



Report to Partnership Meeting of 4 December 2009

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

Concessionary Travel Schemes – Report

SUMMARY

The Report provides a update of the current position with regard to the provision of Concessionary Travel within the HITRANS area following the recent completion of the Review of the National Bus Concessionary Travel Scheme by the Scottish Government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Partnership is asked to

1. Note the current arrangements for provision of Concessionary Travel within the HITRANS area.
2. Consider supporting the case for extension of eligibility in the National Concessionary Travel Scheme to cover all local ferry travel by passengers, and journeys using Community and Demand Responsive Transport in areas where minimum levels of bus services are not available.

DETAIL

The Partnership at its meeting of 6 June asked for a report to its next Meeting updating the Partnership on any changes to the Concessionary Travel Schemes following the recent review of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme by the Scottish Government.

The application of Concessionary Travel Schemes across the HITRANS area is delivered and funded by both Scottish Government and Councils depending on the mode and nature of travel involved. The current schemes, the funding party, and benefits are summarised in the appendix to the report.

The review of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCT) concluded

1. First the Review acknowledged the overriding commitment to retaining the scheme, in its present format, and considered that this was a significant undertaking by the Scottish Government, most particularly given the current economic uncertainties.
2. The Review concluded that, from a strict measurement point of view, there was insufficient evidence to determine the precise extent to which the NCT scheme had directly contributed to the promotion of social inclusion. At the same time, in terms of take up and usage, the NCT scheme had been a clear success.

3. The Review looked in some detail at a number of factors that could potentially impact on the long term sustainability of the scheme, including the issues of funding. While the scheme is 'free' to eligible passengers, there is a substantial cost to government and the taxpayer, which means that issues around the financial sustainability of the scheme should always be kept under review

4. The Review recognised the implications of the Scottish Government's aspiration towards modal shift from car to bus. There is some evidence to suggest that NCT has contributed to around 12 per cent 'full modal shift' and around 47 per cent 'partial modal shift'.

5. The Review recognised the many benefits that a further extension of concessionary fares to other disadvantaged groups could bring, including positive accessibility benefits and wider economic benefits. However, costs have increased significantly and - given the demographics and how that may translate into concessionary fares - could continue to do so in the future. This was taken into account when looking at any potential extension to eligibility to the scheme.

6. One particular issue considered by the Review is the evidence around social exclusion and older persons (in this context 60 plus). Recent legislative developments and changing socio-economic factors suggest - other things being equal - that a greater proportion of the 'older' generation will be working longer. While recognising that economic factors can change, as is apparent in recent months, this could result in such people being economically 'better off' than their counterparts a decade or so ago. The Review noted that it might be appropriate to examine the current eligibility criteria based on age. The Review considered that such an approach would not be inconsistent with the wider aspirations of the scheme and that it would also be reflective of changing social factors.

7. The Review considered current eligibility and examined in detail various calls for extending eligibility. In view of the cost of the scheme, it has not recommended substantial increases in eligibility, beyond the inclusion of seriously injured ex HM Forces veterans from 1 April 2011.

8. The Review has not considered any immediate change in eligibility but has concluded that the objectives of NCT should properly be kept under review and that the continued emphasis should be on achieving the objectives of the scheme and obtaining value for money. In addition, given the importance of having robust evidence in determining compensation to the bus industry, it will be necessary to take steps to improve the specific information requirements around NCT compensation.

While it is clear that the scheme in its current form is proving difficult to manage within existing funding constraints the Partnership may wish to consider two particular areas where changes in eligibility could for very limited cost have delivered substantial improvements of equity of access opportunity across Scotland and particularly for those living in remote mainland and island areas.

The level of accessibility for those entitled to participate in Concessionary Travel Schemes varies considerably across the HITRANS area, and when compared with that enjoyed in the rest of Scotland. Whereas free travel by the least expensive form of public transport (by bus) is available for entitled mainland residents to all other parts of the Scottish mainland, this level of access provision is not currently available to those entitled Scottish residents living on islands or remote peninsulas (by ferry) or to those wishing to visit these areas.

