

Editorial:

A Pressing Problem: The Economies of Time-Wasting

It is a matter of considerable concern that, at a time when speed has become of the essence, and when means of communications have reached lightening speeds, travel between Gozo and Malta has still remained largely at a snail's pace.

We are now giving serious consideration to spending half a billion euro to construct tunnels or build bridges to improve communications between the two islands. That could improve the situation considerably, at a considerable cost and at a considerable distance in the future.

What has never been given serious attention, by governments of either colour, is the fact that an immediate response is necessary. We cannot just sit back and wait for a long-term solution to a problem which can be improved, if not completely resolved, almost immediately.

I am of course referring to the horrendous experience to be faced every working day by Gozitan workers, students, and business people in their struggle to reach their destination at a reasonable hour. I speak with limited but typical experience on this matter. In order to give a talk at the University at 7 pm, I had to leave home at 4.30 of an afternoon. The return journey took almost as long.

Who in this day and age can cope with such an unreasonable situation? Who has all this time to waste? Time is money, and an hour wasted by



thousands of people every day soon mounts to a mountain of waste, and invisible 'Magħtab' which is equally destructive of economic and social existence.

Time was, generations ago, when a bus, distinct by its red colour, provided by the Post Office, provided an express service between the ferry and Valletta. Sixty years later there is no such facility. There is no link-up between ferry and bus. The time-table of the two means of transport seem to fly in different directions. There is no express service. The bus trundles on, stopping at every bus-stop, picking up shoppers or tourists in their swimming gear who have no particular urgency to reach their destination.

Time is money. Waste is to be abhorred. Wasting time is economic suicide.

All Gozitans have been let down by those whose responsibility it is to provide a rapid, efficient express service. Compared to the planned expenditure of millions on alternative transport procedures, the amount of money required to set up a couple of express buses on the hour, every hour during business hours, would be a pittance.

Not even in the largest metropolis around the world would the average worker be expected to spend five to six hours, more than half a working day, on actually travelling. Any other group of people, except for staid and easily assuaged Gozitans, would have been up in arms long ago, demanding equity, and a reasonable but urgent response to this situation.

No wonder that young Gozitans are 'voting with their feet' and leaving our island, to settle closer to work and to avoid the daily hassle and the unconscionable waste of time, time better spent attending to their business or with their families.

Maurice Cauchi