

## Concessionary Travel Consultation – DRAFT response Scottish Borders Council

### Part 2 – Questions on options

#### No change to age eligibility of the Scheme

#### Should scheme eligibility remain unchanged ?

Do you believe that age eligibility for the Scheme should remain as it is? At present everyone resident in Scotland can get the bus pass on their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and be able to travel for free at any time of day, for any number of journeys, on local and long distance scheduled bus services throughout Scotland.

#### Question 1

Do you think that we should retain the existing age eligibility criteria for the Scheme? Yes  No

Please use the box below to provide details.

My comments:

**As pension age rises there is less need for a free concessionary scheme to start at age 60. The cost saved could be better directed to assist the most transport-deprived sectors of the population. It is however recognised that free travel encourages greater use of public transport. Modal shift from car to bus, which is one of the key objectives of the concessionary travel scheme, may be most likely to occur in the 60-65 years (working) age bracket. A significant shift in journeys from bus to car, leading to reduced bus patronage, could affect the financial sustainability of bus journeys/routes and thereby have detrimental effects on the wider bus network and its users, thus undermining another key objective of the scheme, i.e. to “provide opportunity for improvements to public transport”.**

#### Options to change the National Concessionary Travel Scheme

#### Raise the age of eligibility for men and women to the female State Pension age in one step

What is it?

so that they will reach State Pension age at 65 from November 2018. In addition, both men's and women's State Pension age is due to increase to 66 by 2020 and to 67 between 2026 and 2028.

The proposal would set the age of eligibility for free bus travel at female State Pension age from 2018.

## Question 2

Are you in favour of raising age eligibility to female State Pension age in this way?

Yes

No

Please explain your answers.

**Generally it would be expected for income to decrease upon retirement so there is a logic in linking eligibility for concessionary travel to pensionable age as previously existed. (Prior to April 2003 concessionary travel was available to women aged 60+ and men aged 65+ in line with pension ages).**

**People aged 60+ with a disability would still be entitled to free travel if meeting the eligibility criteria for disabled persons.**

## Raise the age of eligibility to the female State Pension age over a number of years

What is it?

Women's State Pension age is being equalised with men's, so that they will reach State Pension age at 65 from November 2018. In addition, both men's and women's State Pension age will increase to 66 by 2020 and to 67 between 2026 and 2028.

Age eligibility could be increased towards the (female) State Pension age either:-

- by one year per calendar year; or
- by six months per calendar year

## Question 3

Are you in favour of raising age eligibility to female State Pension age gradually over time?

Yes

No

At what rate?

By 1 year per year

By half a year per year

**Please explain your answers.**

**The Council is supportive and mindful of the pressure group WASPI (Women Against State Pension Increase) case.**

**Increasing the age of entitlement by six months each calendar year is preferable to increasing the age of entitlement by a year each calendar year (for example, in 2018, increasing the age to only 60 ½ years rather than 61 years).**

**This more gradual implementation would be more beneficial as it would provide those most affected in the short-term (those nearing the age of 60) with more time to plan for the financial and any other negative impacts of the proposal to raise the age eligibility.**

**We appreciate that applying 6 monthly increases will take 14 years to achieve the transition from 60 to 67 in some cases, and we agree this is not practical however, the implementation of at least an initial series of six monthly increases will lessen the impact on those near to 60 years.**

**A more gradual change should also result in a more gradual impact on the bus network, allowing operators more time to plan and adapt to the revised market conditions.**

### Free bus travel for Modern Apprentices

**What is it?**

Young people undertaking Modern Apprentice frameworks registered with Skills Development Scotland would be able to get free bus travel. The offer might be targeted at those Modern Apprentices under age 21.

**What does it mean for me?**

If you are a qualifying Modern Apprentice you would be able to get free bus travel.

