

STATES OF JERSEY



BUS SERVICES: PROPOSALS TO MAKE FREE OF CHARGE (P.52/2019) – COMMENTS

Presented to the States on 17th June 2019
by the Chief Minister

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

While we have seen good progress in recent years, the Council of Ministers strongly believes that more needs to be done to increase bus usage and active travel – reducing congestion, promoting healthy lifestyles, and improving our environment.

This is critical, and it is urgent, and our Government Plan, in the same way as our Common Strategic Policy, will prioritise these objectives.

To do this, we need a clear strategy, with measures that will deliver the greatest impact on what we want to achieve.

Free school buses will not do this. Making school buses free is unlikely to stop children sharing car journeys with their parents and reduce traffic, while costing £700,000 per annum – which must be funded, hence the amendment of the Minister for Infrastructure. However, any additional money would be much better spent on other transport initiatives to expand and improve the bus service for everybody, possibly cross-town buses, or *more* school buses so that children can spend less time on the bus in the morning before arriving at school.

More generally, international research shows that free buses as a policy is unlikely to achieve our objectives – on the contrary, they are more likely to reduce journeys by foot or bicycle.

The way to increase bus usage is to increase frequency and routes, and to reduce waiting times. This will make bus use easier and more attractive.

Furthermore, a free service is unlikely to provide incentives for the operator to improve services and attract passengers – and risks undermining the improvements in quality we have seen in our bus service in recent years.

Ultimately, this Government shares the belief of Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier that more needs to be done. It just does not believe that a free service is the best way to do this – indeed, no service is ever really free.

Therefore, I ask Members to reject the main proposition, [P.52/2019](#), and instead to work with Government to develop immediate revenue and policy initiatives that will make a real impact on bus usage.