

Free Transport to Students

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

METRO EXPRESS LTD – MECARDS SYSTEM – STUDENTS FREE TRAVEL SCHEME

(11.07.2023)

(No. B/1008) **Mr R. Doolub (Third Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien)** asked the Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade whether, in regard to free transport for students, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Metro Express Ltd., information as to the –

- (a) number thereof having travelled onboard the metro during the last 6 months, and
- (b) changes being brought thereto with the introduction of MECards system.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the coming into operation of the Light Rail Transit System in 2020, the free travel scheme was extended to senior citizens, persons with disabilities and students. The Light Rail Transit System is widely used by students to connect seamlessly between their residence and their educational institutions and vice versa.

With respect to part (a) of the question, I am informed that on a normal school day, an average of 4,000 students comprising students from primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions travel on-board the Metro Express. Accordingly, during the last six months, around 400,000 trips were undertaken by students.

With regard to part (b) of the question, in accordance with Regulation 10 of the Light Rail Fares and Light Rail Tickets Regulations 2019, as subsequently amended, any student who wishes to benefit from the free travel or rebated concessions student fares on the Metro Express should use his/her Student MECard.

Accordingly, all students would henceforth be required to mandatorily be in possession of both their Student MECard and a student identity card, that is, the bus pass delivered by the NLTA in order to –

- (i) benefit from free travel between his/her residence and his/her educational institution on school days only, and

- (ii) benefit from a reduced concessionary fare if not travelling within his/her residence and his/her educational institution or on non-school days or during school holidays.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a well-articulated communication exercise by Metro Express Ltd in collaboration with the NLTA and the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology is ongoing to sensitise students in relation to the compulsory use of Student MECard. MEL is further carrying out on-site awareness campaigns in educational institutions found along the Metro corridor to inform students accordingly and in order to ensure that the necessary information is disseminated.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish also to respond to the matter raised by hon. Ameer Meea at adjournment matter on 04 July this year on the subject matter. In fact, a well-established process has already been instituted among the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology, the educational institutions, the National Land Transport Authority and Metro Express Ltd in connection with a timely issue of Student MECard. There is to that effect no excessive delay at the level of the NLTA or MEL in processing the applications for the MECards, provided that the requests are duly submitted in a prompt manner by the relevant educational institutions and that payment for same is made accordingly.

I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the delay in the processing of the MECards is due to the non-submission of applications at the level of the schools whereby some wait for all the students to submit their applications before submitting same to the NLTA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to point out that an adaptation period was indeed provided to the students since the beginning of the school year for them to get accustomed to this new mode of transport and at the same time allow them to procure their Student MECards through their respective educational institutions.

I would therefore take the opportunity to make an appeal to educational institutions for them to promptly submit their applications of the students, including the relevant payment in connection thereto so that the MECards could be made available to the students at the earliest.

In the meantime, Mr Speaker, Sir, and in order to provide a stress-free experience to our students on-board the light rail, Metro Express Ltd has adopted a flexible approach until the end of July 2023 towards the students using the Metro Express to attend their educational institutions.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I refer to the reply to part (a) of my question, the Minister replied that around 400,000 students benefited from free transport. May we know what is the cost involved, please?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I said was that during the last six months, around 400,000 trips were undertaken by students. Evidently, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a cost to all this. In terms of computation of the free travel for the light rail, Metro Express Ltd is currently compensated on the same premise as the bus operators, that is, based on the number of light rail vehicles put in operation. MEL is accordingly being paid a compensation to the tune of Rs229,500 monthly per light rail vehicle in as much as a light rail vehicle has a carrying capacity equivalent to 300 passengers, which is roughly 4.5 higher than those of the bus.

Therefore, the payment of the free travel scheme to MEL does not account the number of students effectively being conveyed on board the light rail but rather the number of light rail vehicles put in operation in a particular month. The same mechanism has been put in place as we are operating in the bus system presently.

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to come to the reply given to part (b) of my question, the introduction of the MECard system. The Minister mentioned in his reply that a well-established process has been established since it involves different institutions, NLTA, Ministries and other institutions. May we know what is that process for processing the application of the MECard?

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question. This question should enable clarifications to the students and their parents. In fact, the steps to obtain a Student MECard are as follows, Mr Speaker, Sir –

1. Any student who wishes to procure a Student MECard should approach his respective educational institution which will in turn send his details to the NLTA based on a template.
2. The information is then checked at the level of the NLTA and validated by the NLTA based on the database kept by the latter.
3. The NLTA after verification will submit the list to MEL.
4. Upon receipt of the list from NLTA, MEL will liaise with the schools for payment.

5. Once payment is effected, MEL initialises the cards with the details of the students, that is, his address, the name of the educational institution.
6. And then, the MECards may be collected by the educational institutions.