

3.9 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding targets for vehicular traffic reduction: [1(272)]

What current targets, if any, is the Minister working to in terms of vehicular traffic reduction; are those targets likely to be met; and, if not, what measures, if any, is he considering taking to reduce car usage?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

Traffic reduction targets were set not by me, or indeed my predecessor, but by the States in 2010 when it approved the Sustainable Transport Policy. The targets were to reduce peak hour traffic levels to and from St. Helier by at least 15 per cent by 2015. This was to be achieved by increasing bus users and cyclists by 100 per cent and walking by 20 per cent. As already reported, it is not surprising that the targets were not achieved by 2015, as the States accepted an amendment to the S.T.P. (Sustainable Transport Programme) in that the cost of motoring should not be disproportionately increased until a viable alternative method of transport is available to all, without adjusting, and in doing so they did not, at the same time, adjust the targets. In spite of this, we are trying to deliver the amended S.T.P. by investing and improving our bus service and making better facilities for people to be able to walk and to cycle. But, to be clear, the original targets were unrealistic and, indeed, remain so. The States decision not to increase the cost of motoring, and in that I mean the cost of car parking in St. Helier, being the main cause.

3.9.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Of course, the Minister forgets to say that he allowed bus fares to go up as well during that time, so not only was driving a car not more expensive, but catching the bus became more expensive under his leadership as Minister. That, perhaps, has an influence. But, could he clarify what the actual figure is; if we have not met the 15 per cent target by 2015 where are we at today?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Just to correct the Deputy: if one uses the AvanchiCard as a payment system that is still cheaper than the fares were back in 2010, I believe, for bus travel. I believe it is now £1.55; it used to be £1.60. What we are trying to do, and what we are trying to aim for, given the premise that we have the work in, so what does “good” look like? In my view, “good” looks like - given the increase in our population, particularly since 2010 - no worsening of our congestion in the morning. We have a marginal 1.6 per cent improvement, but that is not good enough and we are aiming to do better.

3.9.2 The Constable of St. Helier:

I am pleased to hear the Minister is looking at the viable alternatives that the States called for in 2010 and, indeed, we can all see evidence of them in the improved cycleways that have been provided, particularly in Parishes like St. Lawrence and Grouville. However, I would like to know a bit more about these targets. If it was a good target in 2010 to reduce our traffic levels by 15 per cent, what is the target now if it is unrealistic? Will the Minister be coming back with a revised S.T.P. that will have new targets that we can all together aim at?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Just to clarify to the Constable. We are improving the cycle routes in St. Clement, in St. Saviour, in St. Lawrence, in Grouville, in St. Peter, in St. Mary and, indeed, in St. Helier. Will I bring back new targets? I do not want to waste the States Members’ time on debating targets, because if they are going to be realistic, a realistic target is no worsening of the current

situation. As our population grows, if we can cope with the current levels of congestion, which are, to be frank, bad for us but when you look elsewhere, particularly in the U.K., they are not too bad. If we can live with the current levels of congestion and receive no worsement, with an increasing population, then I see that as good.

The Constable of St. Helier:

Could I ask a supplementary? The States have adopted a Strategic Plan, which has the environment as one of its key pillars. Is the Minister really saying that this government regards the *status quo* in terms of not reducing traffic congestion as acceptable?

[10:45]

Surely a government committed to environmental improvement will, at least, have a target of 5 per cent reduction, or something to bring to this Assembly for debate.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

It is all good having a target, but if the Minister, or the Ministers involved, do not have the tools to be able to deliver that target then it is pointless setting one. Without being able to substantially increase the cost of motoring - and I mean the cost of parking in St. Helier - for all Islanders, not just those using public car parking, but also those using private parking, then we are not going to see a reduction even of 5 per cent. I do not think the Island has the appetite to bring in such charges and increase the cost of motoring.

3.9.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I think the word the Minister is looking for is “deterioration”. Nonetheless, I ask routinely about the provision of the Hoppa bus, or its equivalent, in the town and surroundings. I am given assurances, regularly, by the Minister that things are developing. Will he outline what developments have taken place on the provision of an in-town Hoppa bus, or its equivalent?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

A Hoppa bus service within St. Helier, within the ring-road of St. Helier, will not improve necessarily the congestion at peak traffic hours, because the congestion is caused by those coming from outside of St. Helier into the town. We have had detailed discussions with the bus provider, so has the Parish. At this moment in time, a Hoppa bus service, as described by Deputy Southern, is simply not viable. Not unless we want to increase, dramatically, the subsidy that is already some £4.5 million, off the top of my head. It is certainly £4 million per year that we currently subsidise the bus service.

3.9.4 The Deputy of Grouville:

Is there not something contradictory about the Ministers for Environment and Infrastructure? On the one hand the infrastructure levy is going to seek to do away with the eastern cycle route contribution and yet the Minister for Infrastructure is complaining that he does not have the right tools to reduce the car and increase other modes of transport.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

The one will replace the other. So, we would have a bigger pot of money generated from the Minister for Environment, as opposed to the very narrow band that we currently have for the eastern cycle route. Even if we do manage to complete an eastern cycle route, that is not significantly going to change the congestion. In the morning it will help, as the other schemes that we do, but we will not get down to levels of a 5 per cent reduction, let alone a 15 per cent reduction, without using economic differentials for the cost of parking in St. Helier.

3.9.5 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Although the Minister should be applauded with the success of the bus service, taxis, perhaps, is another matter. Could the Minister update us as to where you are with the taxi negotiations, because, clearly, there is an issue, because we had a mini debate earlier about unofficial taxis? There is, clearly, a demand for much more flexible ways of transport other than a bus and other than a taxi. Has the Minister given consideration to that and, perhaps, a revolution in taxi services is what is required? Is he brave enough to take that on, because he is already brave with the taxi drivers?

The Bailiff:

I rule that out of order. The use of taxis is nothing to do with reducing car usage.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I will not ask questions about the failed population policy, which the Minister is blaming for a failure to meet his own targets. That is, perhaps, for another day and, perhaps, he can take that up with his ministerial colleagues. But I suppose the question is: has he exhausted all the mechanisms that he thinks he has at his disposal to reduce car ownership, because the response he has given today sounds like he has resigned to the situation not improving, which is unfortunate.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not believe that the Deputy means car ownership, I think he means car usage.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I did.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I just wanted to highlight that population, when the targets were set in 2010, has increased. That is not an excuse for us not doing more. It is just identifying a fact that the targets were unrealistic. We have not exhausted everything. Last year we tried what we thought was going to be a 3-year scheme for our car to cycle. We managed to do that in one year. That scheme has just come to an end and we are going to assess its suitability and we may come back with a similar scheme when we have the funding to do so. We are looking at lots of different measures to persuade people out of their cars and on to either public transport, or on to their feet, or on to 2 wheels.