

## Scottish Government Consultation: Free bus travel for people resident in Scotland aged under 19

Scottish Youth Parliament response - December 2020

1. Do you think extending national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute towards our objectives to increase opportunities and reduce inequalities?

Yes  No

Please provide further comments

On the whole, we agree that extending national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute towards increasing opportunities and reducing inequalities.

The Scottish Youth Parliament's 2021-26 youth manifesto, [From Scotland's Young People](#), recommends 'Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government should provide funding to support initiatives which make it easier, cheaper, and safer for young people to use active and sustainable travel options.' (*From Scotland's Young People statement, 89.0% agree*). In support of this statement, a young person told us "You need to meet up with people. I began to lose the ability to socialise and speak to people throughout lockdown, I found it really hard to have conversations. Beyond COVID, if you don't have access to transport you can have the same problem."

SYP's 2018 [All Aboard](#) report found that nearly one third (31.5%) of young people would use the bus more regularly if it was cheaper, or if there were promotions or higher concessionary discounts. (*All Aboard report, available [here](#) - results of a survey with 1,329 young people aged 12-25 in Scotland*).

This report shows in an average week, over two in five young people (43.5%) spend more than £9 to travel to school, college, or university each week. This is nearly one third of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) payment of £30 per week. This report showed there is huge variation in the amount young people are paying to travel to access education across the country, with prices ranging from £9.50/week to over £50/month. Although some young people commented that they receive a free bus pass, either because they have a disability or because these are provided by the school / local council, this is not the case across the country. One young person told us "I spend £600 to get to uni each semester and it's because my Young Scot card doesn't work at peak times."

Similarly, nearly half of respondents (49.0%) pay more than £9 per week to travel to work or an apprenticeship. This is equivalent to two hours work at the national minimum wage rate for under 18s (£4.55 per hour in December 2020). As many young people only work part time, this is a significant amount of money for a young person to be paying in order to earn money! One young person from the Sustran RTP region told us "It costs me two hours' worth of wages a week on average to get to work. I get paid less than an adult, and am expected to pay the same for transport as an adult."

Some young people responded that the cost of public transport is too high, particularly if they only earn minimum wage and/or don't live close to the places they need or want to visit such as the nearest town or city, supermarkets,

clubs and hobbies, or other entertainment venues. A further group of young people shared examples of how much they spend to use public transport. In some cases, despite making use of concessionary travel offers, including the existing Scottish Government concessionary discount which is facilitated through the Young Scot National Entitlement Card, some young people are paying over £50 per week to travel to work, with one respondent paying nearly £90 per week.

A large number of young people commented that they rely on cars or walking rather than using public transport, for a variety of reasons. Some live in rural areas where there is no public transport, or where the public transport doesn't run at the times they would need to use it to get to (for example) clubs and hobbies. This was particularly evident in rural and island communities. A young person in the Hitrans RTP region told us *"[buses] are extremely irregular where I live, which makes it difficult to travel to and from my rural home. There are no buses on Sundays, and throughout the week the latest bus home for me is 5.35pm, which excludes me from certain activities - social and extracurricular."*

With this in mind, although free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute greatly towards increasing opportunities and reducing inequalities, further steps are needed to ensure safe and accessible public transport is available for all young people across the country, to reduce the necessity to travel by car and to encourage more young people to choose active and sustainable travel options.

Finally, whilst we believe that all under 19s would benefit from free travel, we know that this will help many groups who face additional barriers to participating in society. Our *From Scotland's Young People 2021-26* manifesto includes the following call:

*The possibility of discounted or free transport should be explored for groups who struggle to access travel such as carers, young parents, Armed Forces etc.*

The scheme will help those groups who overtly struggle to access transport and will open up many opportunities to them. For example, a young parent told us that having free or discounted travel 'would help quite a bit because there's been times where I would want to go somewhere, even just to a park with the kids, but I can't because it's so far away. Even just to get food shopping as well, transport takes it out of your budget. If I was to get a job or college it would have to be somewhere very local so I could afford it.'

In addition to this, this initiative will also improve equality within groups who are less obvious in their need for access to free travel. An armed forces young person told us that 'if one parent is away, then it's my mum who we have to rely on, and we she goes to work, we can't go anywhere until she's back.'

