

STATES OF JERSEY



PROVISION OF A FREE HOPPER BUS SERVICE FOR ACTIVE CARD HOLDERS TO SPRINGFIELD STADIUM (P.33/2023): COMMENTS

**Presented to the States on 8th June 2023
by the Minister for Infrastructure**

STATES GREFFE

COMMENTS

Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central has proposed free travel on buses for Active Card holders travelling to the facilities at Springfield Stadium. This is not a well thought-through idea, and there are numerous reasons why.

1. Infrastructure and Environment does not run Jersey's buses. It is responsible for securing the operation of a public transport network for which it administers a commercial contract with the bus operator. This was competitively tendered with a key principle being the revenue risk rests with the contractor to incentivise passenger number growth, not the department or Government of Jersey. This model has proved to be very successful, and variations introduced on an ad-hoc basis represent a risk.
2. The Townlink bus service is being operated under a fixed cost arrangement, where LibertyBus are paid an agreed sum to run the buses, receive no reimbursement for any concessionary fares issued, and retain any fare income from those not in possession of a travel pass. This proposition, if successful, would impose upon the operator to absorb the additional demand without reward and thus require a further re-negotiation of the Contract and cost to the public purse.
3. The Deputy does not appear to have consulted with Active Card holders or other users of the facilities. No evidence has been provided that free travel is something that is needed. There is no explanation of where these Active Card holders would be travelling from, whether they are existing customers of the bus service who contribute to its financial viability, if they require more than one bus to complete their journey, or if indeed they are already perfectly able to make their journey in a sustainable and active manner by walking or cycling.
4. Other than the brief period during which a service targeted at those travelling to and from the Covid Vaccination Centre was operated, there has never been a public bus route calling at Fort Regent throughout the many years that the Active Gym was located there, with no calls from users for such provision to be in place.
5. The peak times for gym use is understood to be before working hours and after working hours. Townlink operates only during working hours so there is no benefit to a significant proportion of Active Card holders.
6. Although most users are likely to access Springfield on foot or by bike, it is recognised that there will be some demand for travel to the venue by car. As advertised on the Active website, there are three separate car parking areas for users including the facility adjacent to La Petite Rue du Val Plaisant, which offers 43 spaces reserved for Active permit holders. Additional overflow spaces are available at Springfield School after 5.00pm weekdays and at weekends.

7. The proposition fails to acknowledge that, in addition to the Townlink service which currently comprises routes 20 and 24, there are several other bus services operating to other destinations which call at Springfield Stadium. Unlike Townlink, these form part of the main bus operator contract and qualify for the reimbursement of concessionary journeys. To introduce yet another form of concessionary travel pass represents a further increase in the operational administration required to record these journeys and the associated financial reconciliation carried out by both parties.
8. The range of LibertyBus fares and unlimited travel passes continue to represent excellent value compared to the cost of private motor vehicle use and there is no evidence to suggest that the price of bus travel is a barrier to its usage.

Members may be tempted to conclude that offering free travel on the public transport network to more and more people will directly result in fewer car journeys and greater availability of parking spaces. But the free travel being proposed is unlikely to achieve these objectives. It does not come at zero cost and it is only right that our commercial bus operator partner should be compensated for carrying passengers from whom they do not receive a fare.

With a fixed budget, every pound from the public purse spent on making it free for certain groups to travel on Jersey's buses is a pound that is no longer available for investing in improving the service or enhancing and maintaining the associated infrastructure.

Free travel for Active Card holders is not the right thing to do, while the Proposition is well intentioned, in transport policy terms it is not coherent and is considered unnecessary. Accordingly, the Minister for Infrastructure urges States Members to reject this proposition.