

## **SCHOOL BUS OWNERS - FREE TRANSPORT SCHEME (13/09/05)**

**(No. I B/259) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will –

(a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, the number of licences issued to owners of school buses, and

(b) state whether he will consider the plight of the owners of school buses and thereby include them in the free transport scheme for students and, if so, will he state what remedial measures he proposes to take in that connection and, if not, why not.

**The Ag. Prime Minister:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I propose to make a common reply to Parliamentary Questions I B/259, I B/267 and I B/268 as they are interrelated.

I am informed by the NTA that some 680 contract bus owners hold a school bus licence for the conveying of school children. However, it is a fact that a few owners of contract buses who are not holders of such licences do illegally provide the service.

I would like to inform the House that the free travel scheme to fulltime students was meant to target those who use stage carriage buses as a means to go to their respective educational institution. However, I have received several representations from contract bus owners performing school services, to the effect that they be compensated for the loss incurred as a result of students shifting to stage carriage buses.

In view of the unavailability of data on the number of primary school students using other modes of travel for attending schools, their residential address, fares being paid, etc, the Ministry of Education & Human Resources is at present carrying out a comprehensive survey to capture all relevant information relating to the bus using population and money spent on bus fares. A decision on the representations of the contract bus owners will only be taken in the light of the findings of the survey.

I wish to point out that with a view to addressing the problems related to the free travel scheme, monitoring committees have been set up at the level of the Ministry of Education & Human Resources, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizen's Welfare & Reform

Institutions and the NTA as well as a Central Monitoring Committee under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary of my Ministry. The first meeting of the Central Monitoring Committee was held on 09 September at which it was pointed out that along a few routes, for example, Route 16 (Rose Hill to Flacq via Bel Air, Sebastopol and Montagne Blanche), the transport service for students was inadequate. The Central Monitoring Committee is addressing the problem and the NTA has been requested to liaise with the relevant Bus Owners' Cooperative Societies for the redeployment of buses to the routes where the service is not satisfactory. I should seize this opportunity, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to invite any Member of the House to kindly submit to the Central Monitoring Committee of my Ministry any views whatsoever and any suggestions he may have to propose on the functioning of the free transport scheme.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Ag. Prime Minister when will that survey be completed and whether he agrees to table its findings?

**The Ag. Prime Minister:** We expect the survey to end middle or end of October, and then it will have to be analysed.

**Mr Guinness:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, normally, the school bus permits are given by the NTA. Can we know the number of such licences and why these school bus permits – I am not talking about contract buses – are not taken on board?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Why does not the hon. Member come with a substantive question?

**Mr Guinness:** This question is related to PQ No. I B/267. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Ag. Prime Minister mentioned the bus route Rose Hill via Sébastopol. I would like to inform him that we have a serious problem for those from Bramsthan, Ecroignard, GRSE going towards Flacq, because over there we have *taxi trains*, which were previously transporting students, as there was no bus available. Therefore, can I ask the Ag. Prime Minister whether he could see to it that a sufficient number of buses are put on that route?

**The Ag. Prime Minister:** I quoted that bus route number as an example, but there are other ones. I thank the hon. Member, and if he has any deficiencies to point out, we will be only too happy to address them.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** Mr Deputy Speaker, may I know from the Ag.

Prime Minister whether this free transport scheme is extended to the intraurban transport system?

**The Ag. Prime Minister:** Yes, subject to certain conditions.