

4.7 Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier of the Minister for Social Security regarding appropriate replacements for H.I.E. Travel cards and free Active cards:

Would the Minister advise the Assembly how many meetings, if any, have taken place with the Ministers for Transport and Technical Services, and Education, Sport and Culture, to bring forward proposals for appropriate replacement for the H.I.E. (Health Insurance Exemption) Travel cards and the free Active cards as charged by the States on 22nd November 2007, when adopting P.145 of 2007?

Deputy I.J. Gorst (The Minister for Social Security):

As Minister, I have not attended any meetings with the Minister for Transport and Technical Services or the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture in this respect. As far as I am aware, however, the obligations placed on the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture by P.145/2007 are being met in full. Individuals who hold a free bus pass as a consequence of H.I.E. status are currently covered by a Ministerial Decision made by T.T.S. (Transport and Technical Services) last year in February 2008, and are still eligible for free bus travel. Education, Sport and Culture are now providing a free Active card to any income support claimant who has successfully completed the exercise referral scheme. Regular discussions take place at officer level in respect of these 2 schemes and these will continue.

4.7.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I fully understand that we do have a new Minister and I do understand that the transition is protected until October this year. I am fully aware that with these 3 Ministries there is a lot of work to be done and I want the assurance that if this is not sorted out before October this year, when the transition falls away and the proposition P.145 falls away, that this will carry on until the appropriate meetings and appropriate other facilities are put in place for these people.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

[Interruption] The Minister for Transport and Technical Services is probably trying to help me out. It is not for me to second guess. I am aware that the Minister is due to consider this issue. He might have considered it since I was informed of that fact. I am very supportive and did, in fact, support P.145 and very supportive that those who struggle with using money on public transport do have a scheme whereby they do not have to do that. I support the recommendations of P.145 and I, for one, will want to ensure that with regard to transport they are fully met. With regard to Education, as I indicated in my answer, it is my understanding that Education are now meeting the requirement of P.147 and will continue to do so for income support claimants, as I said, to successfully complete the exercise referral scheme.

4.7.2 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

In the ethos of value for taxpayer; do free bus passes get handed out to everybody that is pensionable, and is there going to be any consideration of means testing in the future?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I think that really is straying outside of my particular area and is a question which should be addressed to the Minister for Transport and Technical Services.

4.7.3 Deputy J.A. Martin:

I think the Minister may be missing the point. What my concern is; yes, we are facilitating those who were covered by H.I.E. in 2007. All new entrants on income support, some of very low, much lower income than these people who are getting free bus travel and maybe free Active card, are not receiving them. Now, this needs to be sorted out and I would like the Minister for Social Security to say that it will be the top of his agenda and not T.T.S.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

With regard to the Active card, it is my understanding that has been sorted out and that is now happening. If the Deputy has information to suggest that that is not the case then certainly I would wish to consider it because as far as I am aware that scheme is now operational. I can confirm that with regard to Transport and Technical Services, I am supportive of that and I continue to support a scheme where those, be they individuals who were holders of H.I.E. cards or be they individuals who are now claimants of income support and were not previously H.I.E. card holders - I am thinking particularly of clients with learning difficulties - I do support them having some means of free access to ... it may not need to be free, they may be prepared to pay for it, but some form of access to transportation that means they do not need to be carrying money with them because sometimes they have difficulty with using that.

4.7.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Will the Minister put the sentiments he has just expressed of support into action and ensure that a replacement scheme for H.I.E. with the added benefits is put into place come October of this year when P.147 falls away?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I think I am getting a little bit confused of where one department starts and another one stops. I am not certain whether other Members are, but I am certainly prepared to take it up have meetings with both those 2 Ministers. As I say, perhaps the Minister for Transport and Technical Services knows slightly more about this than I do, but I can give that commitment.

4.7.5 Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister agree that he would be supportive of recommendations coming from the officer group who have met on the subject, that the Minister for Transport and Technical Services and myself continue or approve the continuation of the H.I.E. concessionary pass scheme with a review during 2009, and that checks be undertaken with Social Security on the renewal of each card and that the introduction of prepaid books of tickets to facilitate bus travel for those individuals who have difficulty in handling cash? Would he support those recommendations?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I have not seen those recommendations but from what the Minister has just told me, it sounds as though they are completely supportable but I would obviously need to give a little bit more of an in depth look at them.