

2016.04.12

4.4 Connétable A.S. Crowcroft of St. Helier of the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the cost of bus travel in Jersey:

Will the Minister take steps to make the cost of bus travel in Jersey as attractive as our sister Island of Guernsey where fares are half the price and there is a round-the-Island flat fare of £1 designed especially for tourists and, if not, why not?

Deputy E.J. Noel (The Minister for Infrastructure):

I welcome this question. The model of the bus operation in Guernsey is very different to that of Jersey. While we are happy to be benchmarked with any of our services with Guernsey it is important that we compare like for like. The States of Jersey act as a bus regulator not as the operator. Unlike Guernsey we do not own the vehicles or carry the revenue risk. Being able to set fares at the appropriate level LibertyBus is commercially incentivised to continue improving growth of the Jersey service. In Guernsey the bus company does not have this incentive. It merely runs and maintains the buses on behalf of the States of Guernsey. The States of Guernsey specify fares and the levels of service to be operated. For example, the buses start later in the day and finish earlier at night and run less frequently than in Jersey. In Guernsey the bus fleet is older with less attractive passenger environments than those vehicles in Jersey. The States of Guernsey indeed will soon have to allocate additional taxpayers' money to start renewing their buses. Changing the adult fare in Jersey to the same £1 charge as in Guernsey would reduce our operator revenue by allowing £1.6 million per annum, and this is money simply that my department does not have and I could not support such a policy. To give Members some comparison data: in Jersey our subsidy, excluding the school buses, is just over 80 pence per journey. In Guernsey it is about £3 per journey.

4.4.1 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I would like to thank the Minister for that very helpful and concise answer to my question. Is the Minister going to take further the suggestion I have made to him that we try to seek more attractive pricing in the bus network, even if that does mean a bid for more money to help subsidise the cost?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

That can only be done in one of 2 ways. One is providing further taxpayers' money to subsidise the bus service further or perhaps, indeed, since all the buses come in and out of St. Helier, that maybe the Parish would want to contribute to bring the fares down.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec of St. Helier:

There were 2 others that had their lights on.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I have noted Deputy Mézec, then I have noted Deputy Labey. I am afraid I have not seen other lights so, Deputy Tadier, did you have your light on?

Deputy M. Tadier:

I did, but he can go first.

4.4.2 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Is the Minister aware that parking in Guernsey is currently free of charge and does he accept that in terms of affecting people's behaviour and encouraging people onto buses and to help reduce congestion and pollution that there is another method of affecting people's behaviour other than

just making everything more expensive, and it is to make things cheaper instead? So would he agree to look at this as a potential strategy moving forward so that we do not simply punish poor people who have to travel?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am fully aware of the charging for car parks in St. Peter Port. There is nothing free. Yes, we could reduce the cost of parking, we could reduce the cost of Islanders using our buses but that comes at a cost and who would pick up that cost? It would be the taxpayer or perhaps, in the case of parts of St. Helier, maybe the Parish of St. Helier, as I alluded to earlier.

[10:00]

All these things are possible but it does need to be financed, they are not free.

4.4.3 Deputy R. Labey:

Would the Minister consider with LibertyBus making the £2 cash ticket valid for an hour which would prevent passengers passing in and out of town on a single journey from being unfairly penalised?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I am happy to take that suggestion of the Deputy to LibertyBus and see what they can do. But, as I said, they carry the risk for the fares. We no longer do. Under the old contract with Connex we did carry the risk and I believe our subsidy was in excess of £7 million a year versus the £4 million a year that it currently is. The answer from Liberty will probably be: "Yes, we would be willing to do that but your subsidy has to go up."

4.4.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Does the Minister accept that while there is a reduced fare for using an AvanchiCard that it is discriminatory, arguably, to tourists who either are not inclined or do not know about the AvanchiCard, and also to those on low incomes who do not necessarily have sufficient funds at any one time to be able to top up such a card? Because of that it is both regressive and sending out a bad message to our tourist industry, which Guernsey very quickly learned from.

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I completely disagree with Deputy Tadier there. The AvanchiCard system works well. It is a great way for Islanders to save money and to budget their spend. You can put up to as little as £10 on an AvanchiCard I believe. LibertyBus do cater for our visitors. They do have a separate range of AvanchiCard-like products for visitors to the Island, which are very attractive in their pricing and their flexibility.

4.4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

I know that Avanchi is good and that is why I have one myself, not just because I am parsimonious when it comes to my own money. But given that it is such a good scheme that the Minister endorses would he make those cards available on the bus for purchase so that you can top up those cards when you get on the bus so that you do not have to pay a cash fare when your money gets too low?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I believe that LibertyBus you can top up your AvanchiCard online or at the bus station itself. I believe that Liberty are looking at other ways for individuals to be able to top up their cards. But the beauty about it is that you still do get a receipt and that receipt tells you how much you have got left on

your card, so most people have ample time to make sure that they have sufficient fares on their card to carry out their journey.

4.4.6 The Connétable of St. Helier:

I think Deputy Labey has raised an issue I wanted to raise, which is the problem encountered by someone who wants to stop their bus journey and make a visit, whether it is to a relation or perhaps to stop in St. Aubin on the way to the airport. I am encouraged to hear that he is going to look at the possibility of a ticket which will allow one to do just that, to hop on and hop off a bus. Would he also pass on for me, and I think many bus users, our thanks to LibertyBus for the improvements they have made in their services around the Island?

Deputy E.J. Noel:

I most certainly will do both those things.