2. Do you think there are any disadvantages to introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland?

Yes  No

Please provide further comments

We agree that introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute towards increasing opportunities and reducing inequalities. However, as previously discussed, bus routes need to be available and accessible to young people in the first place. This is currently not the case across the country.

Although an introduction of free bus travel for under 19s resident in Scotland will be hugely beneficial, we would also call for discounts to be available for all young people under 19 who are not resident in Scotland. For example, our *All Aboard* report recommends 'Transport companies should raise the age of child fares to include young people up to the age of 18, and provide with guidance and training for customer-facing staff about how to work positively with young people. This should be carried out in conjunction with young people.' (*All Aboard report, available [here](#) - results of a survey with 1,329 young people aged 12-25 in Scotland*).

3. Should a smart card, such as the widely used Young Scot card, be used to establish eligibility for free bus access?

Yes  No

Please provide further comments

In response to our [All Aboard](#) consultation, some young people said they would use the bus more regularly if they didn't need to use exact change, or if they could use contactless payments with a debit card or smart card. However, we would also encourage Transport Scotland to explore options for a mobile phone app to be made available for use instead of, or alongside, a smart card.

In response to the question '*How could public transport companies help you to find out what fare is the best value for you?*' 65.4% respondents felt a mobile phone app would help them to find out what fare is the best value for them. In this report, we recommended '*Transport Scotland should work with transport companies and other organisations to develop and roll-out a Scotland-wide app to make sure young people have live and accessible information about the range of fares, timetables, routes, and discounts available to them, and can make an informed decision about their travel choices.*'

4. Should children under a certain age need to have their application for a travel card approved by a parent or guardian?

Yes  No

Please provide further comments

No data available to enable us to respond to this question

5. If you answered 'yes' to question 4, at what age should parental or guardian approval be required?

Please give us your views

6. 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.

Please give us your views

The introduction of free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will have an overall positive impact on this age group.

However, there may be particular groups of young people for whom the impact may not be so positive. This is particularly the case for young people who do not currently feel confident or comfortable travelling alone.

For example, in response to our *All Aboard* consultation, over one in five female respondents (21.9%) said they do not feel confident travelling alone, compared to less than one in ten male respondents (8.5%). Although not directly relevant to this consultation, we believe steps should be taken to ensure higher minimum standards of safety on buses.

Of the respondents who indicated they have a disability or access requirement, nearly two in three respondents (61.2%) said they do not feel comfortable using public transport. Some young people indicated that anxiety can be exacerbated by public transport. For some, their existing anxiety is made worse because they are scared that something unexpected might happen; while others become more anxious if they don't know the route or how much a journey will cost. Some comments indicated respondents sometimes feel comfortable using public transport if they are travelling with friends or family. However, others felt that the attitude and behaviour of staff on public transport can have an impact on how comfortable they feel using public transport. With this in mind, we recommend extending the existing companion scheme to enable certain groups of young people to travel with a companion aged over 19 for free or a reduced fare. This would enable young people who are anxious or unsure about travelling independently to build confidence in using public transport.

7. Do you think the proposals contained within this Consultation may have any additional implications on the rights, wellbeing and safety of children and young people? Please be as specific as possible.

Please give us your views

The introduction of free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will improve young people's ability to access their rights, particularly in the following ways:

- Young people in Scotland have been calling for a reduction in concessionary fares for a number of years. By introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government will show they are taking the views and wishes of Scotland's young people seriously. *(UNCRC Article 12 - Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.)*
- Free travel for young people aged under 19 in Scotland will help to minimise some young people's fear of being stigmatised or bullied by their peers as a result of their financial status and/or ability to access opportunities *(UNCRC article 26 - Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance; and UNCRC article 27 - Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.)*
- Access to free bus travel will enable young people to take part in leisure and extra-curricular activities, which will enable them to develop skills and experiences, and improve future prospects. *(UNCRC article 31 - Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.)*

8. Do you think the proposals contained in this Consultation are likely to increase or reduce the costs and burdens for bus companies, public bodies, third sector organisations or businesses? Please be as specific as possible.

Please give us your views

*No data available to enable us to respond to this question*

9. Are there any other issues you wish to raise which are not covered in the points or questions elsewhere in this Consultation?

Please provide any further comments