The level of access to health and social services, shops and other facilities available through the scheme in remote parts of Scotland is significantly less than that enjoyed in the areas of the country with frequent bus services. The great majority of the cost of the scheme is incurred in providing compensation for travel in urban and suburban areas. With the continuing and increasing pressures on Council budgets this situation in remote areas will inevitably be further challenged. When local bus services cannot be supported by Councils, the expectation falls on the Community Transport Sector to meet the transport needs of the most vulnerable sections of the community, including those eligible for free bus travel in terms of the Scheme. The Scottish

Government funds eligible travel on a bus service, but does not fund the cost of the Community Transport Operators providing a comparable journey where the bus services do not exist. Many communities are already involved in providing transport to fill the gaps in local public transport provision. For the most part these services are funded through grants and service level agreements along with the local fund raising initiatives by the local community. These grants are now supplied through local authorities and will increasingly be under pressure within individual Council's spending reviews in the years ahead. The Scottish Government is now encouraging the voluntary sector to move away from reliance on grants and to become more enterprising creating sustainable solutions. Including Community Transport Services within the scheme as with other operators on a nonprofit basis would have provided a clear opportunity for this sector to meet the Governments wishes in a way that supports the Scottish Government achieving its overall Purpose.

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Date: 15th September 2009

Appendix - Current Concessionary Travel Provision

Mode	area	Benefit	Funding source
Bus	Whole area	<p>Free bus travel within Scotland by bus with the following eligibility –</p> <p>Older People - over 60 years of age and live in Scotland</p> <p>Disabled People Eligible disabled people who meet the criteria on the following categories – people who receive the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance receive the higher/middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance receive Attendance Allowance live in a care or residential home or hospital and require 24 hour supervision hold a Disabled Persons Parking Badge (Blue Badge) are profoundly or severely deaf have been told not to drive on medical grounds or would have a licence application refused on the grounds of physical fitness whether 17 years old or not suffer from a mental illness, learning disability or personality disorder are terminally ill suffer from a progressively degenerative disorder have suffered a loss of limbs are visually impaired</p> <p>Companion Entitlement If a person’s mobility is such that they require to be accompanied when travelling, their companion is entitled to travel free of charge with them for the same journey.</p>	Scottish Government, managed by Transport Scotland

Rail	General	Within Scotland visually impaired travel free With a Senior Citizen and Disabled Rail Card (£24 annually) those eligible for concessionary bus travel obtain a 34% discount on fares.	Scottish Government
	Argyll and Bute	Travel within the West of Scotland Concessionary Travel area for those West of Scotland residents eligible as for the bus concessions at a rate of 40p for the first 10 miles then 50% discount beyond. In addition the flat fare zone card allows travel between Oban and Helensburgh Upper for a 80p single fare.	12 Councils in West of Scotland
	Highland	50% discount on standard class rail travel within the Highland area for those eligible for concessionary bus travel.	The Highland Council
Ferry	Argyll and Bute	Free passenger travel for island and peninsular residents on their local ferry service for those registered for the national concessionary bus scheme.	12 Councils in West of Scotland
	Western Isles	2 return passenger trips per annum to the mainland for Western Isles residents registered for the national concessionary bus scheme.	Scottish Government
	Orkney	2 return passenger trips per annum to the mainland for Orkney residents registered for the national concessionary bus scheme.	Scottish Government
		12 free return trips to Orkney Mainland annually for local non Orkney Mainland residents registered for the national concessionary bus scheme.	The Orkney Islands Council
	Highland	Free passenger travel for Highland concessionary card holders on all ferry services within the Council area. 50% discount on passenger travel for all Highland concessionary card holders on Oban Craignure	The Highland Council
Air	Orkney	12 free return trips to Kirkwall for residents of Papa Westray and North Ronaldsay registered for the national concessionary bus scheme.	The Orkney Islands Council
taxi	Highland	Subsidised Taxi travel on some specific routes for concessionary card holders	The Highland Council