, which are fitted with Diesel Particulate Filters (DPF's). When examined, all vehicles' that produces smoke of any colour will immediately fail the test and will need to be corrected before being driven again.

## **ADR**

MS, The ADR is a European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR). The carriage of dangerous goods by road carries the inherent risk of accidents. Considering the safety requirements of vehicles in Gibraltar that carry dangerous goods, and in accordance with the Transport (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road) Regulations 2010, Government has trained officers to conduct ADR testing at the DVLD.

Government will continue to provide this training to new testers in order to qualify officers and allow them to issue an authorisation certificate to these types of vehicles. Additional courses will be held by qualified persons from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in the UK in order to update all the relevant qualifications as necessary. These courses will be held locally and all qualifications achieved by our testers and examiners are in line with our counterparts from DVSA UK.

## **Transport**

Mr Speaker, our Transport Inspectors ensure that our Public Transport service continues to improve, our transport inspectors now ensure that all users and undertakings fully abide and conform to all the legal requirements under the Transport Act. Furthermore, and due to security access management of pedestrianised areas such as Main Street, a new scheme for permit holders



was introduced a few years back and is working very well. A total of 7 Transport Inspectors are deployed throughout Gibraltar and worked extremely hard throughout COVID making sure, our public service users wore masks when inside their vehicles and that all COVID measures were being respected inside our public service vehicles. As we continue to welcome tourists and flights back to Gibraltar, their role will be even more demanding.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire DVLD team for their hard work and a special mention to Mr Pepe Moreno, our chief examiner who retired this year after completing full service at the age of 65!

### **Final Conclusion:**

MS, I am looking forward to getting back into a Ministry which is both challenging and rewarding one. When it comes to Traffic and Transport, beneath every single initiative there is one core value and aim and that is our environment. This is not about targeting any group or sector within the community. At the end of the day most of us own cars and motorbikes and most of us like to drive. Many of us also like to cycle but many of those who would consider riding a bike are very concerned and even scared of riding on our heavily transited roads but one thing that almost all of us have in common is that, we are all pedestrians each and every day. That is the one fundamental thing that needs to be respected and why pedestrians should be at the top of everybody's list.

Walking infrastructure is generally good in Gibraltar although research and best practice is always evolving and what was acceptable yesterday will find a better way tomorrow. Yet, when there are accidents they also often involve pedestrians. Each and every time a pedestrian crosses a road there





is risk and at that point of conflict, speed is what either keeps us safe or the very reason why injuries could be more serious, even life threatening.

The World resources Institute, Cities Safer by Design (2015) Report showed that at 30km/h there is a 10% likelihood of a pedestrian or cyclist fatality, at 40km/h there is a 30% likelihood of pedestrian or cyclist fatality and at 50km/h, our maximum speed limit in Gibraltar an astounding 85% likelihood of pedestrian or cyclist fatality. Is this not evidence enough to want to seriously at least, consider reducing the speed of traffic in Gibraltar? What is the counter argument? I get to work quicker by driving at a faster speed? MS, take this on board, research carried out in Grenoble, in France showed that the difference in time taken to drive 1 km between intersections was 18 seconds when comparing a maximum speed limit of 30km/h and 50km/h. Or is the counter argument, it will create more traffic because we seldom drive above 20km/h when we are stuck in traffic anyway. Traffic is created by sheer volume of cars and not the speed they are travelling at. That it perhaps cannot be policed is another matter but not one that should stop us consider what is safe and beneficial for the environment.

The whole reason behind the STTPP is to find ways of encouraging alternative and more sustainable modes of transport. It is not about wishing to limit freedoms or a wish to displease, but this is what a Climate Emergency is all about, it's about action, not about sitting back and seeing what happens or waiting for a greater law to be imposed from elsewhere. In fact, as I have said before and made abundantly clear, the STTPP is an environmental document with plans on how to achieve a greener city.



