

21.06.08

11 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the presentation of walking, cycling bus travel and parking strategies to the States. (OQ.122/2021):

Further to the response to Written Question 259/2021);, will the Minister advise Members when he intends to present strategies for walking, cycling, bus travel and parking to the States for debate?"

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

Multiple workstreams are currently being undertaken on the agreed transport policy, rapid plans, which cover active travel, the bus development plan, the parking and mobility as a service. As per the Sustainable Transport Policy, these plans will also inform future sustainable transport operational delivery plans and will feed more widely into the development of future Government Plans in subsequent years. I cannot commit to when because at this stage I do not know what might need to be brought before the States Assembly. I will however commit to presenting the outcomes of the rapid plans to States Members as soon as they are available.

3.11.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

Does the Minister not feel it is appropriate to apologise to the States for the long delays in delivering these plans, which were part of the Sustainable Transport Policy, and we have now lost count of the number of deadlines that both his administration and previous administrations have missed in terms of delivering these strategies. Is the Minister not embarrassed by the delay in having, for example, a bus strategy for the Island to consider?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am not sure what the question is there. Am I embarrassed? As I have just previously stated, I am very proud of the bus service and the way it is run and has been run.

The Bailiff:

I think the question posed was: were you embarrassed by the questioner posed as the delays in coming forward with a bus strategy?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

No, not at all.

3.11.2 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

I am just wondering how it is compatible, the idea of having a strategy for bus travel, when in answer to previous questions the Minister points out that it is a private company who decide how they are run and clearly does not have much democratic oversight of them. What is the use in even considering a bus travel strategy when we have such a *laissez faire* approach?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

That is a complete misquote of what I said. We do have oversight. We do have an agreement with LibertyBus. We have key point indicators, so they must meet certain marks. Everything is in the contract. So, as I mentioned, we do have an officer who liaises more or less on a daily basis with LibertyBus. They are providing an excellent service to the community. If you live on the south coast, for instance, St. Clement area, sometimes a bus every 10 minutes, sometimes less, coming into town

and going out of town. Absolutely superb service. We would like to extend that level of service to the urban areas but at the moment that is not possible.

3.11.3 Senator S.Y. Mézec:

If that is the case then, is the Minister saying that the Government has the ability to dictate to LibertyBus what level of service they must be providing if we democratically decide that it is not adequate in particular areas? Never mind the south coast, great, but in other areas where we may not consider that to be the case in terms of sustainability, in terms of cost of fares, in terms of access for children, for example. Does this officer who liaises with them have the ability to dictate to them what they should be doing. If not, then what is the use in a bus strategy if the Government does not have the tools at its disposal to achieve it?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I would not use the word “dictate”. We are not a dictatorship. We liaise with the bus company and they are very forward-thinking. They are extremely obliging and very open to anything that we say to them. They do run buses to areas where there is no profit whatsoever because it is a bus service and they do that to provide a service to the community.

3.11.4 Connétable A. Jehan of St. John:

Could the Minister tell us what the reasons are for the delays in these strategies coming forward please?

[11:30]

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

It has been extremely testing times. With COVID, everything has more or less been put on hold. We are getting lots of staff in the department who were transferred to other departments to cater for the COVID emergency. We are just getting everybody back together and online again now. So we are moving forward with all plans as per the schedule. But we have had major disruption and obviously not just with staff but also with budgets because of COVID. But we are getting things back on track now.

3.11.5 The Connétable of St. John:

Can the Minister tell us what the level of vacancies in the Transport Department are within his department please?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Vacancies in the Transport? We do not have a Transport Department. In the department itself, probably about 5 I think at this time, at a rough guess. But we have lost one or 2 key employees and we have taken on a few newer ones.

3.11.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister is gushing in his praise for LibertyBus. He has used words like “an excellent service”, “a superb service”, and said that he is proud of them. I will not do anything to speak against that. But, if we have such an excellent service, do we even need a bus strategy?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Everything is being co-ordinated now. We are putting up more and more bus shelters, putting in more bus stops, working with LibertyBus as a partner organisation. We do have planning obligations, which pay for a lot of the bus shelters that are going up. We are lucky now the sun is out but with the weather we have had of recent times, to make bus ridership more pleasurable for the people of Jersey. The more bus shelters we can put up the better. That is the way I would like to take it. As I mentioned, Transport for London were doing the gushing as well, if you like, regarding how well the service is run. But I cannot answer for other Members.

