

2024.05.21

Deputy S.M. Ahier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding legislation on the use of electric scooters on roads and pavements. (OQ.91/2024)

Will the Minister advise the Assembly whether he intends to revise legislation regarding the use of electric scooters on roads and pavements, and whether such legislation would include provisions for the wearing of helmets and third-party insurance cover?

The Connétable of St. John (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I thank the Deputy for his question. At this time I do not intend to revise legislation to legalise electric scooters on our roads and pavements. I believe we have other priorities. While I recognise the potential benefits of electric scooters, significant concerns remain regarding safety, infrastructure and enforcement. I believe that further studies and careful planning are necessary to address these issues comprehensively. Ensuring the safety and well-being of all road and pavement users remains a priority. Therefore, I do not plan to revise the current legislation at this stage, but will continue to monitor developments, experiences and evidence from other regions to inform future decisions.

3.3.1 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

In regard to other regions, is the Minister aware that in Ireland the Minister for Transport brought in regulations, which came into effect yesterday, that children under 16 will be banned from using e-scooters in public places, the speed of those scooters would be limited, and there would be prohibition of passengers on the scooters, and that they had to be fitted with an audible warning device. Does the Minister believe that such regulations should be brought in here as well?

The Connétable of St. John:

I was not aware of the new legislation brought in yesterday in Ireland. My understanding is that electric scooters are currently illegal to operate on public roads and pavements in Jersey, and that remains the case.

3.3.2 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Does the Minister recognise it is important for children to be wearing helmets when on non-motorised vehicles, such as bikes, inline skates, scooters and skateboards?

The Connétable of St. John:

I believe it is a legal requirement for youngsters, I think under the age of 14, to wear a helmet when they are cycling. I would highly recommend the use of a helmet for any other wheeled transport, not only for youngsters but also for adults. As a former competitive cyclist who never wore a helmet, I will not get on my bike without one these days, and I highly recommend a good quality helmet to anybody.

3.3.3 Deputy H.L. Jeune:

Can the Minister advise how he will encourage the use of helmets, especially with users of Jersey's ever-increasing stock of skateparks, and could the Minister explain what safety measures are being taken when designing skateparks in this regard?

The Connétable of St. John:

The best we can do is to educate people. We have signage up at our skatepark advising people of the importance of wearing helmets. Skateparks, in my experience, are not supervised and therefore it is very difficult to do much more than we do. We do have youth workers at the skatepark and I would like to think that they would encourage best practice as well.

3.3.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I am disappointed that the Minister is perhaps shying away - I do not know if it is on advice - from electric scooters, which are effectively being sold by businesses around the Island. We are being told that they can only be used on private property but good luck if you have property big enough to use an electric scooter on. Can the Minister answer what the fundamental difference is between a mobility scooter, which might have 3 or 4 wheels that can take up the whole of a pavement, which can sometimes be souped up and go at big

speeds, or a very thin 2-wheeled mobility scooter which a youngster might nimbly be able to use and avoid any obstacles that come in its path?

The Connétable of St. John:

It is an interesting question. I would probably say the difference is choice. People that use a mobility scooter have little choice. I am sure they wish they could cycle or walk from A to B, but sadly they cannot and therefore need to use a mobility scooter. People using an electric scooter often will have choice. They could walk or cycle.

3.3.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

From a legal point of view, where does that leave the suggestion of third-party insurance and helmets, given the fact that damage can be caused either by a mobility scooter or an electric scooter?

The Connétable of St. John:

The original question was about scooters. I would need to seek advice about mobility scooters.

3.3.6 Deputy J. Renouf:

We seem to be struck in a strange sort of bind here in the sense that we know that electric scooters are being used, but the Minister does not intend to do anything to deal with the way in which they are being used.

What is his strategy for dealing with the fact that electric scooters are being used on the roads? What is going to be done about that?

The Connétable of St. John:

I believe that is a question for the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs because the policing of the roads is a policing matter rather than infrastructure matter. An area that I am working on with officers is to legalise electric bikes that can go over 15 miles an hour. I have seen this work very well in Switzerland where the bikes have a number plate, the rider needs insurance and a helmet, and that is where our focus is on at present; to try and make those people who are using bikes which are not currently legal to make them legal.

3.3.7 Deputy J. Renouf:

That is a very interesting piece of information from the Minister, and I applaud that work. Properly regulated use of more powerful e-bikes is to be welcomed. But is the answer with electric scooters not staring him in the face? Why not simply apply the same sort of approach to electric scooters as he is planning to do for electric bicycles?

The Connétable of St. John:

The question is around resource. My priority is to make those electric bikes legal. Then, as I said earlier, follow what is happening in other jurisdictions. We have heard earlier from the original questioner about what is happening in Ireland. I was not aware of that, and I will make myself aware of those developments.

3.3.8 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Can the Minister confirm: are electric scooters allowed on the Les Quennevais Skatepark and around the track at Les Quennevais?

The Connétable of St. John:

That is a very good question; I wish the Attorney General was here to help me. I do not honestly know the answer to that question.

3.3.9 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Could I ask the Minister if he would follow that up and perhaps let us know?

The Connétable of St. John:

I will gladly do that, thank you.

3.3.10 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Would the Minister work with the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs to ensure that the enforcement and reality of using scooters day to day on Jersey roads will come together, and would the Minister engage with Home Affairs?

The Connétable of St. John:

Yes, and indeed I have met with the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, the chief of police and the head of roads policing in the past, and on that very day that we met there had been some confiscations of illegal scooters and such like.

3.3.11 Deputy I. Gardiner:

If enforcement would not work, and we have seen for years that enforcement did not work, would the Minister consider to find a way that electric scooters could be used on the Island while we have enforcement in place as well?

The Connétable of St. John:

I will repeat my earlier answer. The priority is being given to cycles while we monitor what is happening in other jurisdictions, particularly Ireland given the latest information.

3.3.12 Deputy T.A. Coles of St. Helier South:

The Minister makes reference to motorised electric bikes that can go over 15 miles an hour that require number plates and insurance and helmets in Switzerland. Are these not just called motorbikes?

The Deputy Bailiff:

The question was on electric scooters, but are you prepared to answer this question?

The Connétable of St. John:

I am prepared to answer that question. No, they are not called motorbikes, they do have a different name which I cannot remember what it is. They are like an old mobilet, Sir, which I am sure you and I can both recall. [Laughter]

3.3.13 Deputy T.A. Coles:

As we are in Alternative Transport Week, the Minister gave a briefing to the Environment Panel that if everybody used an alternative form of transport one day a week we would have the same amount of traffic

on the road as during school holidays. Would it not be better to encourage these electric scooters as an alternative form of transport to get more people out of their cars?

The Connétable of St. John:

I apologise, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Not at all.

The Connétable of St. John:

It is Alternative Transport Week, and I would encourage all Members, if they are able to, to try and use alternative transport on at least one day this week. We have to make sure that things are safe, we have to consider all road users in the round, and that includes pedestrians. At this time if we are not able to get this across the line we will look for additional information. But as I said many times, my priority is to make the electric cycles legal.

3.3.14 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Since it is Alternative Transport Week, would the Minister consider allowing a trial zone where the use of e-scooters on roads and pavements would be permitted, as has happened in other jurisdictions?

The Connétable of St. John:

I am not aware of another jurisdiction our size that has done that. I am aware of jurisdictions where they use geofencing where they can manage the speed of those scooters in a particular area. I am happy to consider all those ideas and happy to discuss with the Deputy.