

STATES OF JERSEY



HEALTH INSURANCE EXEMPTION CARDS: FREE BUS TRAVEL AND ACTIVE CARDS (P.145/2007) – COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 6th November 2007
by the Minister for Transport and Technical Services**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

The Low Income Support Scheme should consolidate all current benefits and this should include the concessionary bus fares currently offered to HIE cardholders. The issue is whether the Transport and Technical Services Department should be funding free travel for other departments. For example, one use of HIE passes has been to allow unemployed people to attend job interviews. This allows the pass holder to attend a job interview but, assuming attendance at any such interview, it also permits the holder to then utilise the same pass for free bus travel for the rest of its validity period. This deprives the bus network of revenue and may not, necessarily, be assisting an individual's job search.

The new measures for Income Support indicate that welfare benefits will include an amount for daily travel. In those circumstances, it seems to me that such monies should be being spent on public transport or alternative travel and not as benefit that is additional to a free pass that is being, effectively, subsidised by Transport and Technical Services.

I am entirely supportive of individuals who are recognised as needing help with travel accessing a pass or voucher system on the local bus service. However, I am in no position to assess individual needs or, indeed, entitlement to such a pass. If I am faced with receiving no income from the issue of a bus-pass, the net effect is to undermine the viability of the bus service and reduce the opportunity to expend funds on improving and enhancing it, with more routes or additional services on existing routes. This is not a helpful approach, especially when travel components are being included in overall benefits for anyone on Income Support. If there is an issue that job-seekers require more financial support for transport than non-job-seekers, then that is a matter for the Minister for Social Security.

I am sympathetic to the fact that current holders of HIE concessionary passes will, at some given date, become ineligible for free travel. I am willing to propose that a transitional arrangement is implemented which will allow current HIE cardholders to continue to travel for a limited period.