

MPs' cars take over pedestrian zone

No park and ride for parliamentarians

Matthew Xuereb



Part of Merchants Street in Valletta, which has been turned into a pedestrian zone, has become a car park for Members of Parliament and ministers.

The decision was taken last week following consultation between the whips of the two sides of the House and the Valletta local council, which agreed with the proposal since it would free up other parking spaces that could be used by shoppers and residents.

However, the Speaker of the House only appears to have been consulted after the decision was taken. When contacted, Michael Frendo said he had been informed about the new arrangement by means of a letter.

Asked for his position on the matter, Dr Frendo said he did have an opinion but preferred to express it during the House Business Committee meeting, when the letter he received would be brought to the committee's attention.

On Tuesday afternoon, workers were seen drilling holes in the lava paving laid just two years ago as part of the Valletta paving project, and fitting stainless steel plates on the ground to mark the parking bays.

A spokesman for the Transport Ministry confirmed that 70 parking spaces in Merchants Street and Market Square were being reserved for MPs.

The spokesman shot down any suggestion of damage to the newly laid paving, a project inaugurated in grand style prior to the last general election. She said cars and vans used by hawkers in the open-air market Monday to Saturday mornings drove through the same area.

“Hundreds of vehicles use it every day till 9.30 a.m. and again in the afternoon. Having MPs use a small part of it as well makes absolutely no difference. Merchants Street has been built to take the load of a truck as is clearly evidenced by the fact that it is used by Carnival floats with no damage at all,” she said.

Before yesterday, MPs used to park along Republic Street, part of Archbishop Street and the lower part of Merchants Street. Before St George’s Square was upgraded several months ago, it used to serve as their parking lot.

The spokesman said the ministry had not received any specific requests for parking spaces to be freed up or for the parliamentarians to be allocated designated parking spaces.

“It was not a request but an effort to try to ensure the least possible impact on businesses, residents and other users as well as to maximise the use of space in Valletta. All this while at the same time ensuring that Parliament functions effectively,” the spokesman said.

Asked what would happen when Parliament starts to convene in the morning, at a time when the space allocated to MPs would be taken up by market stalls, the spokesman said parliamentarians would go back to where they used to park prior to this new arrangement.

When contacted, Valletta mayor Alexei Dingli said the council had agreed with the arrangement as it would free up parking spaces for residents and people visiting the capital city.

He said the council had been asking for a solution to the problems created by MPs’ cars. “Parking there is not desirable but acceptable.

This is a temporary measure as we are talking about three evenings a week and until the new Parliament building is ready. Before, MPs, by default parked in areas reserved for residents...,” he said.

The ministry spokesman said the MPs will not be spared the CVA fee when they enter Valletta in their private cars.

The owner of a café at the corner of Market Square complained that the new arrangement undermined the investment he had poured into his property.


Edgar Mifsud, owner of CityPro Real Estate Cafe`, said he had invested heavily to upgrade the site in front of his shop and the encroachment area he had been granted, all part of a government project aimed at giving more life to Valletta in the evenings.

“Now, the parking area in St George’s Square has been shifted here for everyone to admire,” he said sarcastically.

John Mallia, who works in Valletta, argued that MPs should have been allocated parking facilities outside the capital city and used a park-and-ride concept to make their way to Parliament.

“MPs should be the first to set the example,” he said.

Comments


Ivan Cassar(1 week, 3 days ago) 

Alexei Dingli defines it as a “temporary measure”. But what will happen to the holes drilled in the lava paving when parliament finally moves out of the Palace of the Grand Master and this site is finally given back to the nation as a museum? The holes won't move.

John Mallia is right a park-and-ride system should have been devices for Mps without a driver while those having a driver could be dropped off and picked up even if this is all done at the taxpayers expense. It is a “temporary measure” after all. And yes “MPs should be the first to set the example”

J Galea(1 week, 3 days ago) 

What a lovely sight to grace the UNESCO World Heritage Site. You might as well have a building site.


n alamango(1 week, 3 days ago) 

why not use the park and ride sevice?


Joe Borg(1 week, 3 days ago) 

Donnu kien hemm KONSENSUS mill-ewwel fuq din

IDAHKUNIEX,... ghax se ninfetaq u jkolli mmur naghmel il-punti (jekk insib fejn nipparkja)

Doris Muscat(1 week, 4 days ago) 

Oh this is great!!! and the poor old residents who need to be collected by their children, have to stick to the times when the street is open (very specific times) or get a special permit for a few minutes to pick them up..... (that is if they manage to find the poles unlocked!!!) Equality....that is the name...

gcForte(1 week, 4 days ago) 

The sign says that the MP`s can only park in the evening. It makes sense somehow, because everybody knows that by 1800 hrs, Valletta goes to sleep. Regarding using park and ride,it makes no sense, considering that they have to do their job in the morning then had to rush like hell to do the part time job in parliament . Hee...Hee. :)
