

2. Road Races (Temporary Modification) Bill 2014 – First Reading approved

The President: Item 2, the Road Races (Temporary Modification) Bill 2014.
Mr Turner to take the First Reading, please.

Mr Turner: Thank you, Madam President.

Now, with this Bill – and there is a timescale which the Department are working to and I will explain that – I will give notice that I will be asking for suspension of Standing Orders for this particular one and then it will be up to Members to decide whether they feel that there is a sufficient case to do that.

Members obviously know my view on suspension of Standing Orders for taking Bills through in haste. So the Department wish to make the case and then I will make it, on behalf of the Department, and see if Members so wish to do that.

This is a short piece of legislation and there are certain circumstances for this Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to allow racing on the Billown Circuit on Sunday 31st May 2015. The reason for the request by the event organisers is all to do with the timing of the Spring Bank Holiday Monday, the day normally used for the Pre-TT Classic and the fact it cannot be used on this occasion due to the late start of the TT Festival. So it is to do with the way the dates have worked out.

Therefore to enable enough officials and marshals to be available to run the event, the Sunday is the only day available as most of the officials and marshals have work commitments on the Monday. The only other options for the organisers are to abandon the event or to run it one week earlier.

Staging of the event on a Sunday is at present prohibited by section 1(2) of the Road Races Act 1982; for the prohibition to be disapplied, this requires primary legislation. The provision will be in place for one day only and a sunset expiry clause has been included.

So, having outlined the purpose of the Bill, I hope Hon. Members will support the Department in what they are trying to do; and I beg to move the Road Races (Temporary Modification) Bill be read a first time.

Mr Downie: I beg to second, Madam President, and reserve my remarks.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Corkish.

Mr Corkish: Yes, thank you, Madam President.

Hon. Members, and the mover, will be aware that I had responsibility for a period of time in Economic Development for road racing, where the subject of Sunday racing came up from time to time. The question I would ask the mover is regarding the Sunday: are there limitations to the permitted hours that the roads would be closed?

The regard I had in this respect was for the churches that would be inconvenienced, and I suggested if we were to use Sundays that we would operate in certain times where we would not be inconveniencing churchgoers.

So, I would like confirmation of that, Madam President, please.

The President: Clause 2.

Mr Corkish: Sorry, clause 2.

The President: The Lord Bishop.

The Lord Bishop: Yes, thank you, Madam President.

I think perhaps what Mr Corkish has been suggesting is that whereas the racing could take place between 1.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m., presumably the roads might be closed a little earlier than that, or not?

I think that would be my question.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Downie.

Mr Downie: Thank you, Madam President.

We are looking at a Bill here which is a one-off. It will enable this race to take place on Sunday 31st May. The roads close about half an hour before racing takes place, so the race could be held any time within the period and then there is time at the end to tidy up, so it would not interfere with the church attendance. I am sure the organisers have discussed that with the only church which is affected on the Billown Circuit – the other church has access from Ballabeg.

I would still prefer to see this Bill have an emergency provision attached to it, because this could happen at some future time again and we could have a Southern 100 programme scheduled to take place on the Saturday. You could have an appalling day's weather, be washed out, and then because there was not provision in place to run the race the following day – because this expires at midnight on 31st May 2015 – the whole thing is abandoned!

I would ask the mover surely we should be looking at this and having provisions, and an emergency provision, should something like this happen. These races bring thousands of people to the Isle of Man, they do help with our economic activity; and I know first-hand from the organisers that the churches and all the other organisations all work in conjunction. They have a very good working relationship – and, in fact, for the church itself it is a good form of income for them.

So it is to be welcomed; and providing one thing does not interfere with the attendance at the church and the hours that the services are held, I think everybody lives in harmony.

So I would ask the mover if he would consider an emergency provision be put into this so that, should the races be washed out the day before, they can actually go and have the Sunday – which is the same situation that we have with the TT at the moment, on the TT course.

We want some commonality with all these things and we want the public to understand why we are bringing legislation forward – not just a one-off to enable this race to be held on Sunday 31st May. If we are going to do it let's do it for the right reasons, make the proper arguments and work through with it.

Thank you, Madam President.

The President: Lord Bishop.

The Lord Bishop: Madam President, excuse me for a further comment, but I do not think there would be any objection from the churches to what Mr Downie has suggested.

Mr Braidwood: No. Enabling.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Crowe.

Mr Crowe: Thank you, Madam President.

Can the hon. mover just confirm that 30th May, the Saturday, is the first start of the TT Practice Week? And the Sunday for the Billown racing: if it was not held on Sunday 31st, it would make more practical sense, because a lot of the riders would be over the TT practice; whereas if you go back to the previous Sunday or the previous Saturday –

Mr Turner: Nobody would be here.

