

**16. Promenade scheme –
Statement on progress**

The Hon. Member for Onchan (Mr Callister) to ask the Minister for Infrastructure:

If he will make a statement on the progress of the Promenade scheme?

1320 **The President:** Question 16, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr President.

Can I ask the Minister for the Department of Infrastructure if he will make a statement on the progress of the Promenade scheme?

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The President: Again, I call on the Minister, Mr Harmer.

The Minister for Infrastructure (Mr Harmer): Thank you, Mr President.

1330 Significant progress has been made on the Promenade since I last had the opportunity to update the Court in April. Major utility replacements are underway. The first part of the rail corridor has been completed and road construction has started in both the southern and northern ends of the Promenade. In addition, the arrangements for the TT worked remarkably well from a traffic perspective and the horse tram service was brought into operation. Temporary car parking has been added to the north end of Summerland, the walkway and at the Castle Mona to support businesses and residents.

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That said, progress has been slower than expected and I believe the project is around nine to 10 weeks behind schedule. This is a complicated project and this delay has been caused by many interrelated factors, not least of these factors is the extensive number of service challenges being identified during road excavations. Although the project did plan for unexpected service-related issues, the number of changes has been in excess of what reasonably could have been anticipated.

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From the outset, the Department has worked in close co-operation with all the utility and service providers and it is accepted that replacing and increasing the resilience of the inroad infrastructure is the right thing to do. To ensure maximum co-ordination members of the Department's project team, the MUA and the main contractor all share the same open-plan office facilities.

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Some of the difficulties are around the scale of replacing underground services, particularly as the old infrastructure *must* stay in the ground and operational until the new service has been fully installed and commissioned. The new services cannot therefore be laid in the same place as the old water pipes, foul drains, storm drains, electrical cables, gas pipes, telecom fibres, traffic signal cables, street lighting and telecoms cables. In other words, the services in the ground doubles – even before the new infrastructure to futureproof the Promenade is added.

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Unfortunately it is not possible to know where all the services are and to have had all of this planned in advance. Some of these services were installed 70 years ago and in many cases records simply do not exist. Trial holes were dug once the outline design was approved by Tynwald to minimise the risk by identifying some of the main service locations, but Members will understand that this site is over 65,000 m² in area and something as simple as a drain being a few feet higher than expected in one location can lead to a major redesign and multiple service routes.

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As you would expect, once utility providers have seen exactly what is in the ground they want to take the opportunity to rationalise and add resilience to their networks. For example, two new additional water mains have been added to Loch and Harris Promenades, and one of them will increase the number of fire hydrants available to emergency services. With respect to communications, capacity for 5G has been added.

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1365 Many of you will be aware that little progress has been made on the rail corridor since TT. This is because of two significant technical problems which were identified: first, cracking was identified in the new concrete. This could be a design or construction issue but to guard against it a new method of construction has been introduced by the design of the rail corridor.

1370 Secondly, the initial running of the horse trams showed the noise of the horse trams to be louder than expected. The design of the rail corridors implemented these changes and mitigation action is being taken. Construction of the rail corridor has now restarted.

1375 Although disruption cannot always be avoided, we must do everything we can to mitigate the impact, to work with local businesses and adapt to the issues we encounter. We need to ensure that our communications are the best that they can be to improve wherever we can. We are making good progress on addressing the issues we face and I am keen to make sure that our sites are as active and as busy as possible. These issues and others have put a significant workload on the project.

1380 To help deal with this, the MUA has deployed extra resources and an additional four highways design engineers have been assigned to help the project through this challenging period. The main contractors also engaged a specialist programme consultant and additional recruitment support to help improve its productivity on site and recover the time lost.

1385 The Promenade was in a terrible state both in engineering and visibility and, although the project is complex, difficult and requires significant upheaval, when finished the Douglas Promenade will be once again an incredible asset. The engineering will be put right and the prom will be an enjoyable place to spend time, a sustainable travel corridor and a great welcome to the Isle of Man.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Callister.

1390 **Mr Callister:** Thank you, Mr President.

I have got two supplementary questions to the Minister. I firstly thank him for his response this morning but my focus of attention is on some of the mistakes which the Minister has already highlighted.

1395 The first question – and I want to make sure I say them very clearly so the Minister can actually respond to them – I want to ask the Minister is with regard to the newly laid concrete which the Minister has already highlighted with regard to some cracking. Can I ask the Minister exactly how much of the laid concrete will have to be lifted? Who will be financially liable for carrying out those works; and what is the timescale involved?

1400 My second question to ask the Minister, Mr President, relates to the nine to 10-week delay that the Minister has actually said this morning and it was on a Manx Radio interview yesterday. Can I ask the Minister how exactly they intend to catch up this nine or 10 weeks, and will it be to the detriment of local businesses that are already struggling on the Promenade?

