

2020.05.12

10 The Deputy of St. Peter of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding Gatwick air links (OQ.120/2020)

Following the recent report that British Airways may close down its operations out of Gatwick Airport, what contingency arrangements, if any, is the Government putting in place to ensure that Jersey has regular and affordable flights to, and from, the U.K. once current travel restrictions are lifted?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

Our colleagues in Ports of Jersey are working very closely in daily contact with our key airline partners, easyJet, British Airways and Blue Island, to be ready to restore the connectivity that is so important to Island life. The key focus areas of our efforts are: operationally, to ensure that processes and procedures are in place and to safely manage the flows of arriving and departing passengers; commercially, investing together with our airline partners to create the conditions that can restore flights; and from a marketing perspective to promote Jersey as a safe and beautiful place to visit. These unprecedented times will require unprecedented measures and co-operation between all of the key stakeholders to ensure our Islands remain connected. I am confident that we will be successful while of course stressing that we will be following the very best safety advice to protect Islanders from the spread of COVID-19.

4.10.1 The Deputy of St. Peter:

I notice the Minister mentioned "Islands" and I also note that Visit Jersey and Visit Guernsey are attempting to promote the staycation in and across the Channel Islands. This is one of the many examples where a robust inter-Island transport service is needed. What initiatives and discussions, if any, are underway between our Governments to deliver this?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I can say that today the Visit Jersey board are meeting to discuss their revised and updated business plan, which takes into account the impact of COVID-19. Jersey and Guernsey have both been lucky insofar as we have managed to contain significantly the spread of COVID-19 and it is currently at very low levels in both Islands. That might present an opportunity for some inter-Island connectivity but of course I want to stress that before we start relaxing the rules on our borders we have to be absolutely sure that we are not going to increase the risk to Islanders in a disproportionate manner. I have said before that I and the economic team are operating to the premise that, if a business can open safely, then it should be able to do so. With the levels and the process and the framework that we have put in place, starting with level 3 yesterday, that is a very good roadmap for recovery.

4.10.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister accept that Islanders will only themselves accept inbound travel if a strong P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) testing regime is in place at the ports? Does he believe the Island is in a position to deliver such a testing regime?

[11:00]

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes I do. The Islanders' sentiment is being received loud and clear and Ports of Jersey are considering the very best measures that can be put in place to protect Islanders. We all agree, as

Islands, we need to be connected to the outside world and we also have an incredibly difficult task of finding the right balance that does that without adding risk to Islanders and the spread of COVID-19. I accept the points the Deputy makes.

4.10.3 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Public perception is that the Government are quick to comply with the requirements of airlines to the detriment of Islanders. Could he confirm that Gatwick and other airports particularly, and harbours, feeding in to the Island are parties to the discussion?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am sorry; I am not sure I understood that question. Could the Constable repeat it?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The public perception is that the Government are quick to comply with the requirements of the airlines to their economic advantage, to the detriment of Islanders. Could he confirm that Gatwick and other airports particularly, and harbours, feeding in to the Island are party to his discussion?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I want to reassure Islanders that the Government will not allow any transport arrangements that produce an unacceptable risk to Islanders. Ports of Jersey and all of their stakeholders are engaged daily in those sorts of conversations and the airlines have made it clear they would like to resume flying as soon as safely possible but they also have stressed that the safety of their passengers and staff is paramount to them. Collectively we are all in a good position; we want to restore connectivity to the Island but at the right time. I predict that will be a slow and gradual increase of connectivity in the weeks and months ahead, subject to sound medical advice.

4.10.4 The Deputy of St. Peter:

We can all accept that the COVID crisis highlights a lot of the legacy issues that we have and one of those is the connectivity between our Islands. Can I ask the Minister to ensure that he uses this as an opportunity to start working towards sustainable transport between our Islands and ensuring great improvements of connectivity outside of the Channel Islands as well?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, I will. Further, as a priority, not only for my Department, but also for the Ports of Jersey. I believe Jersey and Guernsey share the same aspirations and we want to find ways of better interaction and better transport links between our 2 Islands, but being realistic they have to be sustainable and we are going to work together to try to achieve that.