



**Community
Transport
Association**

Response to the Transport Directorate Scottish Government

Consultation on Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People: Three Year Review

Closing Date:

The Community Transport Association

The CTA is a rapidly growing national charity giving voice and providing leadership, learning and enterprise support to member organisations, which are delivering innovative transport solutions to achieve social change. CTA UK promotes excellence through providing training, publications, advice and information on voluntary, accessible and community transport.

Voluntary and community transport exists to meet the travel and social needs of people to whom these would otherwise be denied, providing accessible and affordable transport to achieve social inclusion.

The CTA is the representative body for third sector passenger transport operators in the UK. CTA Member organisations are involved in the provision of transport, especially accessible services.

The CTA is the UK's largest provider of training, advice and information on accessible, voluntary and community transport provision. The CTA is part-funded by the Department for Transport, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Regional Development (Northern Ireland).

CTA's Response to Consultation

The CTA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Transport Directorate Scottish Government consultation process. After reading through the consultation we have decided to respond on those specific areas that we believe would have a marked effect on our sector.

Contact Details

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The Community Transport Association (CTA) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the Scotland-wide Free Bus Travel Scheme, as part of the review of the scheme and as outlined in your letter of 21 July 2008.

CTA and its members have urged for a national scheme which would include community transport services since well before the scheme's inception in 2006. We believe that the current scheme is flawed as many of the people entitled to free travel cannot use their concession due to their inability to access conventional bus services. This can be due to the fact that they may be frail, elderly, or disabled and cannot use conventional services or they may live in areas where bus services are sparse or non-existent. Instead such people often rely on community transport to enable them to undertake their day to day activities but in most instances they have to pay for these services. The activities they need to access include shopping, attending social activities, attending hospital and other health related appointments. Community transport helps the Scottish Government to meet its Strategic Objective of creating a healthier Scotland, by enabling people who experience social exclusion to sustain and improve their health and to have better and faster access to health care. Having good, reliable, accessible transport also enables people to live independently for longer, thus reducing the burden on care in the community and residential care budgets.

CTA's key submission is that the current national concessionary fare scheme should be changed to include community transport services. You have asked for the number of people that would be affected by any proposed changes and our estimated annual costs and savings were changes to be implemented. The best indications we can give are drawn from a survey conducted by CTA in July 2007. This showed that community transport provided 2.6 million passenger journeys in the previous year, i.e. 1.3 million return journeys. We do not know how many individuals use community transport but given the volume of passenger journeys, which can be measured, we estimate this to be around 100,000. In relation to the cost of extending the scheme to include community transport, we have found that return fares on community transport services are in the region of £4 and so on this basis the cost would be £5.2m. This would be the cost to government if all community transport services, including dial-a-ride, dial-a-bus, and car schemes, were to be included in the free bus travel scheme.

In recent weeks CTA has spoken to a number of members about potential changes to the scheme and from these discussions we have listed below our key recommendations on changes to the current concessionary fare travel scheme:

Recommendations

1. Extension of scheme to community transport services

CTA believes that a concessionary fare scheme should be founded on the basic principle of providing for those in the greatest need. The current scheme has been a welcome boon for many of Scotland's older and disabled citizens but sadly many of those who are most frail or most disabled or who live in isolation have not been able to use their entitlement.

The Scottish Executive's "Review of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in Scotland (2006)" highlighted the inequity of a national concessionary fares scheme that excludes DRT services from the approved list of eligible services.

Also in a 2006 Report from the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee it was recommended that “the Scottish Executive make current and future DRT services eligible for concessionary fares in line with the concessionary fares scheme introduced in April 2006”. The majority of DRT services in Scotland are provided by community transport operators. Although DRT services can be registered as bus services, the majority of dial-a-bus/ride services in Scotland are operated under S19 permit.

