

2019.01.29

**12 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the prospect of introducing a ‘hoppa bus’ service: [OQ.30/2019]**

In drawing up his spending plans for 2020, will the Minister give consideration to the in-principle decision of the States (in adopting P.156/2011) to support the introduction of a ‘hoppa bus’ service in the urban areas of St. Helier and its environs?

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

P.156/2011, as adopted by the States, asked the Minister for Transport and Technical Services to include provision for a town area bus service within the current tendering process of the bus operating contract. I can confirm that as part of that process the cost of several options was assessed, following the selection of the preferred bidder but with no realistic prospect of a town bus service being able to cover the operational costs through the income from fares, it was concluded that none of the options were affordable within the available budget. Since 2013 the change to Jersey’s bus network has brought with them improved service, frequency, greater capacity and extended hours of operation on routes covering the St. Helier ring road at no cost to the public purse. These enhancements cater for much of the demand that was perceived to exist in 2011 for a town bus service.

**3.12.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Just for clarification of what was said there, was that a yes or a no? Will he consider backing a ‘hoppa bus’ and providing the wherewithal to fund such a service?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

The yes or no is that it would not be prioritised in the current state of affairs at the moment. But all the problems that were perceived to exist in 2011 have been superseded by a much-improved bus service.

**3.12.2 Deputy M. Tadier:**

I have looked at the accounts for LibertyBus and they are very healthy and I thought they were supposed to invest all their money back into the community but that is perhaps another matter. I have been reminded by constituents that the number 15 bus used to run past the bus station and do a loop past the post office, which it no longer does. Given the fact that many States offices are now being moved to near the post office on Broad Street, will there be consideration given to which services may run past that door? Because the elderly, especially, cannot necessarily make it all the way up Conway Street and round the corner and did value that service previously.

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I agree to an extent that was an important service for some people with mobility problems who find it difficult to walk to the bus station. But the Deputy will be aware that we have now lost the cut-through to Sand Street Car Park, so that all traffic now has to go past the existing hospital down Gloucester Street and loop back again and that would add at least another 10 minutes to the trip from the bus station itself, which would make things very difficult. Sorry, the Deputy had another point.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

I think that is it for now.

**3.12.3 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:**

I would like to start my question by agreeing with the Minister that the new service by LibertyBus is indeed a vast improvement on what we used to have. I particularly welcome the introduction of double-deckers, the frequency of routes, as a regular bus user myself, and particularly the customer care that is so noticeable now from drivers. Would he, however, be willing to bring to this Assembly the evidence that the current much-improved service has indeed, to use his word, superseded the need for a 'hoppa bus' because I would like to see that evidence? Clearly, work has been done in order for him to have said that, particularly in terms of serving areas like Havre des Pas, the harbours and the central market.

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Yes, I thank the Constable for his kind comments. Bringing double-deckers to the Island was quite a challenge. I was working at the time with the Constable of St. Brelade and that was quite an achievement to get those back on the Island. There was a capacity problem, which we have now solved. Just if I can allude to Deputy Tadier's question, most of the money now is reinvested in new rolling stock.

[11:15]

They have taken on many, many more drivers and invested in many, many new buses and obviously bus shelters to keep the people warm and dry while they are waiting for their bus. But to go back to the Constable's question, I would be more than happy to provide any information I have regarding that but I say the logistics of travelling through town now are quite difficult but we will do what we can.

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

To develop on from Deputy Tadier's question, would the Minister agree that given that the 'hoppa bus' concept does not stack up financially by itself, that advantage could be gained by extending the existing services to certain parts of town, particularly Highlands College and the schools up that way on a day-to-day basis and thereby obviate the need for a separate 'hoppa bus'?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Yes, indeed, talks are ongoing with LibertyBus. We want to extend the system as much as we can. The southern routes are particularly well served but we need to extend it into town - northern town - and, as the Constable suggested, getting more and more people on the school buses would be terrific. There are logistical problems but nothing that cannot be overcome.

**3.12.5 The Deputy of St. John:**

Can I ask the Minister if we can move outside the town for a short while to look at the difficulty of people getting into town from the Parishes and the congestion that that causes on many arterial routes? Are the plans to develop park-and-ride facilities well advanced? Would he be able to tell us what the plans are, if they are?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

Deputy, it is a problem with outlying Parishes. We cannot uninvent the motor car but we can just make the buses as attractive as possible for people to use. The Deputy's predecessor gave me a very hard time when I was Minister for Transport and Technical Services. We have put on a bus to St. John running up to La Fontaine and if you had 2 or 3 passengers that was an extremely good day. People tend not to use it. People had trouble getting to the bus stops, so LibertyBus came up with an idea of hubs, that small mini buses would be placed outside Parish Halls and ferry people to the main bus stops, if not further afield, and that had very little take-up and was in fact abandoned. We are working very hard with LibertyBus. They are a very

progressive organisation and if there is a demand there they will fill it. But to have empty buses running around is quite pointless and very, very expensive. But we are always looking to improve the service.

**3.12.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It troubles me a little bit this is not a priority. Is it not a fact that the future of this Island has got to be an integrated public transport system that serves every artery but also every capillary of our town centre? Would the 'hoppa bus' not be an essential part of this if we are genuinely going to provide an option for people to get out of their cars, improve our environment and improve the living standards for those who live in the centre of town?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

As I have just stated, the service itself is expanding and continues to expand and new routes are always being added to take up this. It is a 'hoppa bus' by any other name. It is a conventional bus service that crosses over and what was referred to as a 'hoppa bus.' Many people now have senior citizen's travel cards, we have the disability card, making it easier for disabled people to travel around the Island and that is the way it is going. Everything is now contactless, which speeds up the whole process.

**3.12.7 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Would this not be an opportunity for a small bus around town that circulates to provide a free service and trial whether that free service of free public transport could be successful in town and then can be expanded outwards in order that we provide genuine options to private-car use so that people can take cars off the road, which is so damaging to our environment?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

That is exactly what we are doing with the bus service, expanding it so much that people do not need their cars. But, unfortunately, people wish to use their cars. We had a 'hoppa bus' service many years ago and it had very little use.

**3.12.8 Deputy S.M. Wickenden:**

I was at friends over Christmas who told me that they drive and park in town because for the 3 of them to get in it is cheaper to pay for parking in town than it is to take the bus. Is there any opportunity to do something like a family travel, so it is cheaper, so we can have less reliance on the car for these certain types of instances?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

I am not sure where the Deputy is going with that: is he saying that parking is too cheap? But this is a perennial problem, there are various passes that one can buy; you can buy day travel passes, monthly, 6-monthly passes, yearly passes, which bring the cost right down. Several passes are available at the bus station.

**3.12.9 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

At last, does the Minister accept that he has, in abandoning the concept of a town 'hoppa' service, which might be free and which might be clean ... has he abandoned the Sustainable Transport Policy, P.104/2010, which contained that target to the 'hoppa bus' service and, if so, will he be producing his own transport policy in the near future, in order that we can amend it to get some spend on a 'hoppa bus'?

**Deputy K.C. Lewis:**

As previously stated several times, nothing has been abandoned and it is a 'hoppa bus' by any other name. We are increasing the service to cover all areas of the Island.

**Deputy G.P. Southern:**

The Minister said no earlier on.