The President: Minister to reply.

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The Minister: Thank you.

Answering the first element of the question, at this stage no concrete will be removed; it will be monitored over the coming months and any issues will be between the design team and the contractor. It will be paid for by them.

1410 Regarding the nine to 10-week delay obviously there are a number of different ways that we can ... The main thing is to get the tram corridor correct and get that moving. The work in that area will vastly improve the work sites, but there are a number of different approaches that we can take – obviously with the more resources that we have put in place in terms of, specifically, highways and utilities, and getting those engineers to actually identify ... Because with a lot of
1415 the work you have to look at where the bottlenecks are and the particular bottlenecks are specifically around designing. You may plan to put the new pipe, or the comms, or whatever, at

a particular position but if there are existing works in there you have to redesign – and that means new drawings and new detail sheets and that is where we are concentrating our efforts. By speeding that work up we believe that will then allow us to gain some of those times.

1420 We have always expected the unexpected. It is just the quantity that we have had over the last few weeks.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Robertshaw.

1425 **Mr Robertshaw:** Thank you, Mr President.

Complications were always expected, the Minister says. It was always going to be a complex task. So why on earth did he choose to overstretch himself to the degree that he did?

He talks about looking forward to when the job is finished but does he not accept the fact that there is so much confusion down there now, both running ahead of himself and the complications behind, that he could well find that a number of businesses down there are finished before he has? (**Mr Cretney:** Hear, hear.) And does he not wish to take this opportunity now to apologise profusely to the businesses that are in dire difficulties because of the mismanagement of such an important project?

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1435 **The President:** Minister.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

Some of those areas that we are talking about, we were always going to, for example, do those works around Loch Promenade in June so there was always going to be disruption. This was always a difficult project to undertake. I know we made a decision that rather than taking five years and having even more disruption and more delay and more work over five years, that actually completing it over two years would be much, much better.

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This is a complicated project. There *will* be disruption. We are behind. We obviously intend to recover that time so that we complete on time. I think that is the best approach rather than taking a five-year approach that would just cause more disruption.

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We always said right from the word go that we need to show mettle and we need to show resolve, and when we make a decision like this there will always be disruption. There will always be issues to be faced and it is our job to resolve those, and where we have found those issues they have been resolved. And that is the right thing to do.

But I think we need to take the context of the overall project taking two years rather than taking an inordinate length of time that has been quoted in the past. So we are talking about fractions of two years rather than five or 10 years.

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The President: Hon. Member, Mrs Beecroft.

1455 **Mrs Beecroft:** Thank you, Mr President.

My understanding is that some of the length of time the project is taking – and the cost – is related to the fact that the foundations of the Promenade had failed, so you needed to go down to a deeper level and rectify it really right from the foundations all the way up.

Could the Minister confirm that this is what has taken place, that actually it has gone right down to the foundations in all cases to date, and that it will continue to do so in the work as it goes forward?

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The President: Minister.

1465 **The Minister:** Thank you, Mr President.

We are completely restructuring the Promenade. It is what we said we would do; we said we would go right down to the absolute basis to deal with the services. I just think that we must

1470 have a sense that in any engineering project – and it does not matter what it is – to expect no
issues and no delays is not realistic, particularly when you are talking about something which is
over 90 years since we have done anything to it. So a lot of the things that are in there were not
even planned.

1475 If I take the fire hydrants and so forth that was an issue that when it was found, rather than
just replace exactly what was there, obviously they took the opportunity to say we need to
improve what we put in to UK regulations. We are putting in 5G and we are putting in fibre
optics.

1480 I think we need to remember what this will be in a year's time, which will be a fantastic asset
that we have all said needs to happen. But to expect there not to be any issues, or to expect
that, for example, with the tram tracks and so forth ... The issues have been resolved, they have
been taken forward and they will be resolved. But to expect there not to be any issues is, I do
feel, not realistic. It is part of a normal engineering project that we have this.

The President: Hon. Member for Middle, Mr Shimmins.

1485 **Mr Shimmins:** Thank you, Mr President.

The Minister will be aware that I raised questions and concerns about the length of time
these works would take back in January 2018. What message has he got for the previously
successful businesses which have been badly damaged by the priority being given to the loss-
making horse tram service?

1490 The horse tram service, of course, is an ongoing financial drain on the public purse. Is it not
now the time to cancel the horse tram service for the summer to speed up these works?

The President: Minister.

1495 **The Minister:** Thank you.

Taking the last question first, whether we stop or start the horse trams is not actually
pertinent to whether there are delays in the project. They are only running a small section of
them.

