

Public transport

(England)

December 2022

Wherever they live, older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease.

Age-friendly public transport

Responsibility for transport crosses national and local Government, the private and the community sector, which means that it can be challenging to implement and coordinate improvements. Yet access to transport, or the lack of it, can have a profound impact on the quality of life, health and wellbeing of older people. For example, 66% of older people cannot reach a hospital within 30 minutes by public transportⁱ. The most frequent reason people at 65 and over say they do not use public transport is because it's inconvenient and does not go to where they want it to goⁱⁱ.

Concessionary travel

Buses are the most popular form of public transport for older people – 30% of over 65s take a bus at least once a week. The free bus pass is a crucial benefit for many older people, helping users to get to shops, healthcare and other local services, while at the same time helping reduce traffic congestion and pollution.

Research by KPMG found that each £1 spent on concessionary bus fares for older and disabled people generates £3.80 in benefits.ⁱⁱⁱ Access to public transport is a crucial consideration to address loneliness and isolation among older people. Flexible alternatives to the free bus concession such as taxi cards or free community transport differ widely between local authorities but can be a lifeline in rural areas.

Reviving the national bus network

Research by the Campaign for Better Transport found that 27% of bus routes by mile have disappeared in the last ten years, with a total of 5,000 routes closing altogether. 'Bus Back Better: the national bus strategy' was published in 2021, with £3bn of new funding. This created 'Enhanced Partnerships' between Local Transport Authorities and providers, including the drawing up of Bus Service Improvement Plans. As of March 2022, 76 of 79 LTAs were operating under an Enhanced Partnership. It has, however, come under criticism for being underfunded and therefore unlikely to deliver nationwide service improvements.

Public Policy Proposals

- Where commercial transport services are reduced or withdrawn, local transport authorities must have responsibility to arrange alternative transport options to ensure older people can reach key services.
- Local authorities need to ensure that older people are fully aware of the existing transport options and services in their area such as community bus services and dial-a-ride services and facilitate access to those services.
- Local authorities should consider how they can pool and share transport resources to help fill any gaps in local transport services. New technology should be deployed to assess and meet the needs of older people to offer a range of different transport options.
- The Government's review of hospital transport services must ensure every hospital journey for an older person is reasonably comfortable, affordable and as stress free as possible - while getting them to and from hospital in good time, without long waits.
- Transport operators need to ensure that older people are not excluded by smart ticketing or information provided by smart phone apps and other devices.
- The Department for Transport must ensure the full implementation of its 'Inclusive Transport Strategy' and address any failings highlighted in the final review, due in 2023.
- Local transport authorities should work with operators to improve the physical accessibility, safety and reliability of the journey as a whole. This should cover leaving the house to arriving at a destination using buses, trains and other transport connections.
- The national bus concession must remain free and universal for older and disabled people given its huge social and economic benefits.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money, health and care, housing and communities, and crosscutting themes such as age equality and human rights.

www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/

ⁱ Government Office for Science (2019) Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf

ⁱⁱ Holley-Moore, G and Creighton, H. (2015) The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society. ILC

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://greener-vision.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-true-value-of-local-bus-services-June-2017.pdf>