

2025.06.24

3.4 Deputy K.M. Wilson of St. Clement of the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development regarding travel disruptions to and from Jersey and operator performance (OQ.150/2025):

Will the Minister advise what communication, if any, he has received regarding the reasons for the continued disruption to both air and sea travel; and whether performance measures exist with operators for the level of service delivered to those travelling to and from the Island?

[10:15]

Deputy L.J. Farnham (The Chief Minister - rapporteur):

The Government expects all operators to give effective customers their fullest support in the event of any disruption. This is particularly important for the lifeline services to Southampton for medical appointments. The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development has recently met with Blue Islands to discuss recent challenges resulting from their fleet availability and a series of technical issues. He will be closely monitoring the situation as a new aircraft comes into service and they operate a revised schedule to ensure the level of service improves. In addition, the Government and the Ports of Jersey have been working closely with DFDS as they stand up their new service. This has taken place in a short period of time and has led to schedule changes and delays. The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development was recently in the U.K. alongside DFDS to meet with key groups in our supply chain. We strongly emphasise that any disruption to passengers must be kept to a minimum, should be communicated early and should be fairly compensated. We will continue to monitor through performance measures attached to the operating agreement, which for the first time includes a more robust set of K.P.I.s (key performance indicators) which DFDS must satisfy, which include punctuality and customer satisfaction.

3.4.1 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

It is pleasing to hear there is quite a bit of progress. Does the Minister accept that this level of performance is far from reducing travel uncertainty for Islanders and visitors to the Island, something which was promised, certainly in relation to the DFDS contract. Does he consider travel resilience in the Island is in need of further improvement and, if so, how will this be done?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think both Blue Islands and DFDS can do better. We always expected a bumpy start with a change of ferry operator. I expect that would take at least 12 months to bed in to get to the place where we wanted to be. Of course, there is significant new investment coming along over the next 3 to 4 years which will see a brand-new fleet come into operation for DFDS. I would remind Members that there are works to improve the St. Malo Port over the winter, which means instead of 2 berths being available there will be one. That is going to prevent new challenges in the not-too-distant future. Could the Deputy just remind me of the second part of the question?

Deputy K.M. Wilson:

It was to do with travel resilience, given the amount of disruption that has been caused in a very short period of time. If I could just highlight the reason why I am raising this question: 13 per cent of weekly summer flights were taken out of service from 23rd May onwards. From 27th March through to 16th April passengers travelling with DFDS experienced delays due to

technical issues, cancellations on sailings and changes to schedules on sailings to and from St. Malo. Given what he has just said, is this going to get better or will we see a reduction and a deterioration in the service offered to Islanders?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

It will and has to get better, although the cancellation rates have been lower than expected. We have to remember - we have all got short memories - with the previous operator over many years we have experienced far more outages and cancellations in the past. I think as DFDS grow into the role, things are getting better; it is starting to improve now, touch wood. I stress, there are robust K.P.I.s in the operating agreement with DFDS, which are more capable of holding them to account than the previous agreement.

3.4.2 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

I wonder if the Chief Minister would confirm whether or not the Council of Ministers and the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development put in place a single point of assistance for DFDS in order to transition. One supports the issue of DFDS but was there and are there plans to deal with a single point because it is not clear whether or not it is Ports, Visit Jersey, the Minister or whomever. Is it not important that because DFDS need to operate properly they need a single point of Government to have some authority in order to deal with travel disruption?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

On operational matters, the single point of contact is with Ports of Jersey. On other matters in relation to marketing, it is with the industry with Visit Jersey, and other issues it is with the Government. There can be no single point, one stop does all, because of the nature of the business. What I can reassure the Deputy and Members is Ports, Government, Visit Jersey and the industry will work closely together to help DFDS settle in as quickly as possible and start rebuilding the sea numbers. Outside of the challenges we have had with local transportation, the Deputy and others will know that tourism globally is suffering due to the instability. I am afraid we are not free from that and we need to do everything we can to help rebuild it, which I hope will include an increase to the tourism marketing budgets and the budgeting process because we need all the help we can get for the industry.

3.4.3 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think the only thing I have on this issue in common is the same colour as our tie. I am not going to take the Assembly's time up, but can the Chief Minister not understand the fact he says all these different bodies are responsible, do we not need a single point of responsibility for Blue Islands and DFDS in order to deal with people's genuine hardship?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I will reply to the Deputy in the same theme; did he not understand my previous answer? A single point of call on operational issues is Ports of Jersey. They interact with the Government on certain issues and with the industry and with Visit Jersey on others. I guess the single point of call, the buck stops with the Minister and there are no plans to have a one stop for everything for DFDS as a conduit into Government. We have a relationship with them which works well - to stress so the Deputy can understand - with the Government Minister, with Ports of Jersey and with the industry and Visit Jersey. All of those are working well, I am pleased to say.

3.4.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

The Chief Minister refuses to have one point of contact now. Have DFDS consulted with the Government when they decided to change the Monday schedule sailing to France and introduce

a schedule to Guernsey which affected year 6 students who are due to go on a French trip and need to arrive now almost at midnight to their accommodation? Has Government been consulted why it is Monday and not Tuesday, for example, when we know that all year 6 students are going for their French trip?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

Yes, the Government was consulted. I understand Deputy Morel led on that with officials; I was not party to that. Before that Monday service we did not have a service, so I am not sure how it impacted as the Deputy describes. I am not satisfied with the level of sea transport between Jersey and Guernsey as yet. Although we have new services coming in for passengers, we are still lacking on car-and-vehicle opportunities for Islanders to travel between. I know we are urging both DFDS and Condor and Guernsey Port authorities to work as collaboratively as possible so we can improve that. I would stress that DFDS has put this on as a trial period. I really do hope Islanders in both Islands use it. I know the days are not ideal; we have got a Monday and a Wednesday. I would like to see something closer to the weekend but let us see how that pans out.

3.4.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:

I agree that we need to have a service to Guernsey but this service could be introduced on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday when we do not have year 6 children from most of the primary schools travelling to France. Would the Minister believe it is acceptable to change the timetable and not to engage with the main travellers on that, especially to affect children's school groups arriving now at midnight to their destination?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I think as we approach the school holidays it is probably too late for this year. Like I say, I hope we can improve inter-Island services in the future. DFDS has had to build the schedule they have put in on a Monday around the rest of the fleet so it would have minimal impact on the busy routes to St. Malo and the U.K. That is certainly something I know the Minister will be open to discussing for the future because one thing we all want is for the inter-Island transport links to be as convenient as possible for all users.

3.4.6 Deputy K.M. Wilson:

Thank you to the Chief Minister for standing in. I just wanted to ask, he mentions key performance indicators in relation to strengthening those with each of the providers. Would he commit to publishing a performance review of all passenger transport operators servicing the Island and also set out what further action would be taken if there is a failure to restore the service levels or if the service standards are not met?

Deputy L.J. Farnham:

I cannot commit to that without discussing it with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. That is a discussion we should have because I do understand the concern around some areas of our transport links. Having said that, I think Jersey remains to be very well served, especially by air, by a number of operators throughout the U.K. We have new routes to Europe now. I think Ports of Jersey have done a very good job in developing those links and we are making progress with the new shipping operator. Like I said, it is going to be a bumpy start but I have full confidence we are going to get into a very good place as soon as possible.