

2.12 Deputy S. Pitman of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the fitting of seatbelts on Connex buses:

Would the Minister advise whether Connex buses are now, when refurbished, required to be fitted with seat belts and if so, could he confirm whether the latest Connex buses to be refurbished were indeed fitted with seat belts?

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

There currently is no requirement and there has never been a requirement for Connex buses to be fitted with seat belts, and I should perhaps explain to Members that that is entirely normal on the buses that are operated on frequently stopping local routes are, as a matter of practice, generally licensed to carry a specific number of seated passengers together with an additional number of loaded passengers. I realise that few Members of the Assembly take advantage of the public bus service during peak times. If they did, they would realise that if the standing facility was removed, it would create significant difficulties. In respect of the second part of the Deputy's question, I think the Deputy may be referring to the additions to the fleet that Connex brought to the Island when they were successful in being awarded the tender for the summer services and school services, and that did include 9 white Mercedes buses which had already been fitted with seat belts. They currently continue to operate but they are exclusive to school services.

2.12.1 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Given that the States Assembly has requested the Minister recently on the issue of seat belts, could he inform us as to what progress has been made in implementing rear seat belt in general in vehicles and introducing more advance safety initiatives in Jersey? Where is he with it, please?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am nowhere with it personally. Following the States Assembly decision, I immediately notified officers in the department to progress the matter of rear seat belt law and it is being progressed.

2.12.2 Deputy J.B. Fox:

I wondered if the Minister could give some reassurance to the House that even though it is not a requirement to have seat belts, nevertheless it is a good road safety standard especially to some individuals that might have disabilities or young children, parents with young children, and I just wonder if he could not advance a policy of having at least some seats available on our buses and school buses for use by those specifically that would benefit and for those that would desire it, especially parents of very young children.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I wonder if I could ask of the Deputy, is he referring simply to the school bus service?

Deputy J.B. Fox:

I am just talking generally that if you cannot cover all the seats in the bus for the various reasons that he said, to at least have the opportunity of having some designated seats that can be used by persons so desiring.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I think that would cause some practical difficulties, and if I might outline to the Assembly the very significant problems that would be introduced by a compulsory use of seat belts on frequently stopping buses, it would simply be that in order to comply with legislation buses would have to operate in a similar way to aircraft. In other words, passengers would not be allowed to arise from their seats until the bus had come to a complete standstill and the driver was in a position to give clearance that passengers were able to undo their seat belts and alight from the bus and similarly,

the bus would have to wait if passengers mounted the bus until all those passengers had been properly seated and there was an assurance that the safety belt had been properly fastened. Whether there is a requirement for the driver to check all seat belts individually as air stewards and air stewardesses do, I do not know, Sir, but I think that the Assembly can quite easily see some of the practical difficulties that may ensue.

2.12.3 Deputy J.B. Fox:

Just to go on from the last submission; buses do not travel at 30,000 feet, *et cetera*. They are on a flat, level playing field. They are very successfully used in many buses and disabled vehicles and there is and have been a lot of express wishes by parents to have some facilities if all is not available. All I am asking is that this be looked at again and to see if we cannot have improvements. I do not expect the same levels or the Minister to have to provide the same levels as aircraft; just giving people the opportunity of having some seats with seat belts above that which exist at this time.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

I am, of course, aware of the ride height of buses and clearly, they do not ride at 30,000 feet. I am very grateful to the Deputy for his clarification and his further clarifications of what he was getting at and I am happy to look into the matter.

2.12.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis of St. Saviour:

It can be very dangerous if children are standing on buses loaded with rucksacks, books, *et cetera*, should the bus have to perform an emergency stop, so it would be preferential for all children to be seated on buses. Does the Minister not agree?

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Yes, the Minister does agree, Sir, but I would make 2 points. First of all, that our current bus service and, indeed, previous bus services in the Island have an extremely good safety record but it has to be said, particularly in respect of children, that sometimes there is an issue of persuading them to stay in their seats.

2.12.5 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

Are there any safeguards in place to stop those passengers who are standing falling forward when the driver slams on his brakes? An awful accident happened to a parishioner of mine and her son whereby they both ended up smashing their heads on the windscreen and were hospitalised.

Deputy G.W.J. de Faye:

Broadly speaking, Sir, it is a matter of regret that from time to time, and fortunately only on extremely rare occasions, accidents do happen. Nevertheless, in respect of standing passengers, for Members who are not familiar with the layout of our buses, there are numerous grab poles down the aisle and indeed, passengers are regularly advised not to stand up close to the driver which puts them in proximity of the front windscreen. It is a general presumption that passengers will stand further back in the bus than that. However, sometimes people do come closer and, as I say, on very extreme and fortunately rare occasions, drivers do have to engage in emergency stops which have caused recorded injury.