

2.3 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding consultation to review restart of the hopper bus service:

Now that the new transportation centre is fully operational, will the Minister be consulting with his States and Parish colleagues regarding the possible recommencement of the hopper bus service and if not, why not?

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

The response to the Deputy is that, of course, I am very happy to consult with any Members and discuss the issue of the hopper bus. However, the view of the department as a whole, and this is a view that was expressed principally under the former committee, is that the hopper bus did not directly solve transport management issues around town. It was a very expensive service to run and was very much a non-viable, heavily subsidised operation. An analysis of what performance it was providing showed that while it was indeed carrying members of the public around town on a fixed route it was not doing what most of our public services are trying to resolve, and that is stop people using their cars. It was realistically providing services to people around town who otherwise might have walked or taken a bicycle. Therefore, while I am happy to discuss it, obviously it is not the highest priority among the public bus transport issues.

2.3.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

A supplementary, Sir? Following the recent decision to implement G.S.T. the people of Jersey have been encouraged to shop around. Without the hopper bus service this will be impossible for a large number of young mothers and senior citizens. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am perfectly happy to support the concept of shoppers being able to shop around. However, that does not imply, I believe, that I should provide necessarily personal services to shoppers to facilitate their shopping around all the various retail outlets of St. Helier and the new retail outlets that will be created at the waterfront. I think that there are alternative and far more practical solutions to transport around the inner confines of the St. Helier ring road than a fixed route hopper bus, and indeed if we were to bring a hopper bus back I think it would be far better addressing the geography of St. Helier which is a flat bowl surrounded by significant hillside. To my knowledge, and as a result of my own experience living at the top of the hill up Queens Road, a hopper bus service would provide far more value to the residents of St. Helier if it was routed so that it would take people to the top of the hill saving them the walk up the hill, and for those who live half way up the hill they would at least have the opportunity to walk downhill rather than uphill.

2.3.2 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren of St. Saviour:

Does the Minister accept that the hopper bus service experiment was a very much welcomed service for shoppers? Some just used it to return with heavy bags to their homes. Some people did use the hopper bus service as a means of getting out of town for an hour and the social benefit of that service was immense. I would like to know if the Minister really does realise the value of that regular service.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I really do realise the value of that service but I also do realise the cost of that service. I am extremely sympathetic with shoppers in St. Helier, particularly the elderly. I do understand that the hopper service was seen as a very valuable, additional service to elderly shoppers but then so would be a butler, so would be a chauffeur driven limousine and so would be numerous other things that would be seen as absolutely wonderful accoutrement. The trouble is all this stuff comes with added expense and we have to fit it into our priorities, and as the Chamber well knows you have not given me anymore money lately and that is the seat of the problem.

2.3.3 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not concede that the service could well be recast to link parts of town like, for example, St. Saviours Road which are a long way from his much welcomed bus station? Would he not concede that if he was to do a proper route recasting, which has yet to be properly done, that there could be money and that in a sense he has ended up with enormous financial obligations like the Albert Pier parking situation, and so forth and so on; the running round of the number 19 to Elizabeth Terminal largely empty, which are really taking away funds which he could devote to a recasting of this service?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I do not disagree with the Deputy's analysis. Quite clearly a brand new bus station such as Liberation Station costs a lot of money to fit out and will cost significant sums to run. Circumstances have conspired to ensure that plans of relocating the Connex canteen and rest facilities were not able to go to La Collette so there is additional expense incurred at Albert Pier. There is no question that with the benefit of hindsight it may well be that one would have preferred to devote the money to more services. I would say that I think if we look at Liberation Station and contrast that to the pretty meagre facilities that were on offer down the Weighbridge it really is about time, and I think Liberation Station reflects a change of attitude - I certainly hope it does - that we treat it, those of us who rely on buses, with a bit more care and attention. I certainly have no wish to diminish that but, as I remind Members, it costs money to run these services. I can only work within the Budget I have. With reference to the number 19, that does provide a quasi-shuttle service, admittedly not round the worthy Deputy's end of town where his constituents are but it certainly serves the La Pouquelaye area very well, and I know a lot of elderly people do use it a lot and, indeed, I have seen passengers down at the Elizabeth Terminal as well, just to affirm to the Deputy it is not a lost affair down there.

2.3.4 Deputy C.J. Scott Warren:

Does the Minister accept that the hopper bus service was not only used by the elderly? I knew people who ran a guest house and had to get a lot of shopping in and they used to take the hopper bus back, and they certainly are not elderly.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I accept that the hopper bus service was well used but I think that States Members must understand it is part of my role to get value for money out of public transport systems and the hopper bus service was conducted with a very low fare and came at a reasonably high cost. One simply has to put that in context with other services. I have made it very clear that I think the level of service that we currently provide the Island is the bare minimum and that we should take every step to improve it, but where is the money? What have States Members done to allow me to proceed? In fact, all my department has been faced with over the last couple of years is consistent cuts to provide money to other projects that States have approved.

2.3.5 Deputy J.B. Fox of St. Helier:

As far as hopper buses, community buses, call them whatever you like, Pioneer - before it was bought out - came up with a shamrock route that went all the way to St. Saviours and covered the top of Mont Conchon, and was really a service that I perceived was for the people and stopped off in Halkett Place, right into the centre - did not require any depots - and was able to bring people in. Certainly, this was part of the last election campaign and Deputies such as myself are asking people would they use such a service and would it save them bringing cars in, et cetera. The vast majority of them said yes, they would, it would release them from being trapped. Can I ask the Minister if he would kindly arrange for a meeting and allow not just the St. Helier Deputies but the Deputies in the urban areas that are affected, if we could sit around the table and discuss this further? I appreciate the limitations as to his financial budgets at the moment but I think the Council of Ministers, in particular, would want to hear of something that is practical that provides long term support for the parishioners, et cetera, and that is the question I would ask.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am happy to reiterate the very first thing I said, which is I am only too pleased to discuss the hopper bus service around St. Helier or any other aspects of the Draft Integrated Travel and Transport Strategy with Members. I would suggest that we wait until the Integrated Travel and Transport Strategy is published, which is due reasonably imminently, and following on from that I think I would be only too happy to hold a meeting at which everybody can voice their concerns and opinions, and I would be happy to have a meeting specifically on the hopper bus if Members would value that.