

3.13 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the number of foot and vehicle passengers using Condor's Weymouth service in a full year:

Would the Minister advise how many foot and vehicle passengers, on average, use Condor's Weymouth service in a full year?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

During the period from 2009 to 2011, the sea route between Jersey and Weymouth carried an average of 100,000 passengers and 35,000 vehicles per annum. During the sudden closure of Weymouth in 2012 for essential repair work to its harbour wall passenger numbers fell to just 2,886 and 1,230 for vehicles. During the period when Weymouth was closed passengers and vehicles migrated to the alternative ports of Portsmouth and Poole. Overall the volumes to and from the U.K. have remained stable demonstrating that whether 2 or 3 ports are offered by the operator passengers with an interest in visiting Jersey will continue to travel from whichever port is available and is effectively marketed.

3.13.1 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Given those numbers, does the Minister not agree that should the company decide to choose a ferry which can no longer enter that port a considerable number of people will be inconvenienced and therefore does he not believe that the company should in fact be looking to choose ferries that fit the port and not the other way round?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

No, I am afraid I do not agree with the Deputy. I think the statistics make it clear that during the period where we have had the opportunity to see in real time what might happen if Weymouth were not in operation, the numbers drop dramatically and in fact passengers migrated to both Poole and Portsmouth with virtually no loss in terms of passenger numbers. So I think that makes it clear as to what would happen in real time and, as such, I do not necessarily see there is a problem, although I have stated previously that the operator Condor have looked and continue to look at working with Weymouth in order to help them to facilitate the changes that might be necessary to the port facilities. But that is a considerable investment.

3.13.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Therefore the Minister can confirm that whether or not Weymouth remains a port of choice for Condor is utterly irrelevant to the final decision, which he will be taking by which date?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I am not quite sure how the Deputy managed to weave that in. No, what I am saying is that we have had the opportunity to see what happens when Portsmouth is not in operation, it does not seem to affect the Island. There are obviously inconveniences, probably for a number of Islanders who like to go further west, but generally in terms of numbers there is not a great difference. As far as the agreement, I have said the Islands are negotiating with Condor with regard to a longer term agreement. Those negotiations have been to date constructive. We hope to be in a position to make an announcement by the end of this month, providing there are no showstoppers in the interim period.

3.13.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

Is the Minister not concerned that ... he mentioned Poole and Portsmouth but of course the fast ferries only go to Poole, not to Portsmouth, as far as I know. Is he not concerned that by doing away with Weymouth you end up with just one destination and then if there is an

industrial infrastructure problem we have no fast ferry running at all or indeed by having one fast ferry you are replacing 2; if that should break down again, you have no fast ferry service at all. Is this not taking a huge gamble?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I think I hopefully have made it clear that all parties are keen to see Weymouth continue. Nobody wants to see Weymouth close. However there are some practicalities around the cost of changes that will be necessary to the Weymouth Harbour. I can tell the Deputy and Members that, for example, Condor have a large number of staff at Weymouth and around that area so from their point of view, from a practical perspective, they would obviously like that port to remain open. Customer service that has been undertaken, however, do demonstrate that the balance of customers using the services seem to have a preference for Poole and/or Portsmouth. I take his points about risk to service but I think, all things considered, there are 2 options and I think they can adapt to facilitate the requirements in the future.