

23.06.13

6 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the timetables for travel by ferry between the Island and France (OQ.121/2023)

Before next year's timetables are set for Manche Iles Express and Condor Ferries, and before any new service level objectives with them are agreed, will the Minister take action with the objective that timetables are more sympathetic to Jersey travellers, including for outbound day trips?

Deputy K.F. Morel (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

I thank the Deputy for the question. The issue of timetabling and frequency in day trips is something I do bring up with both Condor and have brought up with Manche Iles Express as well. It is important to note that Manche Iles Express is serviced and owned by the Departmental Council of La Manche and it is fully funded by that body. In that sense, I have very little sway except to ask that they can have regard to trips for Islanders. The service of Manche Iles Express was created expressly for the residents of Normandy so that they may visit the Channel Islands because of the great pride that the people of Normandy have in their links with the Channel Islands. So my word goes a little less far in regard to that service. With regard to Condor, I have prevailed upon them on numerous occasions to have regard to frequency and with day trips in mind. I will continue to do so. In my estimation, Condor, while it is now moving as many if not more passengers than it did before the pandemic, because it has reduced its fleet from 5 vessels to 4 vessels, it is finding it more difficult to provide the frequency that enables Islanders to visit France as and when they wish. I find this difficult because I know that Islanders really do want to go to France for day trips, spend a full day in St. Malo, and enjoy themselves. But I also appreciate, as there are now only 4 vessels on those routes, it is more difficult to provide that service.

3.6.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

Last week I met with the Comité des Connétables with my hat on of President of the A.P.F. (Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonies) to discuss twinning matters. It is quite apparent that there are difficulties with travel between Jersey and the 11 twinning associations that are twinned with in Normandy. For example, there is only, I think, one day trip to Carteret for St. Lawrence this year and there are only 2 to Granville, so we fully appreciate that it is a French service heavily sponsored and subsidised by the region and the department. Would the Minister therefore consider what other action he might take and we might take as an Island to consider how we may have more leverage in the future with Manche Iles, which may go up to the point of co-funding the boat to ensure that Jersey people get a better service for going over to France?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am pleased to be able to say to the Deputy that I have already been on this conversations with the President of La Manche, Jean Morin. It is my view that Manches Iles Express, while it has been created primarily for the people of Normandy, provides an essential service for Islanders and I expressed that view to Messr Morin. I am happy to say as well, I also expressed the view that if there was the need for some element of funding from the Islands to maintain that service and to make sure that we therefore have slightly more leverage, that that is a discussion I am willing to have with them. So he knows the issues and we will continue to talk about those matters.

3.6.2 Connétable D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence:

I was going to ask the Minister whether any consideration had been given to financial assistance to La Manches Iles in order to give him a bigger say in the timetables to allow us to get over there more regularly. But I think I need to ask him about the conversations he has had with Jersey Tourism or Visit Jersey to encourage the use of Manches Iles to get visitors to the Island from the Normandy landing beaches. I think we are missing out on a trick whereby we could have many more visitors to the Island generating income here. What conversations has he had with Visit Jersey to do that?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Connétable for the question. Principally because it is always nice when you have already done the asking of the question before the question was asked. The very first meeting that I had with the new chief executive of Visit Jersey I raised the issue of Normandy landing beaches and the fact that Jersey does not tap in at all ... gains no benefit from the many millions of people who visit the Normandy landing beaches every year. So I did set that as a proposition, that this is a huge market, primarily an American market as well, and there seems, in my head, no good reason why we are not attracting some thousands of those tourists who visit Normandy landing beaches to our Island. I will certainly raise that again, but I am sure the Connétable will be pleased to know that I have already raised that issue.

The Bailiff:

Supplemental question, Connétable?

3.6.3 The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Yes, but not on that. I would like to know from the Minister what the response was when he suggested potential funding to Manche Iles Express. Is it something that they want in order to allow us to have more say in timetabling?

The Bailiff:

Generally, Connétable, a supplemental question to a question you have asked is exactly that. It supplements the question so you can gain further information on that topic otherwise people just get a succession of individual questions. I have to, I am afraid, without saying there is anything more to the question as such, it is not strictly so.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

Can I rephrase it, Sir?

The Bailiff:

If you can, yes.

The Connétable of St. Lawrence:

The addendum to that question is: in order to bring more tourists over from Normandy.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am pleased to say that the conversations I have had with Messr Morin have been conducted in a very good manner. He is very receptive to my thoughts and, of course, we know that during the pandemic Manches Iles Express, like all travel operators, suffered financially due to the lack of tourists during that time. He is certainly open to the idea that Jersey may help financially in delivering that service. I will also just add a little bit extra to the question, which is in regard to

twinning, which has been mentioned a few times, I am delighted that Manche Iles Express do offer discounts for twinning groups who travel to Normandy with their services.

3.6.3 Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

Please could the Minister also agree to talking to Condor, if he has not already done so, about more weekend trips for Islanders? I was very lucky we went over last Friday but the boat was absolutely packed because it was the only boat in June to go for a weekend. Could he also please agree to working with Guernsey so that Islanders can have more chance of going on day trips to Guernsey and back?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Deputy for the question. I am trying not to make a smart answer in regard to parts of that question. I am more than happy to raise both those issues with Condor when I next speak to them.

3.6.4 Deputy A. Howell:

Guernsey I think were talking about a boat and I just wondered if we are also talking to them in relation to that too.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

With regard to Guernsey and our travel links, I am in contact constantly with Guernsey on all aspects of our travel links.

3.6.5 The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Picking up on the point of objective timetables, given that the 4 ports in Normandy, namely Granville, Carteret, Port Bail and Diélette, are all tidal, would the Minister not agree that the operations from those ports are very predictable? May I suggest that perhaps he would agree that he might discuss more positively and be proactive with the Normandy authorities and say: "Those are the dates that we can bring people to Jersey on, let us do it." Would he agree that that is a way forward?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I am more than happy to take that perspective forward. There is no doubt. As with anything, that relies on a wide range of technical matters not solely the tides. I think it is difficult for us in this Assembly to override those who manage the services because they understand the many other factors that play into any decisions about when timetabling is. It is not solely the tides. There are many other matters as well. But I am more than happy to take that view and express that view.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I thank the Minister for his ongoing interaction with the Normandy authorities.

3.6.6 Deputy S.G. Luce:

Some 50 years ago we had a very different tourist offering in Jersey but in those days it was quite normal for 3 or 4 ferries to ply their trade between Cherbourg Peninsula and Gorey. Would the Minister commit to, in the light of the fact that in the 1970s we had one year 170,000 tourists land in Gorey Harbour, with that in mind would he commit to talking to his neighbour in the States Assembly about a greater presence with customs officers in Gorey so that we can reinstate those wonderful days of French being able to get here very much faster?

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I thank the Deputy. Again, because these are conversations that I have already started with my colleague to my left, the Minister for Home Affairs and myself are of the view that we would love to see Gorey being used once again. Interestingly though, when I put that perspective to Manche Iles Express they were less keen on travelling to Gorey directly, partly due to the wider lack of facilities; no bank machine, no hire car companies, things like this. However, I did explain that I am sure those sorts of factors can be addressed as well.

[10:30]

Yes, the Minister for Home Affairs and myself, I believe, are more than happy to take that forward with regard to Gorey.