

## **Consultation Response**

### **Mandatory concessionary fares scheme in Wales Welsh Government**

**January 2018**

#### **Introduction**

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation on the mandatory concessionary fares scheme in Wales.

#### **Q1 – Do you think that the Welsh Government should become the Travel Concession Authority for the administration of the All Wales Mandatory Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme in Wales, or should the functions remain with the local authorities?**

We deem that the Welsh Government should explore the most cost effective option regarding the administration of the scheme in Wales.

#### **Q2 – Do you think that the eligibility age for older people who are new applicants to receive free bus travel should be increased to match the state retirement age, or be maintained at age 60 for men and for women?**

Age Cymru believes that continued access by older people to concessionary travel is essential. The free bus travel scheme has been invaluable in helping older people in Wales to retain their independence and remain active, and in providing a vital connection to services and amenities, and it is vital that this scheme continues to be supported by the Welsh Government.

Older people we consulted with wished to convey how important the concessionary pass is to them, and how much they value the scheme. They highlighted its importance in terms of health and wellbeing and social contact, enabling older people to keep in touch with the local community which can help to overcome loneliness and isolation. They said that the bus journey itself provides an opportunity to meet people and have a chat. They also mentioned the ripple effect of the scheme in terms of the contribution that older people can make to the local community, helping to keep the community alive and benefitting the local economy.

Those older people that we consulted with felt that it was not unreasonable to raise the age of entitlement to match the state retirement age for new applicants to the scheme, as they felt that this would be in line with the original objectives of the scheme which was for the benefit of pensioners.

Whereas Age Cymru would not generally be in favour of the diminishing of entitlements for older people, in this instance we feel that if an increase in the age of entitlement means that the scheme is retained and is sustainable for the future, then increasing the age of eligibility to be in line with the state retirement age may be a reasonable compromise.

However, we do have concerns regarding the impact on those older people such as carers, and older people with ill health or disability who are likely to find it more difficult to continue working up to state pension age. According to an independent review by Cridland,<sup>1</sup> these groups, along with the self-employed, black, Asian and minority ethnic people and women, are likely to have lower private pension savings which may reduce their ability to cope with state pension age changes and the loss of related entitlements.

Should any changes be made to increase the age of entitlement, Age Cymru deems that such changes should be gradual, as some older people who would have expected to receive their bus pass and have access to free travel might have to wait until several years later to do so. Any changes must be considered in light of the benefits that concessionary travel has to access to services, health and wellbeing, social interaction and involvement in communities and wider society.

**Q3 – Do you think that the Welsh Government should maintain the entitlement for disabled people meeting the criteria to be issued with a free travel pass?**

Age Cymru agrees that the entitlement to a free travel pass should be maintained for disabled people. According to an independent review by Cridland,<sup>2</sup> older people with ill health or disability who are likely to find it more difficult to continue working up to state pension age are likely to have lower private pension savings which may reduce their ability to cope with state pension age changes and the loss of related entitlements.

**Q7 – Do you think that bus travel using a concessionary bus pass should allow free travel only during off-peak times, or should the ability to travel at any time be maintained?**

Older people have told us that the ability to travel at any time using a concessionary bus pass should be maintained, and that there should be no change to the permissible time of travel. A number of reasons were given, including:

- Travel to GP, hospital and other essential appointments – which can be early in the morning

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<sup>1</sup> Cridland J (2017) Independent Review of the State Pension Age - Smoothing the Transition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Attending funerals, social events such as the theatre, childminding grandchildren, and early morning shopping, for example, may be difficult if travel is limited to off-peak hours
- Concerns were voiced about potential issues of social isolation and loneliness around restrictions to travel time
- Older people living in rural and other areas where bus services may be less frequent should not have further restrictions regarding access to bus services. In some rural areas bus services may run only at peak times
- Some older people would prefer to travel at peak times to avoid travelling after dark
- Important for older people that have given up driving to be able to access services
- Many older people depend on bus services – which helps to maintain both peak and off-peak services.

