

# Submission from Sight Scotland of 6 April 2022

## PE1928/B: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel

Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans are in support of PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel and are campaigning for a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions, akin to that of the free bus travel scheme.

### **Our Fair Rail Vision**

Sight Scotland is calling on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to establish a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions.

Currently, there is no national policy for rail travel across Scotland which entitles free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions. With different concessionary and companion schemes in different areas, this is causing confusion to both passengers and rail staff. With coronavirus restrictions and social distancing measures return, we want to make rail travel better for those living with sight loss. Having a companion can mean the difference of travelling or not at all.

As ScotRail is set to transfer into public ownership in April 2022, we are calling on the Scottish Government to establish a national policy for rail travel across Scotland which entitles free rail travel for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions.

We are calling for:

- Free rail travel for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companion
- Accessible rail travel for blind and partially sighted people
- A consistent policy across Scotland, wherever you are travelling

## Costings

The figures below are based on data obtained from the Office of Rail and Road.

Summary:

- Average cost of a rail journey in Scotland is £4.74
- Each Scottish resident made 16 rail trips within Scotland during 2019-20.

The Office of Rail and Road, the economic and safety regulator for the British railway industry, reports in its Rail Industry Finance (UK) 2020-21 [report](#):

“The average passenger fare per journey in 2020-21 was £4.74 for all operators, an annual reduction of 20.2%, which was largely caused by shorter average journey lengths. The average journey length decreased by 15.8% to 32.1 kilometres.”

The Office of Rail and Road states that [90m rail journeys](#) were made within Scotland during 2019-20. Given a [Scottish population](#) of 5,466,000, that means, on average, each Scottish resident made 16 rail trips within Scotland during 2019-20.

Based on the average rail journey cost, average number of journeys per person year and the number of NEC eye/eye+1 holders, we estimate the proposed scheme to cost around **£2 million** to provide free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions.

## Calculations

£4.74 x 16 trips = £75.84 per person per year  
£75.84 x 12,768 (NEC eye / eye +1 card holders) = £968,325.12  
£968,352.12 x 2 (to account for companions) = £1,936,650.24

## Key Figures and Findings

### [Chapter 2: Bus and Coach Travel \(transport.gov.scot\)](#) [Summary Transport Statistics](#)

- 1.4 million people had a National Entitlement Card (NEC) in 2020
- Of this, 12,768 hold the eye or the eye +1 card (this accounts for 0.9% of all NEC holders)
- Of those who have a NEC for a disability or visual impairment 73% have the +1 entitlement to travel with a companion

### [Chapter 7: Rail Services \(transport.gov.scot\)](#)

- 2018-2019: 43.5 million reduced fare journeys out of 92 million journeys
- 2019-2020: 96.4 million passengers

### [Disability and Transport: Findings from the Scottish Household Survey](#)

- Reasons for not using the train more were not greatly different between disabled and non-disabled people, although 'cost' was named by more disabled people than non-disabled people (16% compared to 12%)
- 'Health reasons' were given by 3% of disabled people compared to 0% of non-disabled people
- Average household incomes for disabled people tend to be lower than for those who are not (median £19,778 compared to £31,800)
- Those whose condition affects their ability to carry out activities a lot have lower household incomes than those whose condition affects everyday activities a little (£18,793 compared to £21,184)
- 18% of disabled people used the train in the past month, compared to 34% of those not disabled. For use at least once a week, the figures are 5% and 11% respectively
- Those whose disability affected everyday activities a lot used the train less frequently than those whose activities were only affected

a little, with the number using the train in the past month 12% and 24% respectively

## **Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework Annual Delivery Plan 2021-22**

[Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework - Annual Delivery Plan 2021-22 \(transport.gov.scot\)](https://transport.gov.scot)

The Scottish Government sets out its Accessible Travel Framework in its Annual Delivery Plan for 2021-22. We believe providing free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions contributes to the 4 outcomes (detailed below) to achieve the vision “that all disabled people can travel with the same freedom, choice, dignity and opportunity as other citizens”.

4 outcomes:

1. More disabled people make successful door-to-door journeys, more often
2. Disabled people are more involved in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure
3. Everyone involved in delivering transport information, services and infrastructure will help to enable disabled people to travel
4. Disabled people feel comfortable and safe using public transport – this includes being free from hate crime, bullying and harassment when travelling

## Annex A: 48 issues within the Accessible Travel Framework

- Make each mode of transport more accessible to disabled people at least to, but preferably beyond, minimum standard and as quickly as possible

### **National Transport Strategy**

[nts-delivery-plan-2020-2022.pdf \(transport.gov.scot\)](#)

The National Transport Strategy (NTS2) Delivery Plan 2020 to 2022 states “We will continue to operate the National Concessionary Travel Scheme for older and disabled people, making public transport easier and more affordable for around 1.4 million people. We will continue to review the benefits of the Scheme to ensure it best meets people’s needs and delivers a best value solution.”

We believe a review of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme for older and disabled people should be conducted ahead of Scotrail’s move into public ownership as this presents a prime opportunity to assess additional budgetary implications.