

2.18 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding the provision of more capacity on public transport during the morning rush hour:

Would the Minister stipulate the number of school buses that return to town empty during the morning rush hour and advise what steps, if any, are in place to provide more capacity on public transport during this busy period?

The Connétable St. Brelade (The Minister for Transport and Technical Services):

As advised to the Deputy in a written question on 24th February 2009, the only school service that is feasible to reuse as commuter services are those operating to Le Rocquier and Les Quennevais, being out-of-town schools; 12 morning services are operated to these schools of which 4 are reused, providing 5 commuter services back into town, 3 are provided by white Mercedes school buses which are not licensed for the main network and the remaining 5 return to town empty. There are a number of issues which do curtail the reuse of school services. But I am committed to maximising the integration of all services and will continue to discuss options in this regard with Connex. However, it must be remembered that if we succeed in bringing more commuters into town in the morning, we will need to provide afternoon commuter services to get them home. These cannot be provided by returning school buses and will need to be new services on the main network which will require additional funding, which the department does not have. As far as increasing capacity during the morning peak, I am already proposing, as part of the summer timetable amendments, an additional commuter service on the route 15 which will operate as an express along Victoria Avenue and this is provided within existing budget by simply tweaking the network. In conclusion, I would advise the Deputy that whether additional capacity is provided by reusing school services or by adding new services and morning services would have to be replicated by the afternoon services as well, additional funding would be required.

2.18.1 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge that one of his aims was to provide a truly integrated service and that the issue in the morning is not necessarily the capacity, it is the fact that it is all condensed within a very short time period. So to say that extra people will be brought in in the morning and that therefore extra services have to be brought into service in the afternoon to mirror those morning services is not quite accurate. It is the condensation of the services which is the issue. Would he also confirm that I observed at least 7 empty buses going in along Victoria Avenue this morning, totally empty when people were waiting at bus stops?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

Yes, indeed, the Deputy is absolutely right in that situation is more condensed in the morning, but the fact of the matter is those people arriving in town have to be got home somehow and we have additional capacity issues in the afternoon. So, I do not think that can be ignored. In terms of the empty buses, I am not content with seeing empty buses running back into town and also have witnessed, in a similar vein, the Deputy's experience. What we have to take on board is the fact that the white Mercedes school buses are not licensed for scheduled services. They are less accessible with steep steps on entry. The drivers just operating the school bus services are not trained or paid to handle cash. They are paid at a different rate, they

are part-timers and they are only required during the school term and therefore are on a different contract to the full-time, permanent members of staff. So it all depends on the arrival of the school services as to whether it is feasible to get them back on to the already congested network into town to collect commuters and to get them in by 9.00 a.m. It is a tight issue and one the department is keen to gain the most advantage out of and we think with the present situation that we do our best.

2.18.2 The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister confirm that his department are thinking outside the box because at a meeting I had with the Assistant Minister and his Director at Connex some weeks ago, I raised the issue of double-decker buses across parts of the Island and I have got a book here of Jersey buses; in fact there is one that goes to Plémont, another one that goes to Gorey Pier, *et cetera* and the excuses were that double-deckers were basically out of sync because there were too many pinch points? On the roads as they were many years ago - they have been widened since - the double-deckers were running around this Island and I am sure you are aware of that. I am aware that you are possible looking at that, but will you make sure that you are looking outside the box in any review that is going on so everybody in the Island can benefit? This publication can be obtained in fact through the good services of Deputy Le Hérissier.

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I, for one - I think, probably with a bit of nostalgia - would be very pleased to see double-decker buses back. They worked very well on the Gorey to Corbière route as I recall and I caught them many times to school myself. So, clearly there are road issues and a bit of trimming which could be done, as I recall it used to be done with the open topped double-decker by the J.M.T. (Jersey Motor Transport Company Limited) and I am sure that is achievable. I think, quite frankly, we will be leading in the next 2 years towards renegotiating the bus contract towards the replacement of bus stock and these are the times that we have to look at this. I, for one, am keen to take this present contract perhaps in a different direction. The present situation I do not think is satisfactory to the travelling public of the Island in its entirety, but it is entirely constrained by finance and this is the difficulty I have at the moment. I have figures in front of me here which indicate an increased bus usage over the last year of 3.67 per cent, while creditable I do not think is really enough and I would like a new contract to perhaps reflect more the demands of Islanders and be in a position for my department to provide a better service after 2013 when it will come into place.

2.18.3 The Deputy of St. Mary:

Again and again the Minister has said that each additional bus requires funding. The buses cost money. I would like to ask the Minister whether he will quite soon cease to think only in terms of the costs of the bus service and start also to add up the benefits of the bus service to the community? What measures will the Minister take to assess the savings and benefits which accrue to the community, both in health terms, fitness terms, pollution terms and land-take terms? Will he undertake to assess the benefits to the community which accrue when more people commute by bus instead of by car?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

While the Deputy takes a very creditable approach and has perhaps a different angle on living to others, I fully understand, but I do not think it is for me to impose a policy change on the people of Jersey. If there is a strong enough feel... if the Deputy feels

that the Treasury ought to take into account the suggestions he makes, I put it to him that he has to bring policy to this House for the Assembly to adopt and transfer to the various departments so that we can review they way we finance the operations of the Island.

2.18.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I simply cannot believe this last answer. The Minister responsible for Transport on the Island says: "It is not for me to bring a policy forward." When is the Minister going to bring forward a sustainable transport policy for this House to consider and to decide which emphasis we should be directing transport policy?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I think that the Deputy misunderstands me. I operate the department in a way that has to stack-up financially. I have no alternative. The Assembly has directed my department to operate in a sustainable manner and if we are working with intangibles, it is extremely difficult. But if Members wish us to do so, we will. Now, in terms of the transport policy, that has been submitted to Scrutiny who are in the process of reviewing it. I expect I shall have a response shortly and it will form part of the Island Plan which will be presented to this Assembly in due course.

2.18.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary, if I may? When will he be submitting his policy and does it take into consideration such things as the new energy policy?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

The policy has been submitted to Scrutiny and I am awaiting their response. In terms of energy policy, that will form part of the Island Plan and will certainly have some link into the I.T.T.P. (Integrated Travel and Transport Plan).

2.18.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

We are not on Questions without Notice, are we? No? We have got a bit off the point.

The Deputy Bailiff:

We have another 15 minutes for Members to question the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Yes, but in relation to the bus service, I wonder if the Minister has considered asking the Comptroller and Auditor General to review the operation of the Connex contract to see whether it has provided value for money and where it could be improved?

The Connétable of St. Brelade:

I would be quite happy for any review into the contract and in fact my department will shortly be, over the next 2 years in fact, getting involved with that to see how we can improve it to the benefit of the public of this Island.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final question then from Deputy Le Hérisier? No. Very well, that completes Question Time. So we then move to Questions without Notice **[Laughter]** and questions are to the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.