

Valletta business community wants better access

by **FRANCESCA VELLA**

The Valletta business community has set up a committee with the view to collaborating with the government to improve access to the capital city and find solutions to the parking problem.

The committee consists of members from the Chamber of SMEs (GRTU), the Importers, Distributors and Retailers Economic Group within the Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, and the Republic Street Business Community Association.

Paul Fenech, the chairman of the new committee, told this newspaper that the current developments in Valletta are bound to have a negative impact on the business community.

"We are happy with the plans for Valletta," he said with reference to the Renzo Piano plans for City Gate, the new parliament building and the opera house site, "but we want to be proactive and ensure that certain blunders are avoided."

He said the plan for the removal of the road above City Gate is bound to have a disastrous impact on access to Valletta.

Speaking about the parking problem, Mr Fenech said that the Park & Ride car park was an excellent idea and has proven to be very popular, but it is too small.

"The government should invest further in the project by extending the car park," he said.

As for the Controlled Vehicular Access (CVA) system, Mr Fenech said the shops in Valletta end up being empty after lunchtime, so it might be a good idea to make parking within the CVA zone free of charge in the afternoon.

"Parking in Valletta is free after 5.30pm, but that is too late for people to go shopping, considering that shops start closing at 6.30pm."

He said the mindset that people do not need to park in Valletta (and that bicycles could be used instead) is ridiculous, because people who go shopping are after convenience. "We cannot go from one extreme to another," he said.

Asked about the committee's view on ways of bringing life to Valletta at night, he said

the situation is gradually improving, but certain decisions such as the one regarding the underground car park in St George's Square certainly don't work in favour of bringing life to the capital at night.

An underground car park had been planned, but passageways that possibly connect to the Palace were recently brought to light, and the plans were scrapped.
