

2015.12.01

4.10 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Transport and Technical Services regarding plans to charge for disabled parking:

Will the Minister confirm whether he has any plans to start charging for disabled parking which is currently free?

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

I have always been entirely open on my long-held view that parking should not be free and that some form of discounted charge should be considered in the round for disabled parking. Indeed I have discussed this publicly with the media just prior to Deputy Tadier submitting this question. I am not alone in this view. The concept of charging is a way of removing the motivation for abuse of the blue badge system. It was put to me early in my term by a voluntary group who work directly with the disabled. However, for equity I must make it clear that such a proposal would only be contemplated as part of a comprehensive package of measures to improve mobility for all Islanders with disabilities. At present charging is not policy and there are no firm proposals but with my ministerial colleagues I am resolved to break down the barriers to mobility and as such every option must remain open at this time.

4.10.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

It would be nice if we knew about these tendencies before the Minister put himself up for election in this Assembly but nonetheless could the Minister explain what he means by the abuse of disabled parking badges, and his proposed solution that we should perhaps consider removing free parking from all disabled people to stop what he sees as abuses of the blue badge scheme?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am advised by this organisation that does deal directly with the disabled and their mobility issues that there is some limited abuse and, in fact, there is some historical data that the blue badge has been removed from individuals for abusing the system. That is all I have to say on that.

4.10.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Before going to the press had the Minister discussed this at Council of Ministers level and, more importantly, had this been agreed as a potential policy area?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

No, it was a private conversation with a member of the media. It is not policy. It is not even a policy under discussion. It is merely a view that I hold. When I walk down Broad Street and I see expensive sports cars and expensive vehicles parked in disabled bays I see no reason why some of those individuals should not contribute to the cost of their parking and that money redistributed to those who have disabilities that need more assistance.

4.10.3 Deputy P.D. McLinton of St. Saviour:

I guess it is important that we do not confuse disability with inability to pay. So would the Minister look, possibly, into means-tested disabled parking? Also if the Minister is against free parking would he confirm he is looking into States Members paying for their parking as well?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I have already had that conversation with P.P.C. about taking away the effectively no cost to either the States Assembly or to individual Members for their parking requirements.

4.10.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

If the Minister is going to be taking away everyone's parking is he also going to remove it from all civil servants, including chief officers?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

This has come a long way from the original question, but that is something we will have to look at in the round depending on what future we want for St. Helier. Many cities in the U.K. are looking at the cost of parking in terms of redistributing those charges. Is it right that some people can park in the basement of office buildings and not have it be taxed as a benefit in kind while others who do not have that facility have to pay their parking in public car parks? It is something we need to look at, no conclusions to be drawn, but these things do need to be researched.

4.10.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is a long established principle that people with a certain disability are granted free parking and access to the blue badge scheme and the Minister, I would suggest, has no mandate for changing that unless there is evidence that there is public opinion and contrary opinion from States Members. Notwithstanding his dislike of expensive cars, could he suggest that all this has arisen because he made a statement when he stood that he wished to give disabled people free bus passes and when he has been asked to deliver on that he comes out with effectively what is a shroud-waving exercise saying: "But if we deliver that we may have to take away disabled people's free parking." Is that not correct? Could we not altogether find a much more acceptable way to fund such a modest scheme without penalising the very people that we are trying to help?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I do not believe that Deputy Tadier was listening to the answer to his original question from myself. I said at present there is no policy and there are no firm proposals. It is something that I will have a discussion with my colleagues when we discuss the outcome of the work that is being done by the Chief Minister's Department to break down the barriers of mobility for everyone in the Island that has mobility issues.