

STATES OF JERSEY



CONCESSIONARY BUS FARES FOR THE DISABLED: DISCUSSIONS WITH LIBERTYBUS (P.140/2015) – AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 16th February 2016
by Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade

STATES GREFFE

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Before the words “to request the Minister” insert the following new paragraph (a) –

“(a) to agree that individuals below pensionable age with a disability which prevents them from being able to drive should be entitled to a concessionary bus pass;”,

and renumber the subsequent paragraph as paragraph (b).

In new paragraph (b), after the word “LibertyBus” delete the words “to investigate” and insert the word “for”; after the words “prescribed disability” insert the words “which prevents them from being able to drive”; and for the words “31st May 2016” substitute the words “1st September 2016”.

DEPUTY M. TADIER OF ST. BRELADE

REPORT

Introduction

This amendment seeks to do 2 things: the first is to make sure that the political will – and indeed promises – of giving those disabled people who need it, a concessionary pass is actually delivered, and in a timely fashion.

The second is to provide some parameters for the scheme or, in other words, ‘target’ the proposed concession, and in doing so reassure States Members that any cost of the scheme will be kept to a minimum.

Moreover, I hope that the debate on this amendment will establish a consensus that individuals who cannot drive, due to a long-term disability, should be entitled to concessionary bus travel.

As an aside, it seems strange that a disabled person who *can* drive gets access to free parking via the *Blue Badge Scheme**, but someone who cannot drive has to pay for their own bus (I fully support the *Blue Badge Scheme* as I know it facilitates individuals to park accessibly, whilst being a valuable benefit in a civilized and caring society). In terms of saving to the individual, for example, a disabled person who drives to work would typically save £30.40 a week on parking, if they used their Blue Badge. The same person who uses the bus for a single journey to work and back would save £13 – £16 a week.

**It should be noted that a person in receipt of Blue Badge does not have to be the driver of the car, but can also be the passenger.*

Rationale

There is always a dilemma in deciding whether to bring an *in principle* proposal (perhaps asking for a review) or asking for something to be done specifically. Often, the former is a lot easier to win, especially in areas where there is general consensus. However, whilst such propositions and the accompanying debates may help move issues along and raise awareness, without firm, detailed plans they can easily fall by the wayside, for various reasons.

Similarly, when specific, costed proposals are made, the argument is often made that ‘this is not the right time’, ‘we need more information’, or ‘we need a review’. It seems that you can’t win!

This amendment seeks to provide some certainty about the nature and parameters of this benefit, whilst giving the Minister the ability to bring forward a workable and politically acceptable scheme.

Reading through the [comments of the Council of Ministers](#) on [P.140/2015](#) (the unamended proposition), it is clear that, although the Council and the Minister accept my proposition, the Minister is not minded to run with the idea of concessionary passes for the disabled, despite having given an earlier political commitment (on 6th November 2014) to do so.

From what I read in the comments, the resistance to concessionary bus passes can be divided into 2 main arguments –

1. There may be a better way to provide public transport for disabled people.
2. The cost implication may be too great.

I will deal with these 2 arguments in turn.

1. This is essentially the *jam tomorrow* argument.

I do not, for one moment, suggest that work on disability issues, whether related to transport or other areas, should cease with the adoption of a limited and targeted concessionary bus pass scheme.

What we can be sure of is that if we proceed with this proposal, it will be helping a certain section of the community *now*, and in a cost-effective way. Whilst it is certainly true that more work may need to be done in providing more affordable access to those who regularly need taxis, it is difficult to see the Ministers for Treasury and Resources or Social Security – in these times of government cut-backs – paying for disabled people to use a taxi at £10 or £20 a time. Moreover, as a state, we do not fund taxi provision, but we do pay a contractor to run a bus service on our behalf for the people of the Island, so it is entirely within our gift to extend the concession we *already* give to pensioners – fit or otherwise – to those disabled individuals who cannot drive.

