

**1.7. Bus ticket prices for Isle of Man students –
Those asked to pay more than 40p per journey**

The Hon. Member for Onchan (Mr Callister) to ask the Minister for Infrastructure:

Why some Isle of Man students not attending Government-run schools or College are being asked to pay more than 40p per journey; and if his Department will undertake a review of the current policy?

The Speaker: Question 7 and I call on the Hon. Member for Onchan, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I ask the Minister for Infrastructure why some Isle of Man students not attending Government-run schools or College are being asked to pay more than 40p per journey; and if his Department will undertake a review of the current policy?

The Speaker: I call on the Minister for Infrastructure to reply.

The Minister for Infrastructure (Mr Harmer): The policy decision on the issue of fares for schoolchildren does not actually originate from the Departments responsible for providing public transport. The budget speech made by the then Treasury Minister in Tynwald Court in February 2000 contained an announcement that bus fares for schoolchildren travelling to and from state-run schools would be free from the summer term of that year; and that an additional payment would be made to the then Department of Tourism and Leisure to fund this.

In 2015, my Department brought back school fares, at least in part, to promote what we now know as Active Travel but then was called walking to school. In anticipation of this change Tynwald had already provided the Maximum Fare (School Bus Routes) Regulations 2014 which also made clear that eligible school bus services were those serving state schools.

In my view, the additional cost of transport is part of the choice made by parents of those attending a private school. I am aware that King William's College makes its own arrangements for school buses by contracting with a private operator. While I am simply observing a long-established Tynwald policy, with the current charging system I can confirm that it is one I would support and at this point have no intention of changing.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Thank you, Mr Speaker; apologies.

I thank the Minister for his response but, apologies, I need to probably read *Hansard* to understand that Answer.

Does the Minister actually support a change in policy? And, if he does, will he help me to actually change that policy, because the policy is clearly incorrect when there are some students on the Isle of Man being charged more than the standard 40p per journey?

If I can ask the Minister just to work with me to have that policy reviewed and changed?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you.

No, the policy comes from Tynwald. The policy is that the concession fare of 40p is just for state-school pupils, it is not for those attending private schools.

And, actually, it is not one where I feel that my priorities, and certainly I would expect others' priorities, to focus on those that perhaps have longer journeys and that perhaps can afford those journeys. That would not be a priority of mine, particularly.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The Question also asks about the 'College'. I am wondering if the Minister is aware that not all college students are treated the same at the moment under his Department's policy. He did say it was his Department that brought these charges back after Tynwald made a decision to make them free. So I would argue it is quite clearly his Department's policy to do this.

Can he please comment on why all students at the college are not treated equally and why all students at the college are not able to access this concessionary fare?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you.

In terms of really, this was mainly related to as I say, the cost of taking a child to and from school which was an average of £4, and the current fare is 40p.

My focus was really on King William's College. I will take any comments about general college fares back, and particularly on where the concessions lie. But we are really talking about a 40p fare and about private colleges.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I follow up from the question just asked from my colleague from Ramsey? Can I ask the Minister if he is taking back the Isle of Man College, will he also look at private schools as well, because some of those students are actually children that have been awarded scholarships, etc.? So the system appears to be unfair, and I ask the Minister again if his Department will look at that policy?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: No, private schools are not a priority of mine and I will not be looking at that at this point.

There are many other things where we want to encourage people to use buses. This is not one where people can clearly afford to use those buses, (**A Member:** That is not true.) so this is not something that I will be looking at at this time.

The Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr Hooper.

Mr Hooper: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

I would just like to get some clarity from the Minister. He did not actually answer my question if he is *aware* that not all college students are eligible for the 40p concession. And I heard him say he was going to take concerns away and think about them. Does that mean he is going to be providing an answer to that question? And actually what is he going to do to make sure that all college students are eligible for the concession?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: We are talking about a number of different concessions and level of concessions. I was talking about the 40p. If there are other elements to do with the college I will certainly look back at that and come back to the Member.

In terms of private college, which I think is where the question was really pointed to, I do not think that is mine or most people's priority.

The Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr Callister.

Mr Callister: Yes, thank you, Mr Speaker.

Can I ask the Minister just from his previous statement there, how he actually knows the King William's College students can afford the additional fare increases that the Minister is applying?

The Speaker: Minister to reply.

The Minister: Thank you.

The cost of the travel is £4. There are concessionary fares that they already can have, such as a half-price fare. This is not a priority certainly for anybody, I think, in this House; and certainly it is not a priority of mine. I can only re-emphasise that.