

Road use

POOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT UPTAKE

• Only one in 25 car owners in Tenerife use public transport on a regular basis, according to experts.

The very low figure was revealed in a seminar on the environmental implications of the island's transport habits held in La Laguna recently. Fernando Méndez, who works for a well-known firm of consultants, said 2.4 million trips were made every day on the island, almost 80 per cent of them by residents. The seminar explored ways of deterring private vehicle use but concluded that without "serious incentives and penalties", such as bus and tram fare subsidies and higher car parking charges, the picture is unlikely to change.

Among other solutions tabled were minibuses to connect outlying districts of big towns with the centres and more bus lanes.

La Laguna University lecturer Rosa González said that the Canary Islands was the region in Spain where CO2 emissions from road transport had increased highest in recent years.



STEPHEN JOHNSON

In a gilded cage

Recent events such as the detention of six British soldiers in Lanzarote for a violent affray in a local restaurant has shocked many and seen an outpouring, in some quarters, against the 'drunken British tourist'. However what happens next to the six men in detention and whether they, in fact, remain in prison while awaiting trial will also be closely watched by many concerned British individuals in Spain.

Stephen Johnson's enforced extended holiday in Tenerife has been described in the British press as a man 'trapped in Paradise' and 'left in limbo', and the truth would be that for this English businessman in his late 50s, who has been on bail in Tenerife since January 2008, in

relation to a murder case, it's anything but pleasant. When Stephen finally does get to leave Tenerife for good, it is doubtful that he will be coming back any time soon, nor will his extended family, though they do currently make the trip to see the man, known by his mates as Stepy, who is living under what is in effect a self-enforced house arrest since his involvement in an incident which saw a young Moroccan man lose his life, Stepy suffer a horrific head injury, and a number of arrests.

The case revolved around an altercation in the Patch area in the early hours of the morning on January 12th 2008, when Stepy says he went to the aid of a Briton who was being attacked. During the ensuing melee he was hit over the head, staggered away to get help, and was arrested on the street by police. He was sub-

sequently accused of the murder of a 25 year old Moroccan involved in the incident, and was released on bail. Given that he owned a property here (a holiday apartment in Playa de Las Américas), and had a clean record both here and in the UK, the courts granted bail, though his passport was handed over and he must now sign on, without fail, twice monthly. In fact Stepy was granted leave to return to the UK just last October as he was able to convince the judges that he needed to sort out his coach business and renew vital licences, or risk losing all. The two week trip also gave him the opportunity to see his granddaughter for the first time and check up on his elderly mother, and he returned when stipulated, and handed back his passport to the Spanish authorities. He says he was "never tempted

to do a runner...I want to clear my name", he added.

Stepy and his wife Joan are suffering the stresses of the long-drawn out process, both physically and mentally, and one of their children has suffered a nervous breakdown. For all concerned it's the combination of the length of time the judicial process is taking not to mention the long absences from his family that Stepy suffers – his wife crosses over to see him when she can afford to (financially as well as in terms of free time) as she needs to be in the UK to work to keep the family business afloat.

When they read our interview with the mothers of the three British lads, John and David Heyfron and 'Chucky' Guvener, who are on remand in Tenerife II prison awaiting trial on an assault charge since last Summer they saw many similarities in the case, and will, no doubt, be watching with interest to see what happens to the six Welsh Guard soldiers detained in Lanzarote. If, as is rumoured, UK's Ministry of Defence is working to secure a bail release which would allow the six men home to the UK until a trial date is set, the families of the three boys in prison here as well as Stepy Johnson would be more than annoyed at what would be seen as preferential treatment.

Jago Russel, the chief executive with Fair Trials International told us, "Fair Trials International receives numerous requests for assistance from people detained in Spain for months or even years awaiting trial. We often find that pre-trial detention is particularly lengthy for non-nationals who are often refused bail when a Spanish national would have been freed. For a person who has been convicted of no criminal offence such serious restrictions on their right to liberty are of grave concern."

Bus station fires

ARSON OR ACCIDENT?

• There has been a series of new, small fires at the bus terminal in Puerto de la Cruz in January and February.

Closed down by the council last October as a result of its serious state of deterioration, the bus station is becoming the centre for discontent and suspicion. It's been surrounded by controversy since it was built over thirty years ago and is considered to be very ugly indeed - not at all what you would expect to find in a pleasant old tourist resort. Very soon after its opening it began to show defects in design and construction. The building and its underground car park have been plagued by leaking roofs and falling masonry for years. Since it was closed to avoid risks of injury or damage, and

with a view to carry out reforms at some future stage, it has been in the public eye for two reasons. One is that traders with shop premises on the outside of the building don't want to close without proper compensation and are being supported by the political opposition in the town in putting pressure on the governing coalition. The other is the matter of the fires. Although they are only minor and could be caused by drug addicts who continue to use the dark corners to carry out their business, the sheer number of fires is causing suspicion as to whether they are being caused intentionally so as to cause political trouble. The shopkeepers have accused the governing group of abandoning them to their fate. They feel unprotected they claim.

Lidl

Shops and cars

Much fanfare and publicity heralded the opening of various German hard discount Lidl stores early in February and the results in terms of clients flocking to take advantage of cheaper shopping and inauguration prizes were spectacular.

Such was the success at the Lidl shop at Las Arenas in the Orotava Valley that a massive traffic jam took many drivers by surprise and caused a certain amount of head shaking as they took the usually fluid lane from San Nicolas to Las Arenas. The stretch of road normally avoids the jams created as people head for the San Jerónimo and Alcampo commercial areas above the motorway, but vehicles were taking up to twenty minutes



New businesses also need new infrastructures

to move along a straight which usually takes just 30 seconds.

As the days passed, however, the situation became less problematic as the mad initial rush to inspect a new store just after pay day at the beginning of the month subsided. The traffic jams were

another reminder of how the authorities often ignore the consequences of new commercial developments without thought for efficient infrastructures or for traditional traders who lose out, often have to close down and leave employees without jobs. A new Lidl store is

to open soon in the centre of Tacoronte. Whilst central traders welcome the roll on effect the Lidl shop might have on their own businesses, they also fear that traffic in Tacoronte, already chaotic without proper parking facilities, will make life even more difficult.