

2020.02.25

6 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the taxi industry in Jersey: (OQ.51/2020)

Will the Minister advise whether he will be removing the existing cap on taxi driver numbers and encouraging the taxi industry to support app-based schemes?

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

There is currently no cap on the number of drivers who hold public service vehicle badges. At the moment there are 439 drivers who are licensed to drive taxis. The number of taxi vehicle licences is maintained as close to 310 as possible, as this was the number of licences in operation at the start of the Taxi Reform Programme, which commenced in 2015. Until the full rollout of the one-tiered taxi system is completed in 2021, I do not intend to increase the number of available licences. I am actively encouraging existing operators to utilise app based systems of which there are currently 4 being used. Drivers can only be affiliated to one app at a time.

3.6.1 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I thank the Minister for his answer, but would he not agree that his Department is rather sluggish in activity in this sphere and the fact that his proposed Sustainable Transport Policy is silent on the matter simply encourages covert and unregulated organisations to the detriment of a properly and organised 21st Century taxi service for the public to use.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

No, as I say, we have 439 drivers on 310 taxi cabs, so we are encouraging multiple use. There is no cap on the number of drivers, only the vehicles. We are actively encouraging companies to use more drivers and keep the vehicles on the roads, so the vehicle is always in use as much as possible. As I say, when new operators apply to operate a taxi service, one of the prerequisites for them is to identify which app they will be using, which they intend to use to facilitate bookings and control their licences.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Sir, if I may, would the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, I think your final supplementary is later on at the end of the questions.

3.6.2 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

As I understand it, the rank taxi permits, there are a certain number of those and some people can hang on to those while they are only working maybe a handful of hours per week. Has the Minister considered perhaps putting a minimum working time on those permits, so that that might create more vehicles, more taxis on the roads and available?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, that is in process at the moment. Currently a number of existing licences, which is the older rank plates, that is the yellow plates, do not have the minimum mileage that they are required to complete annually. Newly-issued purple plates have a minimum annual mileage of 19,100 miles per year, to ensure they are making the licence work and improve availability to the public. The current breakdown is yellow plates, we have 115; white plates, that is the old private hire, 9; purple plates,

which are full access, that is 142, and red company plates are 35, which is a total of 301 at the moment. D.V.S. (Driver and Vehicle Standards) currently has plate offers out to badge-holders to maintain the total number at 310. With regard to unauthorised companies and individuals, who are providing services, as the Constable is well aware, that is completely illegal and anyone caught doing so is liable to prosecution. In fact, that anyone who carries people for hire or reward are not insured as such, is breaking the law and, heaven forbid, should the vehicle be involved in an accident, there would be no insurance whatsoever, plus obviously the drivers are not P.S.V. (Public Service Vehicle) drivers, so there are no background checks towards the person's capabilities.

3.6.3 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can I just confirm something that the Minister has said? The yellow rank badges, which are the old ones, will not be required to do any minimum hours, is that correct?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

That is correct, that was part of the arrangements when the transitional process was put in train, but by 2021 all plates will be purple.

3.6.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Does the Minister accept that one of the enormous benefits of taxi apps is that the data gathered can help identify usage requirements of Islanders in the sense of where taxis are required, how many are on the roads at any one time and that information would be of enormous use to the Department, were he to encourage these?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, indeed, that is currently in train.

3.6.5 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that the apps can be so useful, can the Minister explain why he is not encouraging their use, or helping Islanders who develop these apps to roll them out to taxis, in order to provide a better service for Jersey?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Indeed, as I have just previously stated, we actively encourage the taxis to use apps. They can only use one app, which is nominated, but we do encourage their use.

3.6.6 Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Last night I received a complaint; yet again, no taxis at the airport for the last flights, about 30 people in the queue, but no taxis. It is an embarrassment to the Island when tourists, who have been delayed in bad weather, have to stand in the rain and wait for their taxis to get to their hotel. If the Minister does not want to change the cap which is in place, can the Minister suggest an alternative as to assist these individuals?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

If we increase the taxis too much, that is when people start going out of business in the lean times. As I say, we are encouraging more drivers to maintain the taxis on the roads. There is no cap on the P.S.V. drivers, only on the vehicles themselves. If people double, or triple-shift, their vehicles, that is perfectly in order, subject to the relevant permissions. D.V.S. are currently talking to the airport and harbours to see how things can be improved. There will be changes made at the airport regarding

the structure and we will be keeping a watching brief on that. But there is no particular reason why taxis should not be available. Most people have either iPads or iPhones, or an equivalent, where the airport flights departures and arrivals are clearly available. Members who have their iPhones with them now can look up now when all the planes are landing, so there is no reason why taxis should not be facilitating that as they go. Plus, anyone landing at the airport can pre-book a taxi cab to meet them at the airport, but it is something that D.V.S. is aware of and we are actively trying to remedy.

3.6.7 Deputy R.E. Huelin of St. Peter:

I have heard about mileage of taxis, I think 19,100 miles. Can I ask the Minister if he can look into the utilisation of taxis, i.e. how much time in the day a taxi has a fare in the back of the cab, as opposed to driving around empty, or waiting stationary, without being productive?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I do not currently have that information. Obviously, if the vehicle is stationary there is no mileage, but taxis very rarely drive around, unless they are driving to the airport to pick up a fare, or driving to a location to pick up a fare. But we will try and take all that information on board.

3.6.8 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister tell Members whether, in his travels, he has ever taken an Uber, or similar app based taxi?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes.