

4.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the extension of the Connex bus service contract:

Would the Minister clarify how the extended contract will incentivise the operator Connex to provide an improved service and would he advise whether the new arrangements will lead to reduced annual payments to the operator by the States?

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

The extended contract will be on the same terms as the original contract and therefore the provision of incentives for the operator is the same as before. The better description would be disincentives as the service contract primarily uses a system of penalties designed to ensure performance efficiency. Additional enhancements of the public bus service will continue to emanate from the department as they have done in the past with, for example, further experimental routes and timetable changes. Indeed the businesslike relationship between Transport and Technical Services and the service operator has been a key factor in service improvements seen over recent years. The renewed contractual arrangements will lead to a reduction of £100,000 a year on the contract price. The contract extension, coupled with the settlement for the shift allowance, will therefore return £500,000 to the States which I have stated will either be reinvested into the bus service to provide additional or improved services, or utilised to provide contractual and technical support in preparation for the contract award in 2012.

4.5.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister outline the major disincentives that are in the current contract?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, I would be happy to do so. To give the Deputy and Members an idea of what the penalty system is, for example, route timings are listed in the timetable and there is a time span allowed around every bus stop within which the buses expect to keep to time. But obviously there is a reasonable allowance for error. However, where buses stray out of that, i.e. they are arriving early or very late then the penalty mechanism kicks in. Over the year - and the penalties apply on all aspects of the service - those penalties, as it were, mount up and it is possible for the department to claim, as it were, the equivalent of a fine back from the operator for not performing efficiently.

4.5.2 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Would the Minister, in view of this renewal of the contract, see any possibility now of increased public consultation regarding the new routes that are envisaged, such as reinstating a bus users forum? Thank you, Sir.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am happy that the consultation processes already in hand are working extremely well. We are, in fact, maintaining contact with members of the former bus users forum but I have to advise the Deputy that I do not see any particular merit in reinstating that group; we are indeed, as I say, consulting former members of it anyway.

4.5.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not concede that by, in total isolation, taking the decision to extend the contract he foreclosed the option of hearing from the Comptroller and Auditor General on other options that might be available?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Without bothering to take a poll of just how many Members catch buses locally on a regular basis, and with the greatest respect to the Comptroller and Auditor General, I am quite satisfied that over the last 3 years of dedicated study to the local bus system that I have all the required expertise to take the relevant decisions that need to be made.

