

23.11.07

**6 Deputy R.J. Ward of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the bus operator contract (OQ.218/2023)**

Will the Minister advise what negotiations, if any, have taken place since the response to Written Question 355/2023, in relation of the Island's bus operator contract, and what further meetings are planned for the next quarter?"

**Deputy T. Binet of St. Saviour (The Minister for Infrastructure):**

The situation remains pretty much as it was the last time the question was asked. The team have not quite finished the documentation required for the tender process. We are hoping that is going to be done in the next few weeks, and that will be out by the end of November. If that is the case, and I think it will be, the first negotiations will take place middle of January. We are hoping to issue a contract towards the end of April, as we originally expected.

**2.6.1 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

It is interesting that the Minister says that the tender contract is not out yet. Yet, repeatedly, the Minister is saying that it is commercially sensitive and cannot answer any questions. May I ask the Minister, what is in the contract, the tender documents? I am completely lost now because I thought they were already out for tender with different companies. That means that no questions can be answered about costs of the bus service in this Assembly.

**Deputy T. Binet:**

The Deputy may not have noticed, but there has been a lot of bad weather recently, and all the departments have been pulled this way and that in order to try and keep things moving. I think it is quite understandable that the process has been somewhat delayed. In terms of the actual commercial detail that is not available; off the top of my head, I cannot say, but I will say this. I seem to recall inviting the Deputy to visit the department to discuss the bus contract in some detail in May. Obviously the Deputy is very busy because he has had to cancel, I think, 3 appointments. Still awaiting his arrival to discuss the bus contract in full detail and I believe there is a meeting due next week.

**2.6.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

Could the Minister outline for the Assembly what specific instructions he has given for what kind of content ought to be in that tender document to deliver his vision for a bus service for Jersey, and what that is meant to look like?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I am going to be quite honest and say that I do not have a fully comprehensive view of what sort of bus service we need. There is a very skilled team that run the bus contract. I trust them thoroughly. They go through with me periodically what they are doing and what their intentions are. I think if full details are needed, I do not think an oral question is the place for that, because quite simply we would have to come armed with so much information that we would be bogged down, we would not be able to do our job. I take the view that I trust the people that are doing the job. They seem very competent. The bus service we have is very good and I am sure it is set to improve.

**2.6.3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:**

If the democratically-appointed Minister with responsibility for transport policy does not have much view about the future of the bus service, might it be a good idea to pass that on to somebody who does?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I will repeat the fact that I am very confident in the abilities of the people that are actually employed to do the job.

**2.6.4 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

Does the Minister know whether the tender includes details of the TownLink service, which is, I believe, an enormous success and very important for the town area, but at the moment is rather underused? It is almost like a bit of a mystery bus because people do not know really where it goes and when it does. Would he undertake to make sure that the town hopper service, if it is to be in the tender document, is really given more clarity and more communication to its users?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I am afraid I cannot answer that either. But the Constable knows me well enough and, if he wants to know what the route is, he knows my phone number. He has my email address. He, too, is welcome to join Deputy Ward, if he wishes, to come down and fill his boots on information about the finer points of detail for the bus service.

**2.6.5 The Connétable of St. Helier:**

My supplementary is merely to say it is not my knowledge of the town bus that is a problem. It is the fact that it does ... it is a good service. I admire the Minister for introducing it, but does he not agree with me that it needs to be widely understood and communicated to all the potential users of the service? I do not think it needs me to attend a meeting for that to be achieved.

**Deputy T. Binet:**

That is a very fair point, and I will take that on board.

**2.6.6 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the Minister not accept that the shape, form and indeed frequency of our bus service is a political decision and one which he ought to take responsibility for?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I certainly agree that I should take responsibility for it, and indeed I do. I think the Deputy will agree, we have a very good bus service. I think it is set to improve because I do get presentations about the bus service and I go through it with the team. But if any Member thinks that you can remember every detail of every single area in a department like Infrastructure, they would be wrong. It is actually quite difficult. I go back to the statement I made saying the team are doing a good job and the bus service ongoing will improve. We are certainly reviewing the town bus service, as the Constable knows, because we have been in detailed discussion about public realm and how that is going to work and how the bus service will be adapted to accommodate the changes.

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

Would the Minister agree that the existing bus service we have is pretty good? Does he agree that there are very few changes to be made to the future contract, apart from perhaps minor tweaks? But would he agree that if it ain't broke, we should not fix it?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I am certainly delighted that somebody in the Assembly recognises the benefits of the bus service that we have. I would like to extend my thanks to the Constable.

**2.6.7 Connétable A.N. Jehan of St. John:**

I am envious of all of these Members who are being given invitations to meet with the department because I repeatedly asked to meet the department to talk about buses and the northern east to west route. I hope the Minister will extend an invitation for me, as I am someone who arrived here by bus today.

**Deputy T. Binet:**

I am giving serious consideration to doing a presentation for the entire Assembly. I had no idea that the bus contract and the bus service was of such interest. I can confirm to the Constable of St. John, and he knows this, that we are working on proposals. We are certainly evaluating a service to run across the north of the Island to the new hospital facilities at Les Quennevais.

**2.6.8 Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I just ask the Minister whether he remembers that we actually have a meeting arranged on Monday, the 13th, for all the members of Reform so it was a much more effective way to use time? Also, I would ask the Minister why he does not simply answer the written questions that are put in, rather than just saying they are commercially sensitive, then we might all have information and we may be transparent, as was promised by his Government?

**Deputy T. Binet:**

If I am advised that something is commercially sensitive, I take my team on their word. I do not think it is my place to go giving away any secrets that are commercially sensitive. I am certainly looking forward to meeting Deputy Ward beginning of next week. And I forgot to extend an invitation to the Constable of St. John. I am being reminded that that extension should go to him too.