

2.3 Senator B.E. Shenton of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the continuation of the current free bus pass arrangements for pensioners:

Will the Minister give a commitment to continue the current free bus pass arrangement for pensioners during his term of office?

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

I will give my commitment to continue the provision of free bus travel for pensioners over the age of 65. [Approbation]

2.3.1 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier:

Would the Minister agree that it would be preferable for him to bring forward the transport policy that the House has been waiting for for several years rather than having these discussions on individual matters such as bus passes, disabled parking, and so on?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, I agree entirely with the Connétable of St. Helier. My predecessor drew up an Integrated Travel and Transport Policy and that was put on my desk when I first came into office. I am not in complete agreement with it. We have passed it to Scrutiny who are not in complete agreement with it, and I feel it is important that we give it a thorough review which the department are doing at present before presenting it to the States.

2.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Can the Minister inform the House what negotiations are in progress now that the H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exemption) scheme, which provided some free transport passes, has been scrapped and what arrangements will replace it?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

We are continuing to support those who are receiving support under the previous scheme as long as they are in demand of it.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister did not answer the question. Is there any progress in negotiations to replace the H.I.E. scheme which is obviously now defunct?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The H.I.E. scheme is not really for my department to deal with, it is the Social Security Department, but we will support schemes as put forward and we will discuss them on an individual basis. I reiterate that those at present receiving the benefit of concessionary bus travel by virtue of the H.I.E. exemption will continue to receive it.

2.3.3 Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

The Minister said that he will support and carry on the commitment for pensioners over the age of 65. It is my understanding that women retire at 60. Will he also give that commitment that he will continue to support women at the age of 60?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Currently the scheme applies to all those who are permanently resident in the Island who have reached their 65th birthday and all those in receipt of a Jersey Social Security pension. There is, however, an issue regarding the age of eligibility for both men and women to be equalised and currently the departments are in discussion with the Law Officers regarding this and how the department should deal with it.

2.3.4 Deputy P.J. Rondel of St. John:

Given the most recent answer, given equal rights for men and women have been adopted for a long time now by this Island, can the Minister please explain why he is trying to differentiate between a 60 year-old lady and a 65 year-old man receiving aged pension given that until now it has been equitable for both parties to receive it at 60. So therefore he is changing the goalposts. Will he accept that he is changing the goalposts?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

No, this is not the case. In fact, there is a human rights issue, as I understand it, which indicates there is a need to equalise not only pensions but, of course, other ancillary matters and it may be that perhaps I could ask the Attorney General to elucidate on the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, not at this stage.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The situation is that the department is taking advice and we will issue guidance to the States in due course.

2.3.5 The Deputy of St. John:

Supplementary after that one. Given that over 60s have been able to get a bus pass for a number of years, is the Minister telling us that those people will now have them withdrawn?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

No, there is no question of having anything withdrawn but I would say that I am keen to tighten the reins on the scheme principally as the rules have not strictly been followed in the past, but I am keen that all those who are eligible to have free travel do so.

2.3.6 Deputy D.J. De Sousa:

Can the Minister inform the House of the rough date of when he will be looking to bring the transport policy to the House and will he also be asking Scrutiny for a date of when they will finish their review? Will it be before the next elections in 2011?
[Approbation]

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Clearly, I wish to bring the policy to the States as soon as possible and it is up to my department to produce the policy and then submit it to Scrutiny with whom we have, I consider, excellent working relationships. No doubt, once they have considered the revised policy, they will comment accordingly and we will bring it to the States.

2.3.7 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

To follow on from Deputy Southern, there was a direction - a proposition - from this House in October 2007 that asked the Minister for T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) and the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture to work with Social Security to tie-up all the loose ends under H.I.E. - the free exercise scheme. Could the Minister inform us how many times these 3 Ministers have got together and followed the directions of this House and if it is none, could he confirm that as well, please?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I confirm that it is none.

2.3.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

Under the previous Minister, there was talk about restricting the hours during which O.A.P.s (Old Age Pensioners) could use their free bus passes. Is this something that the current Minister will be looking to pursue?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think as part of the whole package, we have to consider charging for peak hour travel in light of the fact that the bus service during peak hours is presently very well used. In fact, the trouble is we are almost victims of our own success because there are too many people on the buses at peak times and I might, if I may, just point out the latest figures in that the ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think it is probably sufficient just to say it has been very successful.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Just simply, to sum up, there has been an increase in the last year of usage by concessionary passengers of 14.62 per cent.

2.3.9 Senator B.E. Shenton:

Will the Minister give a commitment to continue the current free bus pass arrangement for pensioners during his term of office?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I refer back to my previous comments in that there will be changes as a result of the equalisation of ages and possibly the peak hour considerations which will be brought into account. So generally speaking, over 65s I can guarantee, but those between 60 and 65 will receive further consideration.