

STATES OF JERSEY



CONCESSIONARY BUS FARES FOR THE DISABLED: DISCUSSIONS WITH LIBERTYBUS (P.140/2015) – COMMENTS

Presented to the States on 14th December 2015
by the Council of Ministers

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade has lodged a proposition –

“to request the Minister for Transport and Technical Services to enter into formal discussions with LibertyBus to investigate the provision of concessionary bus passes for those with a prescribed disability, and to bring forward proposals to the States no later than 31st May 2016 detailing both the potential cost implications and the criteria which applicants would have to meet in order to access this service.”

The Council of Ministers accepts this Proposition.

This work is already being undertaken corporately by the Social Policy Unit, in conjunction with the Transport and Technical Services and Social Security Departments. The initial high-level findings are to be reported to the Council of Ministers in early 2016.

This work on bus passes forms a sub-set of the work being undertaken to develop an Island-wide Disability Strategy, and needs to be concluded before informed decisions can be taken about costs and funding routes. This work on a Disability Strategy includes a wide-ranging independent survey, establishing the prevalence of disability and long-term conditions in Jersey, and the profile and needs of such people.

In making policy and investment decisions, the key objective should be to remove barriers to mobility for as many people as possible, as opposed to simply providing free or subsidised bus travel to those who are sufficiently able to access buses, or fortunate enough to have an accessible route to and from bus stops. Indeed, the funding of free or subsidised bus travel may be at the expense of more targeted and effective forms of mobility service.

For example, Sweden, which is amongst the most progressive nations in providing mobility for people with a disability, does not have concessionary bus passes. Rather, it provides financial support which is targeted to those with the highest need, with a range of transport options. The individual may then choose the mobility solution which best suits their lifestyle and requirements.

Nevertheless, the Social Policy Unit and Transport and Technical Services Department are in the process of collating the data required to make informed decisions on concessionary passes. However, based on initial assumptions, it is likely the bus pass alone could cost in the region of £500,000 per annum.

In making final decisions about bus passes for people with a disability in addition to the existing passes for older people, consideration must be given to the long-term financial impact.

In the United Kingdom, 30% of all bus travel is free to the user and, as a result, rural bus services are being decimated by the associated funding pressures. The end result is that there are no or very limited buses for pass-holders to access. Any concessionary scheme must be sustainable, and must be properly funded. Given the constraints on budgets that we face as our population ages, and as we invest, in particular, in health, social services and in education, this will entail difficult decisions.

In conclusion, the Council of Ministers recommends that the Proposition is accepted. This work is underway, having been instigated earlier this year by the Council of Ministers, and will be reported by May 2016.

It is important to remove barriers to mobility for as many people as possible, supporting increased social inclusion, which is a clear priority of this Council of Ministers.