**Q8 – Do you think that the Welsh Government should introduce an application fee to be paid by some applicants if the fee is limited to the cost recovery for receiving, processing, issuing and auditing passes?**

Older people we consulted with expressed various views regarding whether the Welsh Government should introduce an application fee.

Some felt that there should not be an administration fee as those in most need of a pass may be put off applying. It was also felt that the cost of administering such a scheme could potentially outweigh the benefits. There were also concerns that the charge may be increased over time.

Others felt that a one-off fee would be acceptable. Should a fee be introduced, it was felt that it should be a reasonable amount, with reference to those people on low incomes.

**Q9 – If an application fee is introduced for a free bus pass, should it be paid by:**

- a. Older people**
- b. Disabled people**
- c. Injured service veterans, or**
- d. None of the above?**

Some older people told us that no-one should have to pay an application fee for the bus pass.

Other older people felt that if a fee is introduced for a free bus pass, then all of the above should pay, as it was felt that differentiating costs would be more expensive to administer.

**Q10 – Should the Welsh Government explore the extension of free concessionary bus travel scheme to other modes of local transport services?**

We believe that the Welsh Government should explore creative ways and best practice options of delivering concessionary transport services where there is no adequate public transport.

Community transport schemes provide an essential lifeline for many older people, and can play a crucial role in helping people to access essential services by providing travel where public transport cannot or does not, and on a door-to-door basis for people with specific mobility needs.

Some older people who can't access mainstream buses have to pay to access community transport. There is an anomaly, therefore, whereby people entitled to free bus travel in Wales are charged for using some community transport services; we believe that this should be addressed for the future by the Welsh Government. We believe that levels of public funding allocated to community transport must be closely monitored by the Welsh Government to ensure stability of provision and maintenance of vital services.

**Please use this space below if you want to tell us anything else about the free concessionary bus travel scheme.**

Being able to use the bus is very important for the wellbeing of many older people who rely on bus services to get out and about. The free bus travel scheme has been invaluable in helping older people in Wales to retain their independence and remain active.<sup>3</sup>

The provision of bus services has declined in Wales and we are extremely concerned that local bus services remain vulnerable to spending cuts or commercial decisions. Older people are more reliant on the bus than other age groups and they are less likely to manage with poor quality services. An Age Cymru research study<sup>4</sup> showed that there is a dearth of bus services in many communities. Despite having a free bus pass, many older people can find themselves cut off from public transport where there are no buses or infrequent services.

We note on page 9 of the consultation (Bus Journeys) that 'the number of "live" passes in use in Wales has continued to increase', and that 'In 2016/2017, the journeys undertaken by older people account for 74% of all journeys using free travel passes...'. There is evidence that use of the bus system increases with 'free' travel for older people,<sup>5</sup> and Greener Journeys<sup>6</sup> found that the benefits of concessionary travel extend to other passengers, other road users and the wider community.

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<sup>3</sup> Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2010) Concessionary Bus Pass Research.

<sup>4</sup> Age Cymru (2013) Buses – a lifeline for older people. Older people's experience of bus services in Wales. A report by the Bevan Foundation for Age Cymru.  
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/policy/age-cymru-policy-publications-1/buses--a-lifeline-for-older-people-1/>

<sup>5</sup> Age Cymru (2016) EnvisAGE. No 11. Towards an age friendly Wales. Mackett (2013) cited in an article by Dr Charles Musselwhite 'Vision for an age friendly transport system in Wales'.  
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/pagefiles/52142/Age%20Cymru%20EnvisAGE%20No%2011%20Eng.pdf?eplanguage=en-GB-CY?dtrk=true>

<sup>6</sup> Greener Journeys (2014) The costs and benefits of concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people in Britain. <https://greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Concessionary-travel-costs-and-benefits-September-2014.pdf>