

**Scottish Government consultation:
Impact on Islands Communities of Free Bus Travel for Young People Under 22 -
Scottish Youth Parliament response
June 2021**

1. Do you think that the provision of free bus travel to all young people aged under 22 will have an effect on island communities which is significantly different from the effect on other communities in Scotland?

Between October and December 2018, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) from across Scotland consulted with 1,329 young people to find out their views and experiences of public transport in Scotland. This consultation formed the first phase of the Scottish Youth Parliament's (SYP) *All Aboard* national campaign, which aims to improve young people's experiences of public transport in Scotland (more information about this campaign is available at <https://syp.org.uk/campaign/all-aboard/>). In addition to our national *All Aboard* report, the results were analysed by RTP region to provide a more localised picture of young people's experiences of public transport across Scotland.

In relation to the cost of public transport, young people who live in the Hitrans region (covering Argyll and Bute, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, Highlands, Moray, and Orkney Islands - 141 respondents) told us in an average week:

- Over one in four (**26.3%**) respondents spend more than £9 on travel to medical and/or other appointments. This is nearly double the percentage of young people who pay more than £9 nationally (14.1%).
- Over a quarter (**25.8%**) of respondents spend more than £12 on travel to school, college, or university. This is lower than the national average (31.4%).
- Nearly a fifth (**19.6%**) of respondents spend more than £12 on travel to visit friends and family. This is higher than the national average (17.3%).

Similarly, young people who live in the ZetTrans region (covering the Shetland Islands - 115 respondents) told us in an average week:

- One third (**35.0%**) of respondents pay more than £9 to travel to school, college, or university each week, which is lower than the national average (43.5%).
- Nearly quarter (**23.7%**) of respondents spend more than £9 on travel to clubs and hobbies. This is slightly lower than the national average (24.7%).
- **7.1%** respondents spend more than £15 on travel to medical and/or other appointments, which is nearly 1.5 times the national average (4.7%).

However, the vast majority of respondents in the ZetTrans region told us they don't use public transport very often, or that they are driven everywhere by family and/or friends. This is very different to the comments received from young people in other regions.

We also asked young people what would encourage them to use the bus more regularly. Excluding those respondents who said they would only use the bus if they couldn't get a lift, a number of changes were suggested that would encourage young people to use the bus more regularly, including:

- Reducing the cost of using the bus - 29.2% respondents in Hitrans region, and 16.7% respondents in ZetTrans region, said they would use the bus more often if it were cheaper or if there were more affordable discount options available.
- Improving the availability of buses by adding routes and timetables that better suit the needs of young people in rural areas.
 - 38.9% respondents in ZetTrans region, and one fifth of respondents in Hitrans region said they would use the bus more often if there were buses in the evenings or at weekends, when they want to travel to extra-curricular activities, work, or to visit friends and family.
 - A further 18.1% in ZetTrans region, and 13.3% in Hitrans region, said they would use the bus more often if there were bus routes closer to their homes and the places they want to travel to.

From these responses, we believe **the provision of free bus travel to all young people aged under 22 may encourage more young people in island communities to travel by bus.**

However, there are a number of challenges, which we believe may affect young people in island communities differently to those in mainland Scotland. The following comments are summarised from a discussion with an MSYP representing an island constituency and from young people in island communities who responded to our *All Aboard* consultation.

1. In some island communities, small ferries are as essential as buses to enable young people to travel to school, extra curricular activities, volunteering or youth work opportunities, and medical appointments. Even if buses are subsidised for young people under the age of 22, some will still need to pay ferry fares which are not subsidised.
 - a. For example, in Shetland there is an island which is a five-minute ferry journey from Lerwick. The child return fare is £1.10, while the adult fare (over 18) is £6 for a return ticket. This is a big increase in costs for young people when they turn 18, and is a big expense if a young person needs to pay this fare every day to get to work or study (for instance).
2. There aren't always buses on islands, or available to coincide with inter-island ferry timetables, so some young people may have to rely on a car journey for part of their journey despite the concessionary bus fare.

- a. For example, one young person told us “Well in Whalsay there is no busses [sp] so I only use them when I am in town but my mum normally takes me down in the car so I don’t need to.”
3. In some island communities, bus timetables are scheduled to coincide with normal work / school hours, so there may only be one or two buses in or out of a village in a day. Therefore, young people don’t have the flexibility to ‘pop into town’ or to visit their friends / take up a part time job / attend extra-curricular activities etc. unless they are able to get a lift in a car.
 - a. For example, one young person told us “They 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.”
 - b. Another young person told us “I am a 17 year old girl who finishes work at 20:30. The next bus I can catch home (I live on a farm) is only at 10:50 which means I walk home up our track at midnight.”

2. If so, are there measures that the Scottish Government might consider to mitigate any adverse effects on island communities in relation to the provision of free bus travel to under 22s specifically?

- Explore the possibility of extending concessionary travel for under-22s to include inter-island ferries.
- Work with RTPs, Local Authorities, and bus companies to encourage linking up timetables to make it more appealing for young people to choose buses for their full journeys.
- Explore reasons why young people might not choose to use public transport for the full journey, and work with communities to design solutions to rectify this.