

2017.01.17

15 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Environment regarding levels of pollution in the Tunnel: [1(51)]

I apologise for the banality of this question but I think it is important nonetheless. Are levels of pollution in the tunnel monitored and, if so, how often? When was the last testing done and what were the results?

The Deputy of St. Martin (The Minister for Environment):

To my knowledge, it is 20 years since testing was done in the tunnel. At that time the results were averaged as poor but levels of pollution in the tunnel are not routinely monitored.

3.15.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

There used to be a sign on the tunnel that I can remember for pedestrians that said during peak times the air quality in this tunnel is poor; that is no longer there. Does the Minister know when that was removed and why and whether or not the air quality in the tunnel is still poor at peak times?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I do not know when the sign was removed. I will certainly speak to the Minister for Infrastructure about getting it put back. Members may be aware that the tunnel was built as a traffic tunnel with access to, not necessarily for pedestrians, but more for work to be done.

[12:45]

But, nevertheless, people do use it and have used it in the past. I have no reason to think that the quality of the air in the tunnel at busy times is any worse than it was 20 years ago but certainly I am aware that in other areas of the Island at busy times we do have some issues with air pollution. I would say to the Deputy, to the best of my knowledge, I would think that when traffic is stationary in the tunnel the quality of the air in there is probably still poor.

3.15.2 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

If I can ask the Minister: will he leave the Assembly today and ask his officers to check the quality in the tunnel so we get an up-to-date reading of it? Surely he would think that with the volume of traffic that has increased that the pollution is probably even worse. Will he instruct his officers to do it and come back and report to the Assembly?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

When I said I thought it might be better, that is on the basis that technology these days allows people to drive vehicles with engines that appear to emit far less than they used to certainly 20 years ago. But what I would say to the Deputy is that in the past it has been difficult to get accurate information, certainly not real-time information and any tests that we did in the past were averages, so that you may have an average of poor but you would know during the course of 24 hours that it was probably good during the middle of the night and at times of high congestion it might have been worse than poor. But I would finish by saying this: now that the Environmental Health is into my department we are going to trial in the first 6 months of this year some real-time technology using buses and using the latest technology, so we can allow the public to see what the quality of the air is like in any part of the Island. Certainly I look forward to seeing that data on the internet and, hopefully, if it can be developed in an app. Once the buses have this technology on I think we will be able to see for ourselves in real time where we get issues, when we get issues and certainly if there are issues in the tunnel.

3.15.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

It would be interesting to see what the buses come back with, especially when they are near the coast. But going back to the tunnel: does the Minister accept that while cars may be more efficient the excess of traffic that we have on our roads leads to more stationary vehicles more often, including in the tunnel? If this is causing a danger for people inhaling that at peak times, we need to know about that and signs should be put back on the tunnel to let pedestrians know that the air quality is poor and potentially harmful for them.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I completely agree. I had not realised that the signs had disappeared and I know the Minister for Infrastructure is nodding. Between the 2 of us we will assure the Members and the public that those signs will be put back. People should not walk through the tunnel at times of high congestion when traffic is stationary, especially if they have respiratory problems and I would urge them to avoid it if they can.

The Bailiff:

That brings the time for questions with notice to an end, so questions 16 and 17 drop off the list.