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PRESS RELEASE

Support for improved transport access to Valletta

The Valletta Alive Foundation has expressed support to Government's strategy to reduce traffic congestion to Valletta and Floriana. The Foundation agrees with Government's approach whereby the park and ride is seen as part of an overall strategy aimed at improving accessibility to Valletta. The vitality of any city relies heavily on good access, more so if that city is the commercial, political, administrative and cultural capital of this country. Good access is also vital to Valletta residents.

The Foundation notes that, as part of this strategy, a number of streets in Valletta will be pedestrianised. This will result in a significant improvement of the urban environment of the city.

The park and ride will make it easier for people to come to the City for shopping, to do errands or for leisure. This is subject to the proviso that the scheme is well managed and the pricing for park and ride will be reasonable.

The Government's strategy for Valletta will resolve the long-standing problem of the market in Merchants Street. The market is to be relocated elsewhere. Shops and businesses in Merchants Street has seen their investment being compromised because of the manner the operation of the market has made access to them more difficult.

The Foundation urges Government to take a no-nonsense approach in the implementation of the scheme on matters relating to, for example, the removal of all reserved parking, proper sizing of the monty stalls and the validation of genuine Valletta residents.

There is the risk, that if the pricing is too high, Valletta might actually become less accessible. For this reason, Government must retain full control of the pricing level of the park and ride and vehicle entry control system. The Foundation proposes the setting up of a committee to monitor the level of accessibility and pricing.

Over-insistence by Government to recoup all the costs may jeopardize the strategy. There has to be on the part of Government, a willingness to cover part of the running cost, at least for the first few years. When one considers the economic, social and cultural value of Valletta, this money will be well spent.

The project should be seen as the precursor to further improvements to Valletta including the provision of more off-street parking, the extension of the pedestrian areas to Freedom Square, St. George's Square and other

secondary urban spaces. There needs to be investment in paving for newly pedestrianised areas. Streets and pavements in the more residential parts of Valletta need to be improved. More effort is required to prevent littering.

Pending the re-introduction of the Baracca lift, there needs to be an efficient shuttle or bus service between the cruise passenger terminal and Valletta centre. The redevelopment of the opera house site, a comprehensive upgrading of City Gate and the rehabilitation of Fort St. Elmo should be given greater priority by Government in the coming months and years.