



Ministerial Statement

by

Lt. Col. the Hon. David A. Burch, OBE (Mil), ED, JP, MP

Minister of Public Works

ATV Tours

March 16th, 2018

Good morning, **Mr. Speaker**.

**Mr. Speaker**, I rise this morning to report further on the proposed ATV Tours for the West end of the island. Before doing so, however, there is some merit in recapping how we got to this place.

**Mr. Speaker**, not surprisingly, the proposal generated considerable interest in the community amongst both environmental organisations and individuals expressing their views.

This proposal predates this administration and in fact had received the approval of the then responsible Minister in the former Government.

After assuming office an approach was made to the Ministry to present the proposal for our consideration – we set about following our own course of due diligence to assure ourselves that we considered all the facts in this proposal and would not be influenced by a biased media campaign designed to discourage support.

**Mr. Speaker**, after consultation with the Attorney Generals Chambers and the Department of Parks we recognized that Section 4 of the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986, required the Ministry of Public Works to provide an opportunity for the general public to comment on the proposal.

That consultation occurred from the **1<sup>st</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2017** resulting in 628 valid responses – 2 in favour and 626 against. The two largest objections were Danger / Traffic Congestion / Safety (54%) and Environmental impact / Pollution (51%).

Many of the objections were lodged without the full knowledge of all the specifics of the operation – such as:

- The proposal is for **guided cultural tours** by qualified tour guides.
- Permission to import a maximum of 10 vehicles has been granted but the current plan is for tours of 8 – 6 customers and 2 tour guides.
- The vehicles are not the ones seen on television and repeatedly highlighted in the Daily as the ones proposed for this venture.
- The vehicles will not traverse any virgin land – but utilize the paved Railway Trail and service roads.
- The operating hours of **10 am to 4pm – Monday to Friday** - are more than reasonable and will not impinge on many of the other users of the Trail.

**Mr. Speaker**, to be clear, in spite of my frank and publicly expressed views on the nature of some of the objections, as I indicated then I did consider each and every submission was considered in coming to a decision. Public consultation is a valuable part of our democracy and it is good to see Bermudians making their views known on a wide range of issues.

**Mr. Speaker**, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, the Minister of Transport & Regulatory Affairs and I visited the Beacon Hill Depot for a pre-arranged visit and inspection of the vehicles in question. We were also afforded an opportunity to ride them to gauge their functionality and speed. Needless to say **Mr. Speaker**, the operation did not remotely resemble what has been portrayed in the local media.

During that visit the proprietors provided us with all the necessary documentation and approvals from the various Government and private agencies, the Department of Parks, the Transport Control Department (inclusive of insurance coverage for that very day) as well as confirmation of First Aid certification.

**Mr. Speaker**, this Government's view is that the Railway Trails can and should be for the use and enjoyment of the widest cross section of visitors and locals alike - and no one group should have exclusive rights to its use - it must be shared.

The plan to have guided educational tours - we believe will find favour with that constituency as well.

As such, **Mr. Speaker**, I am granting approval for a "*Licence to Use Vehicles on Government of Bermuda Property*" for a trial period of **one year**. The conditions of the licence are such that it will allow for termination of the licence if terms and conditions of operation are not adhered to.

Additionally, we will enter into a lease agreement with the operators for the rental of the former bus terminal at Beacon Hill. We believe that this initiative will find particular favour with our cruise visitors interested in cultural tourism.

**Mr. Speaker**, if at any time they are found to be acting in contravention of the agreement - it can be suspended or canceled in accordance with the Act.

**Mr. Speaker**, I cannot end this statement without commenting on the vision, steadfastness, detailed research and patience displayed by the Hollis family in this enterprise. Both the Minister of Transport and I were impressed with their depth of knowledge, desire to offer something different in the Bermuda experience and their commitment and love of this country. **Mr. Speaker**, I am convinced that given this opportunity and an approach of sharing - we all can continue to enjoy the Railway Trails.