MS, we declared a climate emergency, most of the world did, but we need to take an important decision, do we do something about it as a people together, or do we wait for it to be imposed on us and then complain about it? Do we say that this is for bigger nations and organisations to sort out or do we tackle it ourselves, each and every one of us? We cannot just look at the oceans and say, poor cetaceans dying due to ingested plastics, or look at air quality readings and state that this is the fault of multinationals outside of our immediate vicinity. After all it was the children who marched up Main Street to No 6 to demand that the Government declare a Climate Emergency.

Each and every one of us needs to do their bit if we are to leave a meaningful legacy to our children. We cannot turn a blind eye, and there are so many things that we can all do which are not just good for the planet, but which are good for us all, for our direct health. We can choose not to buy plastics, we can choose to recycle, we can choose to drop our used chewing gum in the bin and not stub a cigarette butt on the street. Each and every one of us can also look at how we move and decide if we really need to use a car to drive 500m to take our children to school or ourselves to work and remain stuck in a traffic jam taking us 30 minutes to arrive at our destination. In a place like Gibraltar which is in effect a town, a car trip can be more laborious and less time efficient than walking, or catching a bus or cycling. When it comes to cycling, Gibraltar has very little in the way of infrastructure other than one cycle lane across the runway and some bicycle parking. That's about it. Many comment that they would seriously consider cycling if there was infrastructure, but are scared to. Yet few would be scared of driving or riding a motorbike or walking, so it seems that the mode of transport that is most in need of change and assistance is the bicycle. Yet this is the very thing that cities throughout the world are encouraging greater use of. There are cities built around the bicycle yet they did not start off as cycling cities, they became cycling cities. They became so because their citizens were fed up and tired of being stuck in traffic, scared of the amount of



accidents including lethal accidents and wanted that change. People pressure. People, especially worried mothers started to drive cars and traffic off the streets of Amsterdam in the late 60s and are still continuing their drive to remove parking spaces and cars transiting through the city centre.

We want a green Gibraltar, we voted for a green Gibraltar but many of us don't want the inconvenience of a green Gibraltar, that's the reality. MS that is such a shame, our small size could make us one of the most attractive small cities in the world, our health would improve, indeed our life expectancy too.

MS, it is often lonely sitting on my chair but more people are more supportive as time goes on, more people are visibly walking, catching the bus and even cycling compared to when we won the election in 2019. Mindset is slowly changing and if not, awareness is most definitely on the rise.

MS, I recently tweeted that when it comes to initiatives that affect our roads, "It almost feels like dragging a child to the dentist when they know that are going to get a tooth extracted and it's going to hurt."

Nevertheless, MS, I feel that it is my duty to keep to the Manifesto that was voted at the last election and budget permitting, I try my best to sow the seeds for a green future. Had I been the Minister for Transport at the time of the horse and carriage, I would have most probably be spearheading the entry of the car and the bus and the lorry that would bring Gibraltar into the modern era as I would have thought that it was the best thing to do at the time, a time when the environment then, was not a consideration at all. MS, even smoking was considered healthy at in those days. Clearly, today we know much more and it is the duty of everyone sitting here today and listening to this debate



today to come together when it comes to this matter which is one of the most important challenges and threats that we face today.

MS, in conclusion, I would like to thank all those working within my respective departments, most of which I have got to know well while I was responsible for Traffic, Transport and Technical Services, for their hard work. I look forward to working closely with them all once again over the coming months. I would like to thank all technical and administrative staff at Technical Services, the Sewer Section, Highways Division, the garage staff, the Bus Company and its drivers and mechanical staff. Also the DVLD, the acting Chief Examiner and all of his staff.

Mr Speaker, finally, I would like to thank David at the Ministry for all his help in the past year and Jared who recently joined him to assist us.

I also wish to thank all Parliamentary Staff for their hard work and assistance throughout the year. Finally I also wish to wish the Clerk of Parliament the very best on his retirement. He is someone I have always associated with the civil service and a familiar face when I used to visit my Dad at work, then the Registrar of the Supreme Court in the late 1970's.