

MEMORANDUM FOR SUBMISSION TO THE CABINETConstruction of a Road from Dwejra, Gozo

The Second Five Year Plan, 1964/9 includes a provision of £8,000 for the construction of a road from San Lawrenz to Dwejra to replace an existing country road which is excessively steep and inadequate for present day traffic requirements and hence to provide access to Dwejra, a picturesque spot frequented by tourists. The sum of £8,000 is barely enough for the first phase of the project. The total cost of the project is in the region of £60,000 (not including cost of road surfacing).

Two alternative designs were prepared by the Public Works Department for this road:-

Alternative Design shown on Plan B provides for a road about 4,300 feet long and entails the construction of a massive reinforced concrete viaduct spanning a valley. The viaduct is 400 feet long and has a maximum height of about 120 feet. The road as designed by-passes completely the existing road and would run on both sides of the valley and would in consequence render the existing roadway redundant necessitating its scrapping.

Alternative Design shown on drawing A is a modified version and provides for a length of road of about 1,900 feet, follows more or less the existing road, runs along one side of the valley and does not entail any major constructional requirements. The cost of this project is consequently far lower than the alternative project shown on Design B.

The design as per drawing A was approved by the Director of Public Works in the first week of February, 1966. Since there was an urgency to start work and spend the money voted for that financial year, a start was made without approaching the Gozo Civic Council. The matter was however soon raised in the Gozo Civic Council and the two Gozo Engineers of the Public Works Department were invited to meet the Council at a subsequent meeting. The Council were indifferent as to the design adopted as long as the District Committees of

Gharb and San Lawrenz

Gharb and San Lawrenz approved it. The next day members of the District Committees visited the Public Works Office at Gozo to inspect the two projects. They later on expressed in writing without any cogent reasons their disapproval of the design selected by the Public Works Department in favour of the alternative project shown on Drawing B. Work was in the meanwhile proceeding and it was stopped in March on instructions from the Minister of Works and Housing.

The Public Works Department favours project shown on Drawing A for the following reasons:-

(a) The primary objection against the adoption of Drawing B is one of cost. The total cost of the project recommended by the Public Works Department would be in the region of £60,000 (excluding surfacing). This figure would barely suffice for the construction of the bridge alone if Design B were to be followed. (The cost of implementing the design as per the Drawing B would as a matter of fact be about three times heavier than that of implementing the design shown on Design A.) Moreover the construction of the viaduct as shown on Design B would entail a major structural design and would necessitate the employment of Consultants from abroad with regards to design and actual construction.

(b) The road as shown on Design B, with a massive viaduct, would intrude obtrusively upon the landscape. The project as shown on Design A would blend satisfactorily with its surroundings.

(c) The purpose of the road is to provide access to the picturesque spot at Dwejra, Gozo, which incidentally attracts many tourists. On this score, it is doubtful whether it is realistic to spend the heavy sum of £60,000 (plus cost of road surfacing) on a modified road project, let alone carry out the cost prohibitive project as proposed by the Gozo Civic Council.

Work was resumed on Ministerial instruction in April/May, 1966 but was again suspended owing to a strong written protest by the Gozo Civic Council stating reasons, referred

to later on

to later on. The Gozo Civic Council on being asked to reconsider the matter, concluded against the project as recommended by the Public Works Department with a majority of five members present, against two, with five abstentions. Two members were absent. (The Acting Director of Public Works was given to understand by the Chairman, Gozo Civic Council that those members (seven in all) who abstained or were absent from the sitting were in favour of the project. The information the Public Works Department received suggests that had the Vote been taken by secret ballot the result would have been different; however the Gozo Civic Council Constitution prescribes voting by show of hands.

Hereunder are enumerated the objections raised by the Council in their letter dated 3rd June, 1966, with the comments of the Public Works Department against each:-

(a) Gozo Civic Council members contend that the road design recommended by the Public Works Department, Design A, would have very steep gradients, which would render nugatory the purpose of improving the existing road.. They claim that the alternative design as shown on Design B (with bridge) would eliminate steep gradients.

It is a fact that the gradients of the road as per Design A (without bridge) are slightly steeper than those of road shown on Design B (with bridge). The difference in gradients is however slight and negligible. As a matter of fact the steepest levels in the road as designed without bridge are 1:8.027 for short lengths, the levels for similar lengths of road as designed with bridge are 1:9, a very minor improvement, almost insignificant.

Gradients vary and are not completely eliminated, which ever of the two alternative designs is adopted, as a drop of about 260 feet has to be made good. The Public Works Department is however of the opinion that the road as shown on Design A (without bridge) would be adequate and a marked improvement over the present road to Dwejra.

(b) The Gozo Civic Council contend that the modified road design shown on Design A would wind too much and would be dangerous to traffic using it at two points. The road

design shown on Design B, they claim, would eliminate all danger to traffic.

The Public Works Department contends that some bends are necessary to improve gradients taking into consideration the heavy fall in levels which has to be made good. The road shown on Design B (with bridge) would as a matter of fact have one bend too.

The Public Works Department does not agree that the new road project as recommended by it would present any peril or difficulty to traffic using it. It would conform to accepted standards of road design. As a matter of interest one may state that the present road, though far from ideal, and despite its excessive steepness did not have a single road accident during the last twenty years, in so far as it is known.

(c) Members of the Gozo Civic Council claimed that the road as shown on Design B (with bridge) would serve the interests of agriculture and fisheries and would open up the landscape for sightseers. The Public Works Department feels that this claim does not hold any water. It has been ascertained that neither project would minimise or enhance the scanty extent of land under cultivation in the area. As regards benefits to fishermen, it was ascertained that Dwejra Bay is patronised by a single bona-fide fisherman. As regards sightseeing, the surrounding land is barren and does not offer any scope for such purpose. Moreover by intruding on the landscape the road as designed on Design B (with bridge) would detract rather than enhance the beauty of its surroundings.

Finally it is submitted that a sum of about £6,000 has already been spent on the construction of the road. This sum will be wasted unless the work proceeds as shown on Design A as recommended by the Public Works Department.

Hon. Ministers are requested to approve whether the work on the construction of the road to Dwejra should proceed as shown on Design A as recommended by the Public Works Department or as shown on Drawing B as proposed by the Gozo

Civic Council.

L-ARKIVI NAZZJONALI TA' MALTA

Civic Council). If the latter design is chosen additional funds will have to be sought. A decision regarding the continuation of the construction of this road is a matter of urgency, in view of the considerable labour force which the Department employs in the Gozo district and for which the Department has to provide continuous useful employment.

29th July, 1966.

L-ARKIVI NAZZJONALI TA' MALTA