

2.6 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the steps to be taken to ensure against the ‘hoarding’ of taxi registration plates:

Would the Minister explain what steps, if any, the Department for Transport and Technical Services takes to ensure against certain taxi companies abusing their positions by hoarding plates and is he aware of a growing feeling of discontent among taxi drivers in relation to this practice?

The Connétable of St. Brelade (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Each taxi cab licence is subject to a number of conditions. Invariably there is a condition which requires a taxi cab to undertake a certain minimum mileage in the year of licence. In the past year all but 3 of the taxi cabs licence to companies complied with the minimum mileage requirement and for the 3 that did not meet the mileage there was a satisfactory explanation of why this was not achieved. The Deputy is already aware from information provided him that the number of restricted taxi cab or company plates has been reduced in the past few years and the number of restricted taxi cab licences awarded to individual taxi drivers increased. Neither I nor the department has received any representations from taxi drivers alleging that companies are hoarding plates. If the Deputy has information confirming any taxi cab companies not operating licences awarded to that company in compliance with the relevant legislation I would be happy to investigate upon receipt of the information.

2.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I do welcome the invitation to share this information. The Minister will be aware that it is not all taxi drivers. It seems to be the representations that I have received are from owner-drivers who work for these companies and who are quite understandably, perhaps, scared to speak out because what they perceive as an almost monopoly with certain companies having many of the plates. I would certainly appreciate the chance to meet up with the Minister and perhaps with some taxi drivers anonymously so we can thrash out the issues. Does he acknowledge though that while the number of red plates in circulation have gone down from 2005 by, I think, roughly 17 per cent we do need to have a further look because the actual amount of companies has gone down from 16 to only 3, which is more than an 80 per cent drop in the actual number of companies that run cabs.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I am happy to meet with the Deputy at any time.

2.6.2 Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

Really to reiterate what Deputy Tadier said because I have also been contacted with allegations of one firm holding more than 30 plates. I too would be interested to know what the Minister thinks can be done about what is really manipulating the market and, as Deputy Tadier said, there is real pressure and fear being felt by some people. I too would welcome the chance to speak with him if possible.

The Bailiff:

What was your question, Deputy?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can he reassure us about how this artificial manipulation of the market is taking place and being allowed?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Once again, it is difficult for me to comment without evidence, but as I suggested earlier, I am happy to meet with the Deputy on the matter.

2.6.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Could the Minister tell Members what the minimum annual mileage is for taxi cabs or taxis in general across the Island and is the Minister happy that that minimum is sufficient?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The minimum mileage is 20,000 miles and it is considered to be about correct based on previous consultations with the industry.

2.6.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Given that the Minister has given that reply, many travellers and the like within the Island will do 20,000 miles. Is he still happy that ... and I am aware of taxi drivers who, in fact, do double that amount of mileage as my time on public services in its day. We had people doing double that mileage, is he still really happy that that 20,000 baseline is high enough?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

No, I think it is correct in that one has to allow a taxi driver to work for a reasonable amount of time during the day and one would not expect them to work in excess of the normal working hours, and that, it is felt by the department - and once again as a result of consultation - to be the right amount of mileage which is achievable.

2.6.5 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

I fear my question is just adding on to the issue. I think maybe perhaps there needs to be a resurrection of the review of taxis but I would like to ask a question in regard to the rank cabs and whether or not these rank cabs who have got licences to drive taxis without restriction, whether or not there is any ongoing monitoring of those and whether or not the plate is issued to an individual or to a company in those circumstances? What measures are taken to ensure that that individual is the one that is driving the vehicle and what, if any, medical examinations are undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that that individual is capable of sustaining that plate over a long period of time?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The 141 controlled taxi owners have annual medical tests and they are able to employ an individual on a proper contract of employment to assist him with the driving of the vehicle. Once again they are subject to the annual 20,000 mileage regulations.

2.6.6 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Could I press on that issue because this is where I am coming from? If an individual can own a plate and can hire out that plate to another person, are there restrictions on the number of people that they can hire it out to and what medical examinations do those individuals have to undertake and what checks are made upon those because I

have certainly got into taxis that have shown pictures of people that are not driving the vehicles?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

All drivers ought to undertake a medical examination the same way as a driver, but within the law a controlled taxi cab driver is able to employ an individual on a proper contract of employment, so it is not a hiring arrangement, it is an employee/employer arrangement.

2.6.7 The Deputy of St. John:

May I put a final question? Given that the Minister has made a statement that a contract can be drawn up between a taxi driver and a driver does he still believe 20,000 miles for that vehicle is sufficient given that many people in this room will do that on an annual holiday to the Alps a couple of times a year.

The Bailiff:

This is the third time you have put the same question.

The Deputy of St. John:

But he had not told us that 2 people could drive the vehicle. Now we are finding out that 2 persons can drive a vehicle the 20,000 should be per driver not per vehicle.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly that would be impossible for the department to monitor but my view is that 20,000 miles is the appropriate amount of distance for a vehicle and the comment that comes back from the industry is this is the amount that really is achievable if they are to maintain decent working hours, and I can understand this. Notwithstanding that remark, I think, it is time for a review of the taxi service and the department will be looking towards consulting with the public, as well as with the taxi industry as how the service may be improved within the Island.