1500 Our main focus is now to get the tram tracks completed. You will see that concrete pouring
started on the base last week. The main concrete pouring is starting today. That will then
actually see a massive reduction in that 400 m. So over the next three to four weeks some of
that Heras fencing will be massively reduced and we will obviously see a lot of the prom return
back to normal.

1505 I think we also need to remember the successful TT that we had and how there was very little
disruption. We also have to remember the number of people that said there would be traffic
chaos on the prom and so forth, but that has not transpired. There have been many positive
things and I would just urge Members to ...

1510 Obviously there are issues, and obviously there have been problems, and solutions have been
found right in the middle of a project and we are progressing. I would very much hope that we
make good all of the time that we have lost.

The President: Supplementary, Mr Callister.

1515 **Mr Callister:** Thank you, Mr President.

I think businesses and the whole Island accepts that this work has to be undertaken. We get
that. What is actually happening is the clear lack of communication.

I mean, the Minister has already mentioned this morning that they put in place 400 m
corridors, but that was not explained to the businesses which were cut off and people parking
on the Promenade were unable to access those businesses at certain times.

1520 Can I ask the Minister to give a very clear answer in respect of those faults? Can he give reassurance that those faults will be repaired at some point, if not in the winter months?

Can I also ask the Minister to actually put on record how many times he personally, as the Minister, has been down on to the Promenade and spoken to those businesses and listened to those concerns?

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The President: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

1530 I think communication is something we are going to very seriously look at and I think there is a lot of communication all the time, but obviously we can improve and also work with the Department for Enterprise and Visit Isle of Man in terms of improving the communication. I thank Members and the Department for Enterprise for their help with other schemes to help businesses on the prom. Obviously I am very sympathetic with businesses on the prom and we need to come together as a Government and help businesses as much as we can.

1535 We did obviously, back in May, look at improving the parking around Castle Mona and improving the parking at the far end, and we will do everything to minimise the disruption. But a lot of the disruption was planned and is part of doing the prom. You cannot avoid disruption when we are dealing with such a major infrastructure project, because at the same time all of those services – the water, the gas, the electricity – have to work, while you are effectively doing surgery on the prom.

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It is a complicated project and, like I said, we will minimise absolutely as much as possible. We will talk to businesses. It is about all of the communication day to day with the team and we will work with the Department for Enterprise to make sure that we are communicating fully.

1545 **Mr Callister:** Mr President, I am sorry, I asked a clear question. I know the Minister can answer any way he said. I have asked the Minister very clearly how many times he has met the businesses on the Promenade, to give that and put it on *Hansard* today. I have also asked the Minister for reassurance that the affected concrete will be lifted and repaired at some point in the future.

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The President: Reply, sir.

The Minister: I have answered the second part already: we do not plan to replace current concrete at the moment. We are monitoring it and we will monitor it over time. If it needs to be replaced we will do that.

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I have talked to a number of different people on the prom, but –

Mr Callister: How many times?

1560 **The Minister:** I do not recall the exact number of times, but I think you are missing the point. (**Mr Callister:** One? Two?) There are a number of different people that are involved. Effectively, the contractors now doing the Promenade ... It involves the contractor, it involves our own staff and it involves a number of different communication channels. So it is not about one person building the prom; it is about a team effort, it is about a contractor, it is about a team delivering the prom.

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The President: I appreciate this is a subject of considerable interest to Members. I have four more supplementaries on my list and then we will have to move on.

Miss Bettison.

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Miss Bettison: Thank you, Mr President.

1575 In the absence of an apology to the businesses from the Minister, I wonder if perhaps he could look at more practical support for them. One of the things that he raised in the project impact assessment that he gave in answer to a previous Question in another place was around rates rebates for those businesses affected, and yet when they have contacted directly they have been advised that as Treasury and the Corporation cannot come to any agreement there are in fact no rate rebates but they can appeal to the Rent and Rating Appeals Commissioners. I wonder if we could perhaps have a more joined-up approach regarding this to actually resolve this, as a starting point, and if he would commit to undertake that.

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The President: Minister.

The Minister: Thank you.

1585 Do not get me wrong: I apologise for the disruption caused on the prom. It is not our intention to cause any disruption and to minimise it absolutely as much as possible. Do not misunderstand me.

1590 This is an important project. We have all agreed it needs to happen. It is important. At the end it will be a fantastic gateway to the Island. It is always hardest when you are right in the middle of something in engineering because ... One of the problems is at the moment a lot of the work has happened underneath the ground and so it is not visible. Some of the benefit that you will get ... And I have to say, in the context of nine weeks within a two-year project, some of the benefit is only realised at the end, so we have been looking at artwork, for example, in the culture area, which will be absolutely amazing. That culture area will be a shining jewel for the Island and I need to focus on that.