The national concessionary travel scheme currently allows for flexibly routed services though the concession is mainly used on fixed route services. CTA believes that it would be relatively easy to extend the concession to include S19 and S22 services. Within the current legislation, registration of the service is the only barrier to including services currently operated by those holding Small Bus Permits. We would suggest that the mechanism for including these services with the national concessionary fare scheme could be registration to claim Bus Service Operators Grant. Community transport groups have been able to apply for inclusion in the Bus Service Operator’s Grant (BSOG) scheme since 2002. Currently 138 community transport organisations in Scotland have been approved by Transport Scotland though the number of S19 permits in Scotland is larger than this.

The passenger categories for inclusion in BSOG are wider than the concessionary fare scheme and thus there would need to be a means of ensuring that groups only claimed for those entitled to free travel. This could be achieved by installing card readers on all minibuses that groups wish to include in the scheme as is the case with buses on registered bus routes. Costs would be in the order of £1,000 per reader and £300 for fitting. CTA would wish to see these costs and the costs of training managers and drivers to use the system to be borne by the Scottish Government.

If the concession were to be extended solely to community transport providers who operate under Small Bus Permits then CTA estimates that the cost to the Scottish Government would be much less than the £5.2 million attached to extending the scheme to the whole community transport network. The CTA survey of 2007 did not collect specific data on which passengers used small buses and which use cars or other vehicles but it is likely that an extension of the scheme to solely small bus services would cost around £2 -2.5m per annum. Users of community transport services are required to meet certain eligibility criteria and must take up membership of their scheme in order to use the service so patronage is tightly controlled. This means that it is unlikely that the government would have to bear additional unexpected costs as a result of many new people making use of community transport services.

2. Changes to Age of Entitlement for Free Travel

Currently, the free bus travel scheme is available to anybody in Scotland who is aged 60 or over. However, legislation is currently being enacted to gradually raise the pensionable age for women, which would mean a gradual rise to 65 between 2010 and 2020. Thus the pensionable age for both men and women will rise to at least 65 in the not too distant future.

CTA would support the age of entitlement for concessionary travel being changed from age 60 to the state pension age for either men or women whichever is the lower. This would lead to savings to the Scottish Government and help to redirect public money away from people aged 60 or just over who arguably do not need the concession as they may still be in work and even be at the peak of their earning capacity, and towards people who have greater needs and who turn to community transport in order to access the services which they require.

3. Community Car Schemes

Car schemes have an important role in reducing isolation, particularly in rural areas. CTA's survey in 2007 showed that the majority of the vehicles used in the provision of community transport services around Scotland were cars.

Whilst we believe that extending the concession to community transport organisations with Small Bus Permits should be easy with card reading machinery being the means by which the concessionary scheme could be controlled, it is unlikely that such machinery could be implemented with cars which provide community transport services.

Nevertheless we believe that if a national concessionary scheme is to reach the people who are most marginalised, then community car schemes should be included. The easiest and cheapest way in which this could be administered is simply by allowing a manual recording when users show the driver their entitlement card. Given that all community car schemes are not for profit, that the majority of drivers are volunteers whose motivation is to assist their neighbours, the risk of abuse is at worst extremely minimal. Alternatively, a voucher scheme could be introduced though we are not in a position to comment upon what this would cost.

Some community transport groups own and operate vehicles of less than 8 passenger seats through car scheme legislation. The Local Transport Bill currently progressing through the UK Parliament proposes to allow vehicles of less than 8 passenger seats to operate under S19 Permit and these services could be included as described in 1 above.

In conclusion, the main advantage from making these changes will be that up to 100,000 people, who are currently entitled to free bus travel, will be able to use their concession thus giving them access to the services they require. The barriers which prevent them from using their concession on community transport services, which are the transport services which best meet their needs, will be lifted. The cost to the Scottish Government of extending the national concessionary bus fare scheme to community transport services is a small addition to the current budget. However, if the costs need to be covered from within the current budget then the solution may be to change the age for eligibility to pensionable age rather than 60 years of age.

We would be very happy to discuss further any of our proposals and participate further in the Review as it progresses. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can provide further input to this process.