

20.10.06

7 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Minister for Education regarding the measures taken to encourage children to cycle to school (OQ.255/2020)

Given the large volumes of motorised traffic and the Government's desire to encourage the use of non-motorised transport what steps, if any, is the Education Department taking to discourage the use of cars for the transport of pupils to and from schools? What, if anything, is the department doing to encourage children to cycle to school?

Senator T.A. Vallois (The Minister for Education):

The encouragement of cycling and other non-motorised options for transport for pupils relies not just on my department but many others who support us with training, infrastructure improvements and other aspects. A cycling proficiency scheme now known as Bikeability is offered to primary schools for pupils in year 6. The numbers of primary schools that are involved varies from year to year but usually between 10 and 13 are involved in year 6. Recently Jersey Sport has trained and employed staff who are now dedicated to eventually delivering Bikeability to all primary schools. Additionally cycling courses are run during school holidays for children who have either been unable to attend school courses or wish to develop their own road-riding skills. Officers from Environment and Infrastructure tried to run an annual campaign aimed at encouraging primary school children and their parents to walk and cycle to school and they are presently preparing to test a walking bus scheme. They are also in the final stages of recruiting a new policy officer for sustainable transport. This new recruit will take on the further development of this work and the implementation of the Sustainable Transport Policy, which was approved by the States Assembly in March 2020.

3.7.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

I would like to thank the Minister for her full and comprehensive answer. I would also like to ask if the Minister or the department has any plans to ask its schools, particularly its secondary schools, to restrict the numbers of cars dropping off and picking up children from the schools, particularly in secondary schools where children perhaps have many more ways of getting to school?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

It is not something that I am aware is proactively assessed or decided on in terms of the access to the secondary schools. I know historically that, for example, Hautlieu, where we had students that were driving to school, there was a ban for a period then for cars on the property, but I can certainly go back and discuss how that might be feasible, bearing in mind this is asking parents to stop doing something such as that. But we will also have to ensure that we have got appropriate bus networks in place as well, as I understand some buses that go to some of our schools are particularly overstretched with students.

3.7.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister believe that enabling a free bus service for children to travel to school would be one way to encourage people out of cars, even if that means increasing the number of buses as they become more popular among young people because of the zero cost?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Yes, I have no doubt that having some form of free bus service would encourage more on to buses and, therefore, an increased requirement for the bus service.

3.7.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister believe that LibertyBus and the Minister for Infrastructure could do more to improve the service to schools, including a wider service to Hautlieu and Highlands throughout the day for our older students who would then have access to their courses, which are not at set times during the day?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

I would particularly like to see more support in terms of the bus service to the areas around Highlands and Hautlieu, in particular. There have been some issues around that particular offering. I was slightly concerned around the timings; of course as the Deputy has mentioned, at different times of the day the bus service does not necessarily go all year around up Wellington Hill as an example, but maybe there is some further work that I can do. I do deal with the Minister for Infrastructure in terms of discussions around that transport and the Sustainable Transport Policy.

3.7.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Given that the Minister has described certain bus services for schools as being overstretched, and she is already speaking to the Minister for Infrastructure about the sustainable transport policy, would the Minister provide the Assembly with assurance that those discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure are regular and ongoing and aimed at being finished at some point so actions can be taken?

Senator T.A. Vallois:

Yes, what I would refer the Deputy to is the Sustainable Transport Policy, which identified a need for large areas of work to be carried out, one of which was a bus service development plan and active travel plan as well, working closely with the Assistant Minister of Economic Development around the active strategy. So these are all strategies and policies that come together for us to implement appropriately, and of course these have been delayed, like many other policies, but we continue to work on them actively and ensure that we get something in place sooner rather than later.