

Refugee Sanctuary Scotland submission of 15 October 2023

PE2028/C: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland

Refugee Sanctuary Scotland formally known as the Refugee Survival Trust

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to comment on the above and provide information on our very successful 'Travel Choices' pilot scheme that we completed from January to July 2023. The Travel Choices project is funded by the Smarter Choices Smarter Places Open Fund which is Paths for All's programme to increase active and sustainable travel throughout Scotland. The programme is grant-funded by Transport Scotland. The fund aims to encourage people to change their behaviours; to drive less and to walk, wheel or cycle as part of their everyday short journeys or to use public transport for longer journeys. In this case, the purpose of the project was to give people who don't currently use bus travel on a regular basis, the opportunity to access bus transport.

The project had a number of aims:

1. To measure changes in the travel habits of the participants. In particular, to measure how frequently people travelled and whether people travelled further with the ticket.
2. To measure the impact having a travel pass had on people's lives.
3. To collect information about using a digital ticket as this is rapidly becoming the preferred ticket option for bus travel providers, with paper tickets gradually being withdrawn.
4. To collect information about the "customer experience" of being a regular bus user.

From the baseline survey we learned that 46% of the participants travelled by bus more than once per week, with 35% travelling once per day. 9% of people reported that they travelled monthly and just over 1% reported that they never used the buses.

The reasons for travel were varied, with 24% of people identifying appointments as the main reason for their journey. Shopping was also high on the list with 21% of people reporting this and 20% of people reported asylum case related matters as the reason for their journey. Other reasons included social appointments, taking part in volunteering or education, gym or sports, and for religious reasons.

When asked what stopped people travelling by bus more frequently, just under 77% of people said the cost of tickets was their major barrier.

The findings from the 12-week feedback form show a shift in travel habits.

At the end of the trial, 72% of people reported that they travelled more than once per day, with 17% travelling between 1 and 3 times per week. A further 11% reported they were travelling every day. No one reported that they had travelled less than this. The feedback shows that people were travelling more frequently with the travel pass.

Another change in travel habits was recorded. When asked if they were travelling more frequently, 92% of people said they were, while 88% of people reported they were also travelling longer distances.

Given that a large proportion of participants were parents, they were asked if they were travelling more as a family. 57% of parents responded yes to this with 43% responding no. Again, this potentially reflects the lack of take up on the Under 22 concession.

People reported that having the bus pass had had an overwhelmingly positive impact on their life.

There were many positive comments reported on the feedback forms reflecting the change impact on everyday life, freeing up funds (mainly to be spent on food) and freedom to travel and explore:

"I was able to attend appointments without problem".

"I could spend more money on food".

"It has a positive impact on my daily life".

"I travel every day, and this helps my mental health".

"Before I used to stay indoors all day. The ticket is a life saver".

"Having the ticket meant I could go to different places with my family and meet friends and it was easier to go to important appointments".

Using a digital ticket

The majority of people using the digital ticket reported no issues. Some people had issues setting up the app and purchasing tickets. This was particularly the case with the 3rd and final ticket as some people had forgotten the process. Only having a 4-week ticket was problematic for some and generated work for supporting partner organisations. Partners also reported difficulties when using the app in Arabic - there was no payment option. Some people reported being locked out of their account and needing to re-register.

Customer experience

Most people reported no issues with using the buses. There were some complaints about buses being late or cancelled and there were some examples of poor treatment on the buses, examples of this came out in the one-to-one interviews.

Please note that extracts from our Travel Report have been used in this document and we have permission from the participants to do so.

It is clear from the findings of the project that providing access to regular bus travel has an overwhelmingly positive of the lives of people who are ordinarily excluded from using public transport because it's unaffordable. The findings show that with the travel pass, people travelled more frequently, took longer journeys and travelled for different reasons. Having access to public transport supports the concept of "integration from day one" and enables people to do not just the things they need to do but opportunities to explore the place they are living.

Recommendations based our Report:

- Provide a longer lasting digital product.
- Extend the existing concession scheme.
- Promote existing concessions to the refugee community.
- Explore further how the voluntary sector can be involved.
- Ensure travel apps are language friendly.
- Improve customer service on buses.

If you would like to look at our report in full, please take a look at our [website](#). Thank you.