

2015.04.14

3.5 Connétable J. Gallichan of St. Mary of the Minister for Transport and Technical Service regarding the cost of motoring:

Further to the Assembly's unanimous adoption of my amendment to the Sustainable Transport Policy that the cost of motoring, including parking, should not be disproportionately increased until a viable alternative method of transport was available to all, will the Minister advise whether he still supports this amendment and what he considers would constitute a "disproportionate increase"?

Deputy E.J. Noel of St. Lawrence (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

Firstly, I must say that contrary to what has been reported no decisions have been made regarding increasing parking charges. I am keen to ensure that ongoing funding stream for transport as a whole, so that it is not fully dependent on tax revenues. In P.147 of 2004 the concept of using parking income to fund other areas of the transport system was agreed by the States and then this was further endorsed by the Sustainable Transport Policy in 2010. By implementing previous States decisions I want to try to effectively ring-fence resources to provide the continued level and range of transport services that the Island needs. To be clear, I do still support the Constable of St. Mary's S.T.P. (Sustainable Transport Plan) amendment. Since 2010 buses have become a more viable alternative and the improvements are ongoing and, for example, the number of morning commuter bus services to St. Helier has increased some 45 per cent since 2010. LibertyBus is currently in the process of launching a new Parish link initiative which will further increase the network. As I have said, no pricing decisions have been made.

3.5.1 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Firstly, I would be grateful if the Minister could address what he considers a disproportionate increase might be, but I understand and I fully endorse some of the things he said in his response. There are big improvements. If the Minister was to read the small debate around my amendment he would see that indeed great inroads have been made into making improvements. For example, putting on more commuter buses to St. Helier does not address the needs of the people who do not come to St. Helier, whose children have to go to school in the country Parishes, who work in different country Parishes. There are still huge gaps in the system and so I still maintain that a disproportionate increase even though the Minister says he is not considering for the moment, would be a great burden to these people. So would he please address the matter of what a disproportionate increase might entail?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I have in fact reread the Hansard from the debate back in 2010 and it does make very interesting reading and I agree with much of what the Constable said then and says now. There are aspects of our community for whom buses will never be a viable alternative to their transport needs but we have made substantial improvements over the last 5 years in our transport systems and we will continue to do so. With regard to my view on what the disproportionate increase would be; I have not formed that view yet because I am still in the process of understanding the complexities of this topic, which are great.

3.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I hardly know where to start here. I think I have just had my breath taken away. The Minister agrees with the sentiments and the opinions of the Constable then and now having read Hansard. Does he accept that while he might agree with those sentiments and those proposals a 17 per cent hike in the price of buses is not likely to lead to a more viable bus system but rather a less viable bus system?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not believe there has been a 70 per cent hike ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Seventeen.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

... in bus prices but the bus new pricing structure has in fact brought down the cost of using the bus services for those who use the AvanchiCard system.

3.5.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Would the Minister agree that ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

No supplementary?

Deputy A.D. Lewis:

... there is a bit of a situation here of the chicken before the egg. Unless we stimulate changes of behaviour by fiscal penalties, if you like, then we cannot create the bus services and the transport system that we are looking for. So does the Minister agree that one has to stimulate interest in using these services by making it more difficult to use the car so that you can then develop the transport system? Which way is it; is it the service before or stimulate the interest first?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe we need to have a balanced approach and a holistic approach which is why I want to change the way our transport system is funded. Currently it has substantial funding from tax revenues which in years to come are not necessarily certain. I would like to ring-fence to ensure that the Island has a viable transport system going forward for many generations to come which is why I am looking at utilising the Car Park Trading Fund as a catalyst to make it a Transport Trading Fund whereby we can use the excess monies generated to feed back into other forms of transport including the bus service.

[10:30]

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Point of order if I may? My last light was a point of order because I do believe that the Chair should ask the Minister to reconsider his words of a few minutes ago to say that his proposals are about to bring the cost of bus fares down; that is misleading the House. That is not true. For the majority of bus users, 56 per cent of them, prices will be going up by 17 per cent. The figures are there in my proposition. The fact is ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, please, this should not be a speech.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

... the Minister has, I believe, misled the House.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, this should not be a speech. The Minister is responsible for the answers that he gives. It is not for the Chair to tell the Minister what he should say in response to a question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

That is why we allow supplementary questions, with due respect, so the Chair does not have to make those rulings.

3.5.4 The Connétable of St. Peter:

Would the Minister agree that one of the ways to get people to use the buses more and use cars less is to create safe facilities out in the rural Parishes by providing pavements and bus shelters as an enabler to encourage people to use buses rather than their cars? Would he agree with that as a way forward, so working with the Parishes, the Minister for Planning and himself as Minister for Transport?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Absolutely and that is one of the things we are doing particularly with the Constable of St. Peter. We have been looking at increasing the provision of bus shelters to make that whole environment safer in his Parish, and indeed in other Parishes we have been doing similar work, is the simple answer and we will do similar works in St. Mary as well. So we are actively doing it. My Assistant Minister and myself, since we took office in November, have in fact doubled the target of bus shelters to be implemented this year and we will continue to increase that. I said in my speech in November of last year that I wish to raise additional funds purely with this aim of utilising additional cherished number plates sales and again that is something that we are looking at and we are hoping to not only just double the provision for 2015 but to carry on to increase it going forward.

3.5.5 The Connétable of St. Mary:

Will the Minister firstly acknowledge that contrary to what the Deputy of St. John has said, some of the best thinking now in transport policy says that it is necessary to put the services in place and to be able to offer services before you can change the public's behaviour. They have to see what is possible and it has to be in place ready for them to use before you can make that big change to transport behaviour. Finally, will he agree to continue giving more carrot and less stick?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

Carrots are good for you and I intend to make sure that we have a good healthy balanced diet. I agree with the Constable in the sentiments there that it has to be a balanced approach. We have had a number of years now of just using incentives to get people to use different forms of transport and those that can shift away from car transport for their commuting to do so and we will continue to do that and we will continue to enhance the service. The Island's transport systems are critical to the economic and social wellbeing of Jersey and I believe it is essential to protect these services for the community's benefit by providing a safeguarded source of funding that is not wholly dependent on tax revenues. As agreed by the States in 2004 the Car Park Trading Fund provides an opportunity to achieve this which must be fully examined and that is exactly what we are doing at this time.