

STATES OF JERSEY

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BUS SERVICE: RESCINDMENT OF DECISIONS RELATING TO CONCESSIONARY FARES AND ADULT FARES AFTER 8.00 P.M.

Lodged au Greffe on 14th September 2004
by Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier of St. Saviour

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to request the Environment and Public Services Committee to rescind its decisions –
 - (i) to remove senior citizen concessionary fares in rush-hour travel, namely from the commencement of the morning service until 09.00 a.m. and between 5.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m., and
 - (ii) to impose a £2 minimum fare for adults on all travel after 8.00 p.m.;
- (b) to charge the Environment and Public Services Committee to prepare a revised Bus Transport Strategy and to present it to the States for approval within 3 months.

DEPUTY R.G. LE HÉRISSIER OF ST. SAVIOUR

REPORT

PROPOSITION TO RESCIND DECISIONS OF ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF CONCESSIONARY FARES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND TO IMPOSE ADDITIONAL FARES AT NIGHT-TIME

Introduction

The Environment and Public Services Committee intends to require senior citizens to pay full fare in the rush-hour period.

It is also intended that users after 8.00 p.m., except students and young people, will pay£2 per single ticket.

These changes are intended to take place on 26th September 2004.

Why these proposals should not proceed

1. They are aimed, for the most part, at the less well-off in our community.
2. An assumption appears to have been made that there is abuse or misuse of concessionary passes. This begs the question of what controls exist to monitor and prevent these alleged practices. It is noteworthy that the practice of travelling inspectors was abandoned when this contract commenced. Why?
2. In the case of senior citizens no information has been put in the public domain as to the amount of pressure senior citizens are placing upon the operator by travelling in rush-hours and/or whether they are using the concession to travel to work thus (presumably) depriving other commuters of a place.
3. These moves could well reduce bus usage further.
4. These moves smack of incrementalism. In terms of financial benefit they appear to be at the margins. In line with the Bus Strategy (P.187/2003), the public were led to believe that a coherent revamping of the bus services was imminent. Other than the laudable proposal to have an Airport-Gorey through route and some tweaking of Route 18, there is no sign of the long overdue route restructuring.

Further observations

Members will recall the attempt at the end of 2003 to restructure the routes. There was a considerable public outcry as the cutbacks envisaged would have emasculated the service to such an extent as to inevitably kill it off. It must also be remembered that these proposals were put forward against a background of mounting concern about the increasing costs of the public subsidy and the fact that these increasing sums of money were not leading to significantly improved ridership.

It will doubtless also be argued that the delays in setting up the Committee of Inquiry have stalled a major revamp of the service. However, while the Inquiry may well cast doubt upon the methods of tendering, it will primarily focus upon the events surrounding the award of a pay settlement to the driving staff.

Even if this were the case and the Committee is prevented from developing a plan, why has it chosen to make these proposals which will have an inevitable effect upon ridership.

There are constant references in the press to the assertion that Guernsey has handled this much better. As R.C.53/2003 makes clear, the Guernsey service cost more money to establish. Aspects are different, such as the fact that the States of Guernsey bought the bus fleet, which is then leased to the operator.

These differences make direct comparisons difficult. However, insofar as the new service resulted in a revamped route structure and a 50p flat fare, we have much to learn.

The whole intention was to put in place a strategy that would wean people from their cars. It was bold and is apparently bearing fruit.

Our “policy” of nibbling at the margins, amidst a background of growing public subsidy, has done little to increase ridership.

Conclusion

Rather than become bogged down in relatively minor but highly damaging moves, the Committee is asked to not implement these proposals and to turn its attention to developing a plan which will be in line with the Bus Strategy and the Sustainable Transport Strategy.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no manpower implications.

No exact figures have been issued by the Environment and Public Services Committee as to savings emanating from its proposals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is highly likely that there would only be marginal savings.