

STATES OF JERSEY



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

**Lodged au Greffe on 10th June 2019
by the Connétable of St. Helier**

STATES GREFFE

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

1 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

For the words “from the start of term in September 2019” substitute the words “, and that other steps to make bus travel more attractive for the school run are investigated and consulted upon with a view to being implemented by the Council of Ministers from the start of term in May 2020”.

2 PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (b) –

For the words “from the earliest date practicable; and” substitute the words “and that other steps to make bus travel more attractive for people under the age of 18 and people in full-time education are investigated and consulted upon with a view to being implemented by the Council of Ministers from May 2020”.

3 PAGE 2, NEW PARAGRAPH (c) –

After paragraph (b) insert the following new paragraph –

“(c) to research, consult upon and identify funding for a sustainable transport strategy, including safe routes for walking and cycling, and provision for those with impaired mobility, by the end of 2019; and”,

and re-designate paragraph (c) as paragraph (d).

CONNÉTABLE OF ST. HELIER

Note: After this amendment, the proposition would read as follows –

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

to request the Minister for Infrastructure –

- (a) to take the steps necessary to ensure that school bus services can be used free of charge by school students, and that other steps to make bus travel more attractive for the school run are investigated and consulted upon with a view to being implemented by the Council of Ministers from the start of term in May 2020;
- (b) to bring forward a plan to enable all bus services to be free of charge to people under the age of 18 and people in full-time education, and that other steps to make bus travel more attractive for people under the age of 18 and people in full-time education are investigated and consulted upon with a view to being implemented by the Council of Ministers from May 2020;

- (c) to research, consult upon and identify funding for a sustainable transport strategy, including safe routes for walking and cycling, and provision for those with impaired mobility, by the end of 2019; and
- (d) to prepare a plan by the end of 2020 for working towards and then enabling free bus transport for everyone in Jersey.

REPORT

At first sight, Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier's proposition ([P.52/2019](#)) to introduce free bus travel in Jersey makes good sense. One is inclined to say, 'In the absence of any meaningful sustainable transport policy making over the past decade by the politicians responsible for this important aspect of our lives in Jersey, at least someone in the States is making waves'.

The proposition asserts that free bus travel 'will enable and actively encourage the use of public transport above the car by removing the charge for the journey'. I am not sure on what local research this argument is based. You will certainly hear it argued that at £2 a ticket, it's cheaper for a group of people to jump into the car for a trip to the Airport, restaurant or beach, but I would suggest that there are other questions people ask themselves when making their travel choices: is there a bus to where I want to go? Is there a bus back? Are the times of the buses convenient for me? Do I have to change buses in St. Helier, and will there be a lengthy wait, if I live in St. Ouen and my destination is Gorey? It is quite possible that the Island's bus-users, including the over-65s who enjoy free travel on the current network, would prefer to see improvements in ticketing, cross-Island and inter-parish routes and other innovations, rather than making all bus travel free of charge.

It is important to state at the outset that our Island has seen significant improvements in the quality of bus services in recent years. While we may object to those aspects in which we seem to lag behind other jurisdictions – the need to wait for a receipt on boarding a bus, in spite of having used a debit or bespoke Avanchicard to pay for the journey; the inability to break a journey for a couple of hours without having to pay again; worse still, the difficulty of travelling by bus between the northern parishes or from east to west without paying twice – we still enjoy bus services in Jersey which are frequent, and which start early and finish late on major routes, our buses are accessible, customer care is good, and the current provider is willing to introduce innovations, such as the double-decker and open-top bus.

There is certainly some anecdotal evidence that the school run is a major contributor to the congestion of the morning peak rush-hour, as the roads are so much easier to navigate during the school holidays, though it has been argued in the past that the number of teachers and other staff travelling by car to their places of work also contributes to congestion. However, it is surely necessary for us to see evidence that those school-children (part (a) of the proposition), or young people in general (part (b)), or all Islanders and visitors (part (c)), who do not avail themselves of the current bus service, would adjust their travel choices were it to be free of charge.

I suspect that the students who do not use the current service may have one or more of the following motives for not doing so –

- It can be a long, circuitous bus-ride, especially for students living in remote parts of the Island.
- As a result of this, it requires an earlier start to the day than if the student can be driven to school by a parent.
- Parents join forces to save their own time, so that students from neighbouring families share a ride into school.
- Improbable as it may sound, some families actually enjoy 'quality time' together as part of the school run.

- A substantial proportion of those driving one or more students to school each morning will be car-borne commuters going on to their place of work, who would be making the car-trip anyway, with or without students in the car.
- People who commute by car have a variety of reasons for doing so; again, local research is needed into what those reasons are, but we can hazard a guess that the cost of the bus alternative is not that high on the list: the car has already been paid for; fuel is relatively cheap (cheaper still if you use electricity); the traffic queues are no worse for the private car than the bus; the commute is a sort of oasis between a hectic household and frenetic workplace; and so on.

