

2019.11.25

11 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the structure and effectiveness of taxi and cab services in Jersey: (OQ.293/2019)

In developing the Sustainable Transport Plan, is the Minister's Department assessing the current structure and effectiveness of taxi and cab services in the Island?

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

The 2010 Sustainable Transport Policy initiated a comprehensive programme of taxi cab regulatory reform, which will not be fully implemented before March 2021. As part of this established and ongoing reform programme, there are periodic unmet demand surveys and review points, which consider the further measures that might be required. I can confirm the new Sustainable Transport Policy will also include measures to review the role of public transport, including taxi cabs, in reducing traffic and carbon emissions.

3.11.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I appreciate the review that is being undertaken, but surely the only important review that needs to be undertaken is the informal Facebook pages, *et cetera*, which Islanders are using to set up their own taxi services, essentially. Does this not lead the Minister to realise that there is a need for a restructuring of the taxi services and does the Minister believe they are meeting today's needs?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, the taxi drivers do work very hard, likewise the taxi cab drivers. There is the safety, there are an enormous amount of checks with taxi cab drivers. They have to go to C.R.B. (Criminal Records Bureau) checks, they have to be licensed as P.S.V. (Public Service Vehicle) drivers. There are lots of regulations involved. The people that the Deputy is referring to are providing lifts for money, which is illegal; it is very dangerous, they are completely unregulated, there are no background checks and, heaven forbid, should there be a horrific accident, there is no insurance. So, I would advise people strongly, do not use these kind of things, either catch a bus, or a taxi cab.

3.11.2 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:

I was wondering if the Minister could confirm whether part of the Sustainable Transport Policy that is going to look at taxis is going to re-introduce something such as an exam for taxi drivers, as I had a C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer) of a very large company just the other day that came back from the airport and came to dinner with me and then turned around and said: "Well if you could listen to what the taxi driver told me, I would have turned around and gone back to the airport." They are supposed to be the ambassadors of the Island, there used to be an exam. A lot of the older taxi drivers are brilliant at this, but I think there should be an exam. Will that be looked into as part of the Minister's policy?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Not quite sure where the Deputy was going with that. Sorry, could the Deputy elucidate on that, please, then?

Deputy S.M. Wickenden:

Absolutely. I was asking whether there is going to be a re-introduction of the exam that is about taxi drivers being ambassadors and promoting this Island and answering questions that are pertinent to

this Island in being ambassadors, that they used to do that. Apparently, clearly, they are not doing now.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Deputy for that clarification: so not running the Island down and being polite and courteous and well-dressed to all customers. I absolutely agree. I am more than happy to pass that on to the board.

3.11.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

The corollary to which is, of course, that all taxi drivers will from now on be employed by the Communications Unit at Chief Minister's and be told what to say after they have had the chip put into their brain. Sorry, Sir, you are indulging me, but that is clearly a statement trying to make a ...

The Bailiff:

Well I assumed it was leading up to a question, Deputy, but ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

The question is: I would like to focus on the positive potential and the current positive impact that taxi drivers have in the Sustainable Transport Policy. We know that taxi drivers have been leading the way when it comes to environmentalism. Many of them have hybrids, so partially-electric cars, or possibly even fully-electric vehicles. Could the Minister expand on what the possibilities are for them also being encouraged to be used more by the public, so potentially, if we use them more, prices would be brought down and they could also, perhaps, access some of the areas of the Island, which the current bus company has not been able to necessarily maximise?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I think I got the gist of where the Deputy was going with that. It is a minority of taxi cab drivers that do run the Island down, but it just needs one, or 2, which is unfortunate. The overwhelming majority are very polite and courteous to their customers. Regarding the company itself, we had, as part of the original review, the J.T.D.A. (Jersey Taxi Drivers Association), as they are commonly referred to, were part of the original consultation and they were consulted widely. Regarding vehicles, yes, taxi drivers are ahead of the game, inasmuch as 77 of the vehicles that are used are, in fact, hybrid, electric and fuel vehicles, so I congratulate them for that.

3.11.4 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

In the light of the question, would the Minister agree that the time for restricting the numbers of taxis/cab drivers has now gone and that, secondly, if I may, is there any longer a reason for having 2 levels, namely public rank and private hire drivers?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, that is indeed happening with the purple plates, so the whole system will not be transferred until 2021. There are existing long-term taxi drivers, who have grandfather rights, shall we say and the whole transfer in 2021 will be the few remaining ones transferring over. It is more efficient now. Lots of the taxi cab drivers are using apps, if they do not affiliate to a particular company and they can be called by using various apps on the phone, which is proving to be a very efficient system.

