

2020.03.09

3. Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the income of Liberty Bus: (OQ.70/2020)

Given that it has been reported that there were 5 million bus journeys taken last year, what information does the Minister have on the income to LibertyBus from bus fares paid and what was the level of subsidy paid to LibertyBus in 2019?

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

The LibertyBus financial year runs from May to April, so the audited accounts for 2019 are not available. However, I can confirm that the contract includes an open book accounting agreement that provides a high level of transparency and trust. I would like to stress that the Government does not subsidise LibertyBus, the commercial cost of running the contract, paying for staff, fuel and buses is the cost. The subsidy is to the passenger, via the contract payments to the bus operator. In other words, the public money payments enable the fares, paid by passengers, to be held lower than would be if the operator were fully commercial. In 2019, the value of payments was approximately £4.6 million, of which just over £1 million was reimbursed for the concessionary travel journeys that are made by senior citizens and persons with prescribed disabilities. A fundamental tenet of the contract is LibertyBus is free to use its commercial acumen in pricing to encourage uptake. It has been extremely successful in this with bus ridership having grown 40 per cent between the start of the contract in 2013 and the end of 2019.

3.3.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Given that we cannot get a figure as to the income from those 5 million bus journeys, yet again, will there be any difference in the subsidies, should LibertyBus register as a charity? It is already a non-profit making organisation, which should be channelling its income back into community provision.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I certainly have not heard of that, but I am more than happy to keep an eye on that. As I say, it is an open book policy. Members will be informed as soon as they are available.

3.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

Given the Minister's inability to give figures for 2019, will he please supply the equivalent figures for 2018, 2017, 2016 or any other year between 2013 and 2019?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, the ability is there but they are not ready yet. But more than happy to provide the figures for the years as requested by the Deputy.¹

¹ The Minister for Infrastructure circulated the following figures to Members of the States after the meeting:

2013	£3,488,505.00
2014	£3,498,086.00
2015	£3,572,696.90
2016	£3,440,728.78
2017	£3,316,712.65
2018	£3,421,510.65
2019	£3,556,707.30
2020	£3,644,714.05

3.3.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Is it the case that the Minister's officers allow him to go into another question time with notice, without giving any figures to satisfy the valid demands of backbenchers and Scrutiny members to find out whether or not we are getting value for money from LibertyBus?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Value for money certainly is there. For instance ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

Point of order. The question was not about value for money. The question was about whether his officers are allowing him to come into this Assembly unarmed with valid figures from any of the preceding 7 years to answer the question.

[15:15]

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am more than happy to get that to all States Members later this afternoon. As I was saying, value for money wise: yearly pass, Jersey would cost you £449; Isle of Man would cost you £800; Isle of Wight £900.

Deputy M. Tadier:

Point of order ...

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It is not a point of order.

Deputy M. Tadier:

... the Standing Order says that the Minister should seek to address the question. The second part was not asked. He is simply trotting off an answer for which no question has been asked and that has got to be a contravention of Standing Orders, as well as a waste of the Assembly's time.

The Deputy Bailiff:

He has given an answer.

Deputy M. Tadier:

But Standing Orders does say that he should seek to address the question and the second part of the answer that he has given addresses a question that has not been asked. Is he in cloud cuckoo land here?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I was asked for value for money. I was providing it.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Please sit down while I am speaking. He has attempted to address the answer. I do not think he has breached Standing Orders in the way that he has responded.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

May I continue?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Drop your light off please, Minister.

3.3.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

While the Minister mentioned the increase in bus passengers, does the Minister know the quantum of the increase in bus mileage driven? So, how many more miles are the passengers taking each year?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I do not have that, but I am more than happy to get that to Members as soon as I can get hold of it.

3.3.5 The Deputy of St. Martin:

A point of clarification: in a previous answer the Minister said very recently he would get back to the States Assembly Members with some figures this afternoon. Could he clarify what those figures were going to be?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I have been just asked for extra mileage year on year and the figures for the last several years.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Could you clarify, Minister, precisely what it is you are promising Members you are going to do today?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I believe Deputy Southern asked for all the accounts for the previous 6 or 7 years.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

I referred to the figures requested for 2019 and requested the equivalent figures for 2018, if he did not have 2019 and backwards.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes and that will be available.

3.3.6 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Can the Minister assure the Assembly that income from bus fares for LibertyBus and Jersey buses is spent only on the Jersey bus service by the bus company in Jersey?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Income; they are a private company. There is a profit share arrangement where a percentage comes back to the States of Jersey, which pays for many road improvements, zebra crossings, pelican crossings and other worthwhile projects in the Island, including bus shelters.

Deputy R.J. Ward:

Point of clarification, it is a social enterprise company. Is that being considered as a same profit motive company because in their books it says it does not make a profit?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

There are administrative charges, but the profits are shared between States of Jersey, which come back into other projects and the company itself and those monies go towards other items, such as senior citizens' passes, disabled passes and recently introduced carers' passes.