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AGE UK LONDON SPEAKS OUT AGAINST FREEDOM PASS SUSPENSION DURING PEAK TIMES

The London charity for older people has spoken out against the decision to temporarily suspend free travel for Freedom Pass and 60-plus card holders at peak times (6:30am to 9:30am and 16:00-19:00). Age UK London supports advice asking everyone to avoid public transport where possible at peak times in order to protect their health and the health of others.

But some older Londoners have no choice but to travel in peak times, including those who are key workers, have unavoidable medical appointments or are supporting vulnerable friends and family. Supermarket priority hours are also usually during peak times, which seems somewhat counter-productive.

London already has the highest pensioner poverty rate in the country and older Londoners are less likely to be able to afford to run a car or use a black cab or private hire-taxi. The most vulnerable older Londoners may be unable to use active travel such as walking or cycling due to frailty or a physical impairment.

Abigail Wood, Chief Executive, Age UK London said:

“These changes penalise older Londoners who do not want to use public transport at peak times but simply don’t have a choice. This includes key workers over the age of 60 who are delivering vital services during the pandemic.

“It’s unhelpful and unfair to try to create behaviour change by putting financial pressure on one particular group of Londoners.

“These temporary measures must not be the first step on the road to watering down travel concessions for older people living in London.”

As we look forward to seeing London recover it is important to recognise that accessible travel prevents isolation and its negative impact on mental and physical health. Age UKs in the capital have already voiced their concerns about declining mental health due to isolation and inactivity during lockdown and Age UK London wants to ensure these changes are only temporary and not the first step on the road to watering down the concessions.

*****ENDS *****

Notes to Editors

1. Age UK London is the London-wide charity that campaigns for an Age-friendly London. We work with over 400 older people's organisations in London to ensure that the voices of older Londoners are heard by decision makers across our city. We deliver campaigns and projects that improve the lives of older Londoners and their health and wellbeing. We work to tackle the deep-rooted problems faced by the most vulnerable older Londoners.

www.ageuk.org.uk/london

www.twitter.com/ageuklondon

www.facebook.com/ageuklondon

2. Spokespeople:

- Print media quotes: Abigail Wood (Chief Executive)

- Interviews: John McGeachy (Campaigns Officer)

3. 24% of pensioners in London are living in poverty according to DWP figures released on 28 March 2019. This compares to 16% of pensioners in the UK as a whole.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201718>).