

2025.09.08

3.14 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs regarding the illegal and organised operation of receiving payment for offering lifts by unregulated, non-DBS checked drivers without adequate insurance coverage (OQ.192/2025):

Will the Minister advise what procedures, if any, are in place to police the illegal and organised operation of receiving payment for offering lifts by unregulated, non-D.B.S. (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked drivers without adequate insurance coverage; and if none, will she commit to addressing this issue?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat (The Minister for Justice and Home Affairs):

I thank the Deputy for her question. The ongoing use of illegal taxi operations remains a significant concern, requiring continued attention from the Department for Infrastructure, with the support of the States of Jersey Police. S.o.J.P. (States of Jersey Police) routinely stop, engage with and, where offences are identified, investigate individuals operating outside the bounds of regulation. However, it should be noted that recent prosecutions have not resulted in successful convictions. It is recognised that a substantial proportion of Islanders utilise informal lift services, commonly known as Jersey Lifts. S.o.J.P. have maintained a proactive approach in delivering safeguarding messages and advice regarding the risks associated with improper use of such services. Where individuals are identified as posing a risk to public safety, S.o.J.P. will take proportionate action in accordance with their powers.

3.14.1 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is the Minister concerned that at some point there could be an accident which is not covered by insurance, or an assault on a member of the public by one of these drivers while their customers may be especially vulnerable following a night out?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I would reiterate what the States of Jersey Police would say. It is not advisable for any member of the public to take a lift with somebody who is not regulated and has no D.B.S. check. The police will continue to monitor and do what they can in relation to this matter, and I appreciate what the Deputy is saying in relation to the risks. We can only continue to highlight those risks but, at the current position that we are in, we can advise people not to take those risks. But we can only do what we can do.

3.14.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

This seems a very grey area, which I know many a Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Infrastructure have struggled to resolve over the years. Could the Minister explain why she thinks there has been such a low conviction rate where prosecutions have taken place and could she clarify how many decisions have been made to prosecute and have any of them ever resulted in a successful prosecution?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

As far as I am aware, there has been no successful prosecution. I am aware of one that went through the courts. There was one that was a driver, the same driver on 2 separate occasions, was reported in 2023 and a prosecution was brought but that was unsuccessful. In relation to the further details that the Deputy requires, I can certainly make inquiries to find out whether and how many others have actually got to the stage of prosecution. It is very difficult to prosecute it, it is very difficult to be able to establish that the people are not known to each other and they are not just having a lift home, and whether they are just giving some money for petrol. It is a very difficult situation and we can only continue to reiterate the fact that it is not advisable to utilise this type of service because the insurance is not likely to be valid should an accident occur.

3.14.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

It seems strange for the Minister and the police to be giving advice not to use something which is not an illegal taxi service. If somebody wants to hitch a lift presumably it is okay to hitch a lift so long as it is mutually consensual. Could the Minister maybe advise whether energy will be better spent making sure that D.V.S. (Driver and Vehicle Standards) enforced their own permits so that those who are not taxi drivers, who do not have a taxi licence, should not be carrying out taxi-type activities? Could that indeed maybe involve something such as a mystery shopper programme where such services which are being offered illegally could be fished out?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I see the idea of the mystery shopper, however the difficulty with this is that this legislation does not sit with the Minister for Justice and Home Affairs, it sits with the Minister for Infrastructure so I do not regulate how people do or do not get cab registrations, if you like.

[15:45]

I suppose you could say that you could use the shopping-type thing, but I think the thing is that this has grown and it is very difficult to be able to establish what is somebody actually giving a lift to a friend, as most of us may do on a regular basis, and whether somebody else may not be able to drive and have paid them for that purpose. However, as I said, it is a very difficult offence to actually prosecute and I will find out the data. But, as I said, it is very difficult to prosecute and to establish the full facts.

3.14.4 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Does the Minister have any idea - and I appreciate her difficulties - wearing her Home Affairs hat or do the police have any idea of the scale of the use of so-called Facebook Lifts in comparison to the amount of regulated taxi rides, say, on a Saturday night?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

Quite frankly, no, I do not, because every night you will have a certain amount of taxis that will be on the ranks and those will take people home. There will be a certain amount of people who will go on and book one through illicit lifts. I do not think that that data is available. I can certainly ask the question, but I doubt that it is going to be available. So I can ask the question but I doubt very much whether that data will be available.

3.14.5 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

Just very briefly, I am not currently on Facebook and so I do not know, but when I was I understand it is a closed group on Facebook which you have to agree to join. Once inside, you can see all the posts offering and requesting lifts. May I build on the suggestion of the previous questioner when saying that you can be a mystery shopper on there, because my understanding is there is a very significant amount of users on it. Would the authorities within the police think that it would be a good idea, and does she think it is a good idea, to ask that question just so we can get a handle on how much of this is in this Facebook group?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I could certainly ask the questions, and I will ask the State of Jersey Police whether there is any way that they can get access to the Facebook page but, as I said, this is one of a number of issues in relation to roads policing and the police have to take priorities. At this stage, this may not be as high a priority as the other 5 that are mentioned in the fatal 5.

3.14.6 Connétable K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

I know this is something that the present and previous Ministers for Infrastructure have wrestled with. A little unfair to have a go at D.V.S., because they can only regulate what is legal, not what is illegal. Deputy Ozouf has pipped me to the post regarding the Facebook sites, which do advertise this extensively. But it is definitely something we need to have ...

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, is this a question?

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

It is coming up.

The Bailiff:

That would be quite nice.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Obviously, insurances will be null and void, so will the Minister agree to work with other fellow Ministers to nip this in the bud finally?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I am always happy to work with the other Minister.

3.14.7 Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Jersey Lift started as a way to help people who could not wait for a taxi and of course were reimbursed by the passenger. Is the Minister aware that things have moved on, so with Facebook groups now with 14,000 members and another with 28,000 members, and there are people doing this as a job and not paying any tax or social security, an almost unregulated and potentially dangerous industry and this is not fair to the legal taxi service?

Deputy M.R. Le Hegarat:

I will ask the question of the States of Jersey Police to see whether they can get access to these sites. I am not sure that they can but, as I said, there has been work on that. They continue to monitor what is going on in the evenings and some prosecutions have been forthcoming but have been unsuccessful. So, as I said, I will ask them again about what access they do or do not have to these sites. I think clearly the message we need to be saying is that this is not necessarily a safe mode of transport home because if there is an accident then you may not be insured.