

2019.09.10

**16 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding electric buses: (OQ.208/2019)**

What criteria are being used to judge the success of the electric bus trial; and what influence does the Minister have over the decision on whether, or not, to increase the number of electric buses in the Island's fleet?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

The electric double-decker bus, which arrived in Jersey in August 2019, is a demonstration vehicle that its manufacturer is lending to LibertyBus for the purpose of carrying out in-service trials on our bus network. This is so that the appropriateness of this form of motored power can be evaluated in-service on Jersey's roads, traffic and topography. LibertyBus have a contractual obligation to investigate the use of alternative technologies. The electric double-decker bus is a tangible example of how this requirement is being met. The decision as to how and in what combination to invest in which low-carbon propulsion technology is a blending of LibertyBus's operational expertise and how best to achieve the Government's strategic objective to lower the Island's footprint. The contract facilitates partnership working between my officers and LibertyBus to determine how the best effect can be achieved. I am delighted to advise that this is continuing to deliver impressive growth in-service with passenger numbers currently 5.5 per cent ahead of 2018 and forecast to exceed 5 million trips before the end of this year. In terms of my influence therefore, ultimately, as the client, the contract must serve Government's purpose through the powers vested in my office.

**3.16.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I am minded to ask the same question again, to be quite frank, because there was absolutely no answer to how the trial will be evaluated and the influence that the Minister will have over the decision being made and it is very difficult to sit here as a backbencher and not do that. I will continue. How does the Minister envisage electric buses being funded if the trial, by whatever means, is successful?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

At the moment, we just have one electric bus, which is on loan at no charge from the manufacturer to LibertyBus, so there is no cost involved for the States of Jersey, whatsoever. I am not sure who is paying the shipping fees for the bus, whether that is the bus operator, or LibertyBus, but there is no cost to the States of Jersey. Evaluation-wise that will be done between myself, my officers, who are very experienced in this department and LibertyBus, to find the best way forward. There are several alternatives to electric buses, such as hydrogen, which also may be explored in the future, but the costs at the moment are prohibitive. So, it is very much an experiment to see how it runs and, like everything else, when something is relatively new, they are extremely expensive and I believe that the double-decker electric bus is approximately £145,000 more expensive than the conventional diesel model. But this is all being taken into account and when something is new it is more expensive; hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, costs will come down.

**3.16.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

While the intention is right to get over an electric bus, does the Minister agree that Jersey's similarities with London, in terms of topography and demography, are not necessarily that similar? When 11 of our 12 Parishes in the Island are twins with Normandy and if we go to Normandy and see the smaller electric buses that they have there, would he not consider intervening as Minister,

talking to some of our Norman and perhaps Breton colleagues about how they use their small bus services, which are clean and which are frequent and could circulate in the Island and fit on Jersey's roads for a change, rather than looking to solutions in London, which are completely inappropriate for the Island context?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I was not aware we were looking at London. We look at the whole of Europe. This is something my officers have been exploring. Optare, the manufacturer of our current smaller diesel fleet, are being approached as to whether the electric engines can be put into their particular vehicles. The Deputy will be aware that we have restrictions in Jersey and we need smaller vehicles. They also need to be disabled-friendly. So, this is the compromise that we are facing, but officers are looking all over Europe.

**3.16.3 Deputy M. Tadier:**

The Minister said he was not aware they were looking at London, but LibertyBus brought over an old electric London bus and parked it in the Weighbridge, so the Minister should have been aware of that. Perhaps I could offer some assistance, wearing my Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie hat, to put him in touch with some of the mayors in France to see if we cannot get a demonstration of a smaller manageable bus to be brought over, perhaps as a trial run as the Town Hoppa; would he agree to that?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I am well aware of what is happening in France. This bus was badged as a London bus, but it came from the manufacturer as a loan bus, it is on loan, it is badged up in London colours, but it is on loan to LibertyBus to see how this goes. So far it has gone extremely well and it is something we will be monitoring. We are looking at all buses, all shapes and sizes and working very closely with LibertyBus on this.

**3.16.4 The Connétable of St. Brelade:**

Given that I gather that the contract with LibertyBus obliges LibertyBus to provide the fleet, probably not specifying electric buses, would the Minister, in the future Government Plan, confirm that he has the budget to support a change to electric buses, which would probably compromise the contract?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

We have not got that far down the line yet, but this is something we are monitoring, but we are in close contact with LibertyBus. LibertyBus does have subsidiaries in the U.K., so their existing fleet can be transferred within their parent company to other companies in the U.K. under their control. That is one way of doing it, but we have not got that far ahead; this is very much an experiment, which we are monitoring.

**3.16.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister singularly failed to state to any degree what aspects of this trial they were to monitor. Will he return to the House with a statement about the aspects that he is going to monitor in the near future please?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Obviously, it is the cleaner air we are going for, so the electrification, which I am encouraging of bikes, vans, lorries, buses, because we all want to breathe clean air. That is the primary driver in everything, to be eco-friendly.

**3.16.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Can the Minister tell us how he is going to monitor that when he does not have a baseline to start from?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

That is being developed; I am more than happy to report back to the Assembly on that.

**3.16.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It is difficult to come up with a supplementary when your question has not really been answered. Will States funding be used to subsidise the electric fleet for a company we do not have a stake in?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

We already subsidise LibertyBus, but we do not have funds at the moment to pay for electrification of the fleet. It is part of the contract that LibertyBus maintains its own fleet at present. LibertyBus owns and operates all of their own buses, as opposed to our friends in Guernsey who own the fleet of buses there. LibertyBus owns all the rolling stock in Jersey; it is a matter for them, but obviously we will look at things when they arise.