

FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT FACILITIES – GOVT. POLICY (22/06/10)

(No. 1B/107) Mr S. Obeegadoo (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, National Development Unit, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to free public transport facilities, he will state -

- (a) if the present policy is being reviewed and, if so, the reasons therefor, and
- (b) the alternative measures that will be introduced in respect of
 - (i) old age pensioners;
 - (ii) students, and
 - (iii) other beneficiaries.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, free transport facilities are being granted to old age pensioners, the disabled persons and students travelling by public buses since 2005. This scheme is applicable in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The House is also aware that in the Presidential address, mention has been made to the effect that the present policy of free travel scheme will be maintained. But the mechanism for payment will be reviewed to ensure efficiency gain. In this respect, several options are being analysed.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has now publicly confirmed what the MMM has been saying since 2005, regarding the lack of effectiveness of the hastily arrived at formula of 2005, that is, the wastage of public funds that have gone into this hastily arrived at formula. Will the hon. Minister agree to recommend to Government an overall assessment of the cost- effectiveness of the formula implemented since 2005 and, if not, why not?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not true to say that there has been wastage of public money, this is not the case. But, in fact, all of us know that there have been many flaws in the existing system and we have tried our level best in order to improve whatever required. For example, there have been too many problems which are created by the bus conductors, drivers, the bus proprietors and all these things have been taken care of. Despite it, we have still seen certain flaws in the system and that is the reason why Government has decided to look once again on the mode of payment. We are looking into in and, in fact, I have with me a report which was prepared by Steer Davies Gleave and I am going to lay a copy on the Table of the Assembly so that the Member can have a look at it. In fact, this has been a very interesting method which we have introduced. Unfortunately, this method has got certain flaws and that is the reason why we have instituted a Committee to look into the flaws and then to come forward with certain recommendations which we are going to implement.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since these so called flaws have been publicly known since five long years, would the hon. Minister tell us why Government has had to wait until now to agree to what the Opposition, the MMM, has been saying since long that there is a need to review this whole formula?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, we have taken steps in order to control the situation. For example, we have taken action concerning all those who have not been following the rules of the game properly. In the beginning, for example, in 2004, we received 440 complaints and last year we have received only 200 complaints. This means that actions have been taken and we have been able to obtain results.

In addition to these, we have got 100 cases where the conductors and bus drivers' licences were suspended. Even the traffic permit of the bus proprietors have also been suspended for many months. So, actions have been taken and the system that we have put in place has given results, but as I have just mentioned we have got certain flaws in any system.

Whatever we introduce, we do have certain minus points and once we have come to know that there can be better means that can be introduced, we are going to do so.

For example, the report which I have submitted is clear that there is a distinct system which is a good one. But unfortunately, we have seen the flaws; we have taken actions that need to be taken. Last year only we have forfeited Rs5.2 m. that were supposed to be paid to the bus companies, which we have not been paid, which means Government has been very strict. Now, when Government has decided to have a look at the system over again, we are going to have a look at it, that's all.

Mr Obeegadoo: The old people are still left waiting on the bus stop!

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over!