2. Looking back at the [Hansard of 7th October 2015](#), when the idea of disabled transport was first debated in the form of an amendment to the budget ([P.72/2015 Amd.\(7\)](#)), I can't help feeling somewhat aggrieved that the Minister's estimate regarding the cost of this project was so high, and not a true reflection of the true figure. During that debate the Minister stated –

“Based on the initial data that we do have and our initial assumptions, it is likely that a blanket concessionary bus pass could cost in excess of £500,000 per annum. That is based roughly on 1,000 recipients.”

It is true that an unlimited bus pass with LibertyBus does currently stand at £495 per annum, so the cost for 1,000 participants in the scheme could be no more than £495,000. It would only be this amount if the concessionary pass worked in this way.

But Jersey already operates a scheme of concessionary passes for pensioners, as has been previously mentioned. According to figures given to me by officers at (what was formerly) Transport and Technical Services (as at December 2014), there were 11,000 concessionary O.A.P. passes on the database. The officer adds the caveat that the database may need updating (I guess that is the thing with databases), but if the same calculations were made for the cost of running this scheme, we would be looking at a figure in excess of £5 million to pay for pensioners' passes.

In actual fact, the true cost of running the pensioners' concessionary scheme is a fraction of that cost. This is because it is not the number of passes issued that determines the cost, but the number of concessionary journeys. Figures given by the Department show that –

- In **2013** the pensioner scheme recorded **558,672** journeys at a reimbursement value of **£569,294** to LibertyBus.
- In **2014** there were **615,072** journeys, and a cap on the reimbursement payments was retrospectively agreed with LibertyBus at **£630,000**.

In both cases, the reimbursement given to LibertyBus equates to **£1.02 per journey**.

It is difficult to see how a scheme with 11, 000 potential participants costs in the region of £600,000 a year to run, but a scheme with an estimated 1,000 participants would cost £500,000. Even with margins for error, and a presumption that working-age disabled users would use the bus more frequently than their pension-age counterparts, the figures do not stack up.

Nonetheless, in order to provide some reassurance to Members and to the Minister, I have given consideration to whom the scheme might target. It is true that if we were simply to say *all disabled people* get a free bus pass, then this may be particularly broad, difficult to define and open to appeals from those who feel that they should also be included in the scheme. This said, in an *ideal* world, that is what I would like to offer, but I accept the need for compromise.

There is, of course, a natural limiting factor anyway, in that this scheme would be for those working-age individuals under 65, as pensioners with a disability would already be covered by the pensioner concession.

It may be noted that, although disability can affect a whole cross-section of society, unsurprisingly, the older one is, the more likely one is to be categorised as having some form of disability.

Delivering the scheme

It is hoped that with the acceptance of this amended proposition, the Minister will have some clear parameters for the creation of this concessionary scheme and be in a position to return to the Assembly later this year with the detail of the proposals, including any cost implication, how it might be funded, and who would qualify for the scheme. It is my hope that LibertyBus will be asked to provide this scheme at no extra cost to their current funding arrangement. If this is not possible, it seems reasonable that the scheme might follow the pre-established routes, and I have full confidence in the Minister to negotiate hard when it comes to the spending of taxpayers' money.

Potential funding for the scheme

Obviously, Members can be confident that if they vote for this amended proposition, there will be a further opportunity to vote on the detailed scheme when the Minister comes back later this year with the further detail, which can of course be subject to amendment.

If the scheme cannot be provided from within existing ministerial budgets or those of LibertyBus, it will be necessary for the Minister to identify funding for this.

I hope Members will agree with me that in looking at potential ways to fund this, if necessary, the Minister will not entertain the retrograde steps of seeking either to cut Blue Badge Parking for the Disabled, or stop or limit Pensioners' Bus Passes, as the Council of Ministers hint at in their comments. As I said during question time on 1st December 2015 –

“It is a long established principle that people with a certain disability are granted free parking and access to the blue badge scheme and the Minister, I would suggest, has no mandate for changing that unless there is evidence that there is public opinion and contrary opinion from States Members.”

Financial and manpower implications

There are no additional financial or manpower implications for the States arising from this amendment.