Sustainable transport policy has long recognised the need for a ‘carrot and stick’ approach, and there is no ‘stick’ to be found in the current proposition. How many sixth-formers who have passed their driving test and received their first car with their card of congratulations will decide to forego the excitement of driving to school, and will instead queue, possibly in the rain, and await the arrival of the school bus? How many students will continue to prefer to be driven to school in the family car, whether the school bus is free or not?

These scenarios, among many others which may well exist, suggest that a holistic approach to reducing dependence on the private car is required on the part of the Ministers whose portfolios include the management of the school run. If the same parents who are currently driving students to school were to face parking charges when they arrive at their place of work, the argument that they have to drive into town anyway would be less persuasive than it is at present. If their employers were also offering incentives for them to walk, cycle or car-share into work, then the idea of a free school bus might be more attractive still. If the commuter buses, as well as the school buses, were to be provided with other advantages over the private car, such as a bus- and taxi-only lane on Victoria Avenue during morning and evening rush-hour, then a situation could be envisaged where using the bus would not only be cheaper, but it would also be quicker than going by car, and the whole family might take the bus to work and school, keeping the car(s) for leisure use, and giving them the satisfaction of playing their part in the Island’s collective efforts to respond to the global climate change emergency.

It follows from the above, though it would need to be established by proper research what impact these and other factors have in influencing the travel choices of Jersey students, that there is at least some doubt about whether the creation of a free school bus service would lead to the kind of reduction in traffic congestion that we would all like to see in Jersey. If the proposition is approved in its present state, it is quite conceivable that there would be no significant increase in the take-up of school bus services, or by the under-18s, unless it is true that students are discouraged currently from using the service due to its cost. In the absence of any research on the matter, this is surely a gamble.

The purpose of my amendment is to ensure that if part (a) is approved, the Minister for Infrastructure carries out the necessary research into why students and the under-18s do or do not use the bus service, making adjustments to the service as necessary; and that the Minister for Infrastructure works with the relevant Ministers in the Council of Ministers to ensure that a suite of proposals is introduced at the same time as free buses for the under-18s, to ensure that there is more than one reason for them to take the bus. I would expect such additional measures to also make bus travel a more attractive choice for the commuter, too.

My amendments also seek to improve the timetable set out in the proposition. As it stands, the target date in part (a) of the proposition could be objected to as being too hasty, not allowing sufficient time either for the bus provider to implement a free school bus service, nor for the States to fund it; it certainly does not allow time for any of the necessary research to which I have referred to be carried out. On the other hand, the target date in part (b), ‘as soon as practicable,’ is weak. It may be argued that the States has been talking about these issues for decades while successive Ministers have been sitting on their hands, but the States has been promised (by the Minister for the Environment, at least) that measures to tackle such disincentives to bus travel as free workplace parking will be addressed in the next Budget. If we are to find the extra funding necessary to make bus services free, even in a staggered way such as this proposition requests, I believe that measures must be introduced to offset the additional expenditure, as well as other adaptations such as bus priority, where possible, and I do not believe that it is realistic to expect the Ministers to deliver these by September this year. The amendment proposes an introduction date of the Summer Term 2020, for free bus travel for students and the under-18s, which is challenging, but does allow for the necessary research, consultation and implementation, as well as any fiscal measures and changes to infrastructure which the relevant Ministers agree are necessary, not only to help fund the services, but also to influence people’s travel choices.

The new item which appears as part (c) in my amendments to the proposition is included because there is a more fundamental reason why Deputy Ward’s proposition to make bus travel free should be not supported in its current state: getting more people on the buses will not cure the Island of its traffic-related ills, any more than ‘electrification’ will. In common with other countries we are facing an obesity epidemic; where travelling to work or school is concerned we need to prioritise modes of transport which will get us fitter. And one of the main reasons people walk and cycle less in Jersey than they do in many other countries is that it is considered by many neither safe nor convenient to do so. It would be quite wrong to prioritise the spending of millions of pounds on making bus travel cheaper or free when the same expenditure on improvements to the walking and cycling routes between the homes of Islanders and their places of work or education would make them happier, healthier and more independent. If there is funding available for personal transport, and I believe that it must be, then the needs of Islanders with mobility impairments should also be treated as a high priority, and making the buses free does not necessarily do that either.

A holistic plan for making walking and cycling safe and convenient, together with funding proposals, is shockingly overdue, given that successive States’ Strategic Plans and Island Plans have repeatedly required the Minister for Transport and Technical Services/Infrastructure to bring proposals to the States to encourage walking and cycling, and I make no apology for giving the present Minister a deadline of the end of 2019 for this vital piece of work.

Financial and manpower implications

The amendments, if approved, will require a modest amount of investigatory work and consultation, the cost and staff time of which I believe can be met from within existing departmental and/or Communications Unit budgets. In addition, the amendments, if supported, are likely to identify new income-streams which will offset the significant cost to the public purse of providing free bus services.