### Question 4

**Are you in favour of providing free bus travel to Modern Apprentices?**

Yes

No

**Should this be targeted at Modern Apprentices under Age 21?**

Yes

No

**Is there a better way to provide support to help with the travel costs of Modern Apprentices?**

Yes

No

**If so, please specify below.**

**Please explain your answers.**

**The consultation paper states that the proposal will make “Modern Apprenticeships more accessible for all young people”. However, particularly in rural areas there may be no public transport or no suitable public transport between the young person’s home and place of work (or place of higher education if applicable) so the availability of a free bus pass could be of limited benefit. It might be more equitable to provide a travel bursary that could be used towards the cost of any transport: for example, bus or rail fares, taxi/PHC fares, or the running costs of private transport.**

**The Council is supportive of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme but, rather than targeting concessionary travel to modern apprentices, an enhancement to the Young Persons bus scheme would be more equitable and provide an incentive for more young people to use public transport rather than their own private transport.**

**Support for “Wheels to Work” type schemes (e.g. scooter or moped hire would support those people who do not have suitable bus services. Travel by these means would not necessarily be free, but assistance towards the cost of the schemes, enabling low cost to the users, would be useful.**

## Companion cards for disabled children under age 5

### What is it?

Allow disabled under 5s to get a companion card where this is needed so that their parent/carer can travel for free. Under 5s cannot get a disabled persons bus pass as they generally travel for free.

### What does it mean for me?

The parent or carer accompanying the child currently has to pay for their own travel until that child qualifies for a companion card on their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. This would allow the parent or carer to travel with an eligible disabled child under 5 for free.

## Question 5

Are you in favour of providing a companion card for disabled under 5s where this is needed?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer.

**The proposal addresses the anomaly in the current eligibility criteria whereby the individuals affected are entitled to a bus pass on grounds of disability but fail to qualify because of their age. We support the reasons given in the consultation paper, and it removes an element of age discrimination. We do believe, however, that concessionary reimbursement should be paid only for the companion, as the child would have travelled free in any case. This would mean the card being programmed with a different category of eligibility.**

## Are there any other issues you wish to raise which are not covered above?

The Scottish Government welcomes any further comments and suggestions on the Scheme and how it might be improved or made more sustainable.

### Question 6

Do you have any other comments about any of the issues raised in this consultation?

Yes

No

If so, please use the box below to provide details.

#### My comments:

- 1. The National Blind Scheme for Rail Travel is administered by Scottish transport authorities who individually deal with the ScotRail franchise-holder, currently Abellio, who represent the rail industry in this respect. It would be more appropriate for Transport Scotland to manage the administration of this concessionary travel arrangement.**
- 2. The existing scheme disproportionately benefits urban residents who have high frequency bus services. It does not benefit people in areas without bus services or who are unable to walk to the nearest bus stop (however near or far that may be). We would therefore urge that some of the savings from increasing the eligible age are directed to supporting provision of demand-responsive transport (which could be Community Transport, Council-operated or contracted with commercial providers) which would directly benefit the most vulnerable and transport-deprived people in our community. This would give a significant social benefit for these groups of people, and would give targeted help to offset the disadvantage to lower-income people aged 60 to 66 caused by increasing the entitlement age.**
- 3. It is well known that the benefits of the scheme vary significantly for different individuals, being greater for those living in areas well served by public transport, particularly urban and inter-urban areas. Those people living in areas less well served by public transport, or only served by community transport services unable to participate in the Scottish Government's free travel scheme, are less able to take advantage of concessionary travel.**
- 4. As highlighted in the consultation paper, public transport has experienced a decline in use, affecting the viability of services and resulting in reductions in levels of service. Government savings derived**

**from amending the age entitlement could be used to support bus services including the enhancement of passenger transport provision in rural areas where the possession of a free bus pass may be of little or no value given the sparsity of bus services. Given the potential impacts on the wider bus market it is essential that operators remain no better and no worse by participating in the scheme.**

- 5. Implementation from April 2018 is a very short timescale for those approaching the age of 60, particularly those on low income, who will need to adjust to the change in their circumstances. A later implementation date would benefit individuals nearing the age of 60.**

## Part 3 - Assessing impact

1.1

### Question – Equality Impacts

Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained within this Consultation may have on particular groups of people, with reference to the ‘protected characteristics’ listed above? Please be as specific as possible.