Mr Crowe: – it would be illogical – there would be nobody, either tourists or motorcycle racers. So, I think again from a logistical point of view the Sunday makes sense. I think obviously there is always concern about churchgoers who need to have access to their places of religion. So I would support the Bill, Madam President.

The President: The Hon. Member, Mr Wild.

Mr Wild: Thank you, Madam President. Just to say that, providing it does not disrupt the church attendance, I would support the Bill.

The President: The mover to reply.

Mr Turner: Thank you, Madam President. Again, I thank Members for their interest in this very short, but important, Bill. Mr Corkish mentioned the hours: well, the hours are, as was mentioned, stipulated in clause 2, between the hours of 1.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m.

That – and again, if I am wrong, I will look to the learned Attorney – is the time that the Department can issue the Road Closing Order; so the set up and racing would have to be contained within 1.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m., because those are the times in the Order and currently at the moment the Department issues that Road Closing Order and it is up to organisers to use that time to do whatever they need to do to get the circuit, the course, ready and run their inspection laps and their racing all within those times. So there is no extension to those times because that is what it says – and I think that is correct?

The Acting Attorney General: That is correct.

Mr Turner: So I hope that has given Mr Corkish and, indeed, the Lord Bishop some comfort on the hours.

Mr Downie mentioned emergency provisions. This Bill has come about because there was due to be a full Road Races Act revamp and there are a lot of provisions in there to modernise the way in which we close roads on the Isle of Man; and part of that includes provision for Sunday closures.

There has been much debate within the Department about this and I think the Isle of Man has to decide where it is going to go with these weekend events. Motorsport enthusiasts amongst us will know that the United Kingdom has been pursuing road closing and, indeed, has been successful in getting legislation to a stage where they can now have events such as motorcycle racing, classic cars, hill climbs, rallies and all sorts of other things which were, effectively, unique to the Isle of Man – that is what made us the road racing capital of the world.

We had the TT, of course, which needs no introduction; and the smaller events like the Southern 100. We also had the Manx International Rally which became a major European event through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, we still have it now albeit in a slightly different form – and that is what made the Isle of Man unique.

There were some road closures in Northern Ireland as we know – there is a limited number in Northern Ireland; there is one in Scotland near the Scottish Borders. But the rest of the UK, and local councils and authorities, have now realised that this is a chance for bringing in investment and tourism to their areas; and they are going to be competing with us. What we have to do is modernise our legislation going forward that enables the Isle of Man to look at some of these events and decide whether we want to have them.

This is in answer to Mr Downie's query – it is not related to this Bill which is specifically for this one date. But, in answer to his question, yes, we are looking at it because, for example, we may get an approach from a classic car club wanting to do a weekend event here, so that might include some

autotests, where they have to do things round cones on, say, Jurby Airfield – but it may also include say, a Sunday morning hill climb up the Sloc.

At the moment, we cannot facilitate those events; so we then have to, as I said, have legislation to enable that to happen. It is a very delicate subject, but if the rest of the United Kingdom are looking at providing for these events, we could very well lose out because the cost of getting to the Isle of Man is a deterrent and, if people have the choice of going to events that are organised elsewhere in the UK, it may well have an adverse effect. So, everything has to be taken into consideration.

Before alarm bells start to ring, we would be – and again this is only in an early stage – if there are to be any closures for Sundays, there would have to be consultation with the people in those areas, and also to look at roads maybe that have not got anybody on. The Sloc is a good example, it is where they like to do their hill climbs, there are very few properties on it, they usually start past where the properties are anyway, and could use that road all week and have very little impact on the community. And yet they would be good events to come to the Island.

So there are moves afoot to look at this – and I hope that gives Mr Downie some comfort going forward. That, of course, will be a matter to discuss at the time, to decide whether it is acceptable to the other place and to here but, for now, this is the focus – and the reason is because of the date.

This comes back to what we were saying about the bank holiday. Because traditionally the bank holiday was the first full weekday of Practice Week, many people were off work and were able to marshal for the event down at the Billown Circuit. Because the TT does indeed start on Saturday 30th and the bank holiday is the week before, it means that the Monday is not a public holiday in the Isle of Man, therefore many of their officials have indicated that they would not be able to assist on that day, so the event would possibly have to be abandoned – which would be a great shame, particularly when so many people come for that.

So, those are the reasons behind this. It is simply for 31st May; it has a sunset clause that it will expire; and I hope Members will support it. It is the Department's wish that we get this through today, if possible, in order that it can receive the Royal Assent in time for it to be enacted so they can put the provisions in place.

So, I beg to move that the Bill be read a first time.

The President: The motion is that the Road Races (Temporary Modification) Bill 2014 be read a first time. Those in favour, please say aye; against, no. The ayes have it. The ayes have it.