3.11.5 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

I refer to the Minister's response about alluding to the questioner's point about what is developed on social media with young people. As a father of a 17 year-old son, my priority is getting my son home to my doorstep and if he has to pay in a car, where he knows that he is going to get here, is it not time, as part of the sustainable plan, that we engage with young people and that we can learn from them and listen to them as to why they are choosing this service, so we can help make it safer, regulate it and work within, because the priority has to be the safe arrival of our children home?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I absolutely agree with the safe return of the children home. Absolutely 100 per cent agree with those sentiments. The best way to do that, at the moment, is with a regulated taxi cab service if buses are not available in that particular area or, indeed, early hours of the morning at that time. I would again reiterate my advice not to go near the lift service that are provided, as I consider them to be extremely dangerous. There are several taxi cab companies out there, who are coming up with several initiatives, such as minibus services and we are exploring the ways that these can be shared, so we are on the way to that.

3.11.6 Deputy K.G. Pamplin:

Just to make the point again, will you, as part of this plan, set up a round table discussion, engage with teenagers, get their views and points? Because you cannot simply say to a teenager, as I am finding out every day at the moment: "Do not do that", because the genie is out of the bottle, this is not going to go away overnight. We have to work with our young people, to listen to them, to get their views to making something workable, so we can get them involved and home safely, as you are alluding to. I am asking, will that engagement happen with young people, just to listen to why they are choosing this way?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

The team engages all people, young people, old people and families generally, to get people home safely. That is going to be part of the discussions we will be having.

3.11.7 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

It was roughly 20 years ago I was last in Singapore and the use of the car down there has been taxed so heavily I think it is really now a pastime for the rich only, but the government there subsidised public transport to a huge degree and they also subsidise the taxi and cab industry. Is that something, perhaps, we can consider going forward with the ring-fenced funds that we generate?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Well, we do, in fact, subsidise the public with regard to the bus service. We do not subsidise the taxi service, as they are individuals who like to do their own thing and they are doing very well - some better than others obviously - but they prefer to remain individual in that sort of sense. But I cannot see there being subsidised taxis any time soon, but the bus company is subsidised by way of subsidising the passengers, with people with disabilities and people who cannot, for various reasons, use motor vehicles.

3.11.8 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would the Minister agree that one way to encourage cab drivers to move to electric vehicles would be to give incentives such as removal of G.S.T.?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

That is straying outside of my remit at the moment, but I think the policy at the moment is not to interfere with G.S.T., is to keep it low and simple, but that is a matter for Members.

3.11.9 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Would the Minister for Infrastructure suggest other ways in which he would encourage the move to electric vehicles?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, part of my remit also involves the multi-storey car parks.

[16:30]

We are increasing our charging points in multi-storey car parks. Quite a few individual companies and individuals themselves are putting in charging points for electric vehicles and it is certainly the way to go at the moment and it is something that I would encourage.

3.11.10 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister accept that as lift services thrive online and dozens of otherwise law-abiding Islanders, if not hundreds of otherwise law-abiding Islanders, are willing to run the risk of prosecution in order to provide them, does he accept that this, in itself, shows that the current taxi and cabs market is not providing the services that Islanders need, in order to take them home safely? As a corollary to that, would he also outline how many extra cabs and taxis will be on the road as a result of the purple plate system that is continuing to be in use until 2021?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would agree that obviously, especially with young people, the cost involved has a lot to do with using, shall we say, other initiatives that are online, which I will not advertise. I consider it to be highly dangerous. They do not have the same overheads as regulated taxi cab services, they do not have to sit for a P.S.V. licence, they do not have to have C.R.B. checks and they do not have to be insured to carry passengers, so obviously they can do it cheaper. But it is illegal, it is dangerous and I strongly advise against it. Obviously, there is work to be done if people are feeling the pinch of how we can get people home safely and quickly. I have mentioned certain taxi cab companies now are looking into minibus services, which is possibly the way to go for youngsters to get home safely.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

How many extra taxis and cabs will be on the road as a result of the purple plate situation?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Well, the purple plates are an amalgam of the taxi and cab service. More plates have been issued. I do not have the actual statistics with me at the moment; more than happy to get back to the Deputy on that. But there is a fine line with providing a service and not saturating the market, in which case, taxi and cab drivers could go out of business if there were far too many taxis and cabs around, so it is a very fine balancing act.