### Question – Children and young people

Do you think the proposals contained within this Consultation may have any additional implications on the safety of children and young people?

1.2

### Question – Business impacts

Do you think the proposals contained in this Consultation are likely to increase or reduce the costs and burdens placed on any sector? Please be as specific as possible.

1.3

### Question – Privacy impacts

Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained in this Consultation may have upon the privacy of individuals? Please be as specific as possible.



## Annex C

### Options not favoured by the Scottish Government

A number of those with whom we have engaged in preparing this Consultation indicated a first preference for maintaining the current age of eligibility or, if changes had to be made, for alternative approaches to be taken. For a variety of reasons the Scottish Government is not minded to adopt these but they are listed below for information: -

#### **1 Requiring card holders to make a small financial contribution towards the cost of each concessionary journey.**

A fixed contribution of, say, 20p, 50p or £1 would be required to be paid for each journey undertaken. This would be relatively simple to implement and would generate significant savings. For example, a contribution of 20p per journey could save up to £17 million annually if applied to all concessionary passengers, including disabled bus pass holders as well as those qualifying on age. (Requiring a contribution only from non-disabled pass holders would reduce savings by about 10%.)

#### **2 Levying an annual charge for access to free bus travel.**

The journeys themselves would be free but there would be a fixed annual fee, for example £10 or £20. In effect, this would be like having an annual very low cost season ticket valid on all buses. Based on current usage, annual savings could be up to £13 million with a £10 charge and proportionately more for higher charges. Excluding disabled bus pass holders from the requirement to pay a charge would reduce savings by about 10%.

The Scottish Government does not favour either of these two options because they would not be consistent with the commitment set out in the Programme for Government 2016-17 to provide free bus travel for older and disabled persons. Option 1 could additionally lengthen boarding times and Option 2 would require new administrative arrangements, for example to issue reminders and process forms.

#### **3 Restricting use of a bus pass during peak travel times.**

Limiting the use of the bus pass to off-peak travel might save costs by encouraging people to travel at times when bus services tend to be less busy. This can reduce costs for bus operators and possibly alleviate overcrowding at peak times. However savings might be limited if people simply travel at different times and there could be delays to boarding times if disagreements arise over whether a journey is peak or off peak.

#### **4 Having a cap on the value of individual journeys which can be free.**

For example, all journeys made in a year up to an overall limit, such as £250, would be free. Travellers would have to pay for any additional journeys beyond this point until the end of the year. The level of savings would depend on the limit set but such an arrangement would allow costs to be controlled without the need for the present reimbursement capping arrangements. However new systems would be required to administer such an arrangement, including enabling passengers to tell easily how much travel they were still entitled to.

The Scottish Government is not minded to pursue either of these options at this time given the potential implementation and operational issues.

You may wish to use the box below to provide comments on these or any other way in which you believe the long-term sustainability of concessionary travel could be achieved, as well as other comments you may wish to make for improvements to the scheme.

##### **My comments:**

- 1. It is our experience that many older people are willing to pay a contribution towards their transport.**
- 2. The levying of an annual charge unrelated to actual travel would be particularly unfair for those living in rural areas with limited access to public transport who already benefit less from the scheme than urban residents.**
- 3. In rural areas the number of bus journeys available can be limited and people may have little option but to travel at peak times so we do not favour a time restriction for concessionary bus travel.**
- 4. This option could be attractive if adequate systems could be put in place to ensure that bus users have all the information required to manage their free travel “budget”.**
- 5. The National Blind Scheme for Rail Travel is administered by Scottish transport authorities who individually deal with the ScotRail franchise-holder, currently Abellio, who represent the rail industry in this respect. It would be more appropriate for Transport Scotland to manage the administration of this concessionary travel arrangement.**