

2.8 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the removal of the Airport Express Service from the bus winter schedule:

Would the Minister explain why, despite strong assertions from himself that the service is a success, the Airport Express Service has been removed from the winter schedule?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

The Airport Express was, as originally publicised, an experiment. The intention was to provide a more direct link to and from the airport and St. Helier for both residents and visitors. It successfully increased capacity on the Island's western services which are very stretched at commuter times and I consider that a new service which carried an average of 700 passengers a week to be a success. It also gave passengers more choice and flexibility with their travel arrangements in the west of the Island. The Airport Express Service will now be evaluated over the next few months to analyse its efficiency and effectiveness with a view to considering whether the same or a different form of the service should be reintroduced next year.

2.8.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Would the Minister identify when he says: "700 carried", 700 on how many seats available? Thank you, Sir.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

On average, each service carried 13 passengers on buses with a capacity of 37; however I think the important feature to realise with this new service is not the capacity in its experimental phase but to understand the rate of the increase in take-up of passengers using that service. What was remarkable about the Airport Express from the experts who understand how bus routes operate was the rate of take-up by passengers. So, although we are not looking at buses filled to capacity, that was the clear direction in which the capacity was moving.

2.8.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Does this not look rather odd? If this gradual increase was taking place and all the indications were, as the Minister told us in July, that it would carry on and on, does it not look rather odd that it should now be withdrawn?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

It may look rather odd to the good Deputy, Sir, but I remind the House this was an experiment and not a permanent addition. Permanent additions to the route structure require quite a comprehensive public consultation process. Experiments do not. It may indeed look odd to the casual observer, but it is important to realise that experiments of this nature need to be fully understood. For example, some of the capacity on the bus routings as scheduled meant that passengers were moving from routes 12 and 15. It is important that we understand what those movements signify in terms of passenger demand. Those are the sort of elements that we will be considering over the winter.

2.8.3 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

I was going to ask, and I am now asking, what is going to happen to these passengers while this service is being re-evaluated. The other 2 routes have been mentioned and

the other 2 bus numbers. I will ask the Minister if there is enough capacity to ensure that there will not be people waiting around for ages for buses. If there is enough capacity, why was this service introduced in the first place?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I can, I believe, assure the Deputy that it is extremely unlikely that, due to the withdrawal of the Airport Express, any passengers are likely to be left standing or waiting or left behind on the airport and its associated routes. Route 15, the most popular and profitable and successful route on the Island, will still ply its trade as it has done on a regular basis, as will route 12. I expect no serious disruptions in the west of the Island at all. One of the advantages however, it has to be said, during its introduction over the summer period when there is a higher demand, was that the Airport Express did relieve the services I have indicated. That meant that for people who live between the west of the Island and St. Helier in areas such as First Tower, who do suffer from time to time from buses being full when they arrive at those spots, found that there was increased capacity for them. But that is another problem that we will be addressing and we need to see, importantly, how the Airport Express did affect that.

2.8.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister appears to be saying the operation was a total success but the patient died. Does he agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

No, I do not, Sir. The Deputy is talking rubbish, not unusually.

2.8.5 Deputy of St. Martin:

Given that winter ended last March and we have now had 6 months since, can the Minister advise Members why the service re-evaluation was not carried out in the last 6 months so we are ready for this winter?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Sir, firstly I think that all questions on when winter begins and ends should be referred to Senator Shenton, who is an expert on that particular subject. Secondly, I just simply point out to the Deputy of St. Martin that it is very difficult to evaluate the Airport Express Service before we have put it into service. Now we have had a good run at it, I believe we have an opportunity to analyse how successful it indeed was.

2.8.6 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Sir, does the Minister not think it is an absolutely ridiculous situation, which may well affect his clubbing and pubbing bus, where a service is started; it is a success and the service is then terminated while people go away for a long re-evaluation?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I think if the Deputy paid perhaps closer attention to the overall annual statistics of how our bus service operates he would know there is a very substantial difference between how the summer service operates and how the winter schedule operates. I think it would be potentially damaging to continue the Airport Express Service through the winter, where there is a clear lower usage particularly in respect of its relationship to the airport and the visitor season, and it would be folly to not carry out

an experiment and then stop it and evaluate it to see, quite frankly, whether we can improve on it. I am confident that there will be no serious damage caused to the citizens by the withdrawal of the service and I am equally confident that in our discussions with Connex - the operator - that we will probably come forward with a better and more enhanced service for the next summer schedule.