1595 In terms of rate rebates, I noticed that we have not had the most positive response from the Corporation but we will work with businesses to get through that and to have some joined-up ... because I completely agree it should be an automatic thing. I will work with Treasury and everybody we can to mitigate the disruption. I cannot avoid the disruption but we will try and mitigate it as far as possible.

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The President: Mr Robertshaw.

Mr Robertshaw: Thank you, Mr President.

1605 So far, the Minister has admitted that they are significantly overrunning timewise on the Promenade. They have also admitted that in terms of closed sections they have overstretched themselves. He has also admitted the fact that they have seriously underestimated the amount of work, even though they should not have done. Would he please now, to calm things down, simply apologise to the businesses down there for the mistakes made so far and promise that he is going to improve the performance of his Department on this important project significantly from now on?

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The President: Reply, sir.

The Minister: Thank you, Mr President.

1615 Obviously I apologise for the delays that are caused and we will work to minimise the delays. Those delays are nine weeks over a two-year project. There have been problems with the design of the concrete; they are now resolved. We will work with businesses absolutely to minimise disruption, and so we will work hard and we will gain that nine weeks back.

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The President: Supplementary, Mr Baker.

Mr Baker: Thank you, Mr President.

1625 Would the Minister agree with me that the easy option here would have been not to take on this challenge of addressing Douglas Promenade, that actually this administration is about actually getting things done and that right now we have started, we are partway through and this is the toughest time but the vision is worth progressing for?

And would the Minister confirm that this is being undertaken by a private contractor and it is not the DoI that is actually doing all this work –

1630 **Mr Robertshaw:** Come on!

Mr Baker: – it is a private contract –

1635 **The President:** Through the Chair, please.

Mr Baker: – and that a lot of the issues that have arisen are a legacy of things that have been done over the past 50, 60, 70 years, the way things were done on the Island, and that we are uncovering all these; and actually we have got to hold our nerve, we have got to work together, we have got to engage with businesses, we have got to engage with the Department for Enterprise in terms of supporting those businesses, we have got to work with the local Corporation, who are very keen to actually have this work done, which will be fantastic when it is done, and we have got to hold our nerve; and actually, in any major construction project challenges abound and it is how you handle them that is the key thing; and that we must press on, we must not ignore the challenges, we must not pretend they do not exist, but we have got to work together to deliver it collaboratively in the best long-term interests of the Island?

1645 **The President:** I do not think there was a question there, but –

The Minister: Yes ... No, there absolutely is (*Laughter*) and I think it highlights –

1650 **The President:** You want them to vote for you.

Mr Cretney: ‘Does he agree?’

1655 **The Minister:** Yes, but I think it is an important point that I do want to come down to because partly I did not ... It was going to the detail of the Hon. Member for Douglas East on one of the issues.

1660 Let’s be blunt about it: it is an old promenade that had no significant drawings of many of the services, so the only way you can deal with a lot of the work is through trial holes. When you detail the trial hole it may be in a specific location in one place but actually a few centimetres higher. A foot difference makes all the difference in terms of design, so each time that has to be redesigned and re-detailed. It is not possible to know what you do not know and it is only when you are dealing with the project that you deal with it and you resource up, which is why I have been committed to resourcing up the design work, and that is what we have.

1665 I do think this is a private contractor that is doing the work; we have initiated the work. There is a designer and contractor involved and that is very important to ... But it is also probably one of the toughest times and I do agree with the Member, we do have to hold our nerve because we all said we wanted to do it, we all knew it was going to be tough, and now is the time to actually resolve to commit to get it done, to resolve the issues, to learn the lessons that need to be learned and to move forward.

1670 **The President:** Final supplementary, Miss August-Hanson.

Miss August-Hanson: Thank you, Mr President.

1675 I sympathise with the Minister because it was always going to be a disruptive process, as he
says, but from the start would it not have been sensible to pull together a working group across
Government to work phase by phase with the private contractor – between Highways and other
Government stakeholders like DHA and fire services, for example, Enterprise, DEFA, Treasury
and the constituency MHKs – as the project managed to its conclusion? As he says, it is a big
1680 project and it does not only affect DoI, so I suggest, as he says, it may mitigate disruption and
also provide a bit more communicative effectiveness.

The President: I think there was a question there.

1685 **The Minister:** Yes, but there is a misunderstanding. There are project co-ordination groups.
There is a project political steering group, there are people being brought together; there are
designers coming together. Obviously, as a project progresses you learn from things that happen
within the project. But do not be under any misunderstanding, there is significant co-operation
between all the utilities, the contractor and the Department.