3.11.7 Deputy M. Tadier:

This question might be slightly out of leftfield, but it is to ask whether or not any future-proofing is being done. It seems to me that advancements in technology and also therefore behavioural changes can happen very quickly. We might see alternative green methods of transport coming forward like proliferation of electric vehicles, small vehicles, electric bikes, which might contradict the need for a proliferation of a bus service, which obviously takes up lots of space on very small roads. Has the Minister given any thought to how all of these laudable sustainable transport methods might conflict with each other?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Indeed my team has certainly monitored that. But we are working with LibertyBus. Just a few weeks ago we opened the new eastern bus lane, the first bus lane in Jersey, which runs in front of the Pomme d'Or Hotel, can take off maybe 10 minutes' waiting time during peak times. That is every bus that goes through and that totals up throughout the day. We have another western bus route going to be opened up in the next few months going west. Again that will cut off most of the peak traffic. So initiatives such as this we are all in favour of. We are encouraging people to bike wherever possible. We are putting in cycle lanes as quickly as we can. We have a new one coming into Snow Hill in the next few weeks and that will enable people to travel from west to east. That will take people up Snow Hill to the top of La Motte Street, which is one-way anyway. That will be a shortcut for students going to school and people going to work, enabling people to use the bike. We are encouraging more people if maybe they need a little assistance, they have the electric bike system. But that is something we encourage. Every bike on the road usually means one car off the road, which will assist in the congestion that we have during the peak hours.

3.11.8 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I am not going to ask the larger question on Sustainable Transport Policy. Can I ask the Minister about a specific, would he address the cycle pathway along the seafront and do something about highlighting the pathway either by painting it a particular colour, renewing the cover of it, because as more and more people are cycling there are more and more people wandering on to the cycle lane, et cetera, et cetera, because they simply do not see it? There are some simple things that can happen. Can I ask the Minister to commit to doing some of these simple things as quickly as possible?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, that is something that is being addressed as we speak. There have been one or 2 accidents on the front where members of the public have wandered into the cycle lane and been hit. But we ask cyclists to slow down and obviously we have a white delineation line there. It would be very expensive to paint the actual cycle track itself but we are using everything we can. We cannot put a

physical barrier up there but we will do whatever we can to keep people safe. Of course it is a priority to pedestrians at all times, which the signage goes all the way down to La Collette as well.

3.11.9 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Unfortunately, the Minister has just demonstrated exactly why we do not understand shared areas. Can I ask the Minister again to try and perhaps find some affordable paint and make that a designated cycle path so that people can avoid simple accidents and educate people in the use of shared spaces? That is the role of Government.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Yes, indeed, people do not need to be educated, they need to be informed and we will inform people wherever possible to please do not walk anywhere near the cycle lane. We also ask cyclists to take extra care, use the bell on the bike, not aggressively, just a little ting on the bell to warn people that they are there. During the summer months the whole front is very congested with people and we ask everyone to take care. We will of course look at it again and anything we can bring in to make it safer we will do so.

3.11.10 The Connétable of St. Helier:

My supplementary is in 2 parts. Firstly, does the Minister not agree with me that the conversation or discussion we have just had about cyclists and pedestrians on the front illustrates exactly why we need a cycling and walking strategy so that people can understand where they are entitled to be and how they are supposed to behave when they are out and about? My second question is: is the Minister aware that the citizens' panel on climate change has requested, as an urgent action, that walking and cycling routes are put into the Island, particularly in the urban areas, immediately? How is he going to deliver those immediate improvements without a strategy for walking and cycling?

The Bailiff:

I think, Connétable, that is 2 final supplementary questions. I am very happy that you choose one of them but I do not think one can, under the guise of a final supplementary question, have a list of subordinate questions. Which one of those would you prefer to ask?

The Connétable of St. Helier:

I would prefer to go with the second one that perhaps lingers in the Minister's mind sufficiently for him to answer it.

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I am confused as to which question that was, perhaps if the Constable would like to repeat it.

The Connétable of St. Helier:

Yes, indeed. The Minister will be aware that the citizens' panel on climate change has produced a report with various recommendations and one of them is that the department immediately introduces walking and cycling improvements to enable people to do exactly that. Does this not illustrate the need for a strategy so that these improvements are not done in a piecemeal way but have an overall strategy behind them?

Deputy K.C. Lewis:

Absolutely, that is exactly what we are doing. As previously mentioned, we have got ... all in train with the strategy being brought forward. We have got, as I say, bike lanes opening in the next few

weeks running through Snow Hill going to the top of La Motte Street and any other cycle lanes as soon as we can to bring them on line. We are coming into the summer months now, eventually we are trying to encourage more and more people to walk, to cycle but we need to keep everybody safe, so that is the mode we are taking at the moment to bring that forward as soon as possible.