

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

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity written submission, 8 December 2025

Thank you for your letter dated 18 November 2025 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee about Petition PE2028.

I confirm that a non-statutory pilot offering free bus travel to people seeking asylum, who are not eligible for the existing National Concessionary Travel Schemes, commenced on 1 December 2025 and will run until 31 March 2026, or earlier if funding is exhausted.

Funding of up to £2 million was allocated in the Scottish Budget 2025-26 to deliver the pilot which utilises the existing concessionary travel infrastructure, providing each eligible applicant with a temporary National Entitlement Card to allow them to travel by bus across Scotland in a similar way as under the Older and Disabled Persons and Young Persons Schemes.

This pilot seeks to help people seeking asylum to attend essential legal and health appointments at a time when they are generally not allowed to work to support themselves and their families or to access public funds.

During the pilot, information on usage will be collected and participants and stakeholders will be invited to give their views on the impacts of free bus travel. This information will feed into an evaluation to be carried out to inform consideration of proceeding with this policy including future affordability and value for money and to determine if it has supported people seeking asylum to integrate into society in line with the Scottish Government's New Scots Strategy.

In parallel, the Scottish Government continues to explore if inclusion of people seeking asylum in the statutory National Concessionary Travel Schemes will be possible in the longer term. As the Committee are aware, much of Asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government, particular care needs to be taken to ensure that any Scottish Government proposal does not subvert the regime put in place by the UK Government. The operation of the pilot may also provide evidence as to the effect (if any) of free bus travel on the asylum regime which will be an important consideration in assessing the competence of extending the current statutory Concessionary Travel Scheme in Scotland to include all people seeking asylum.

I hope that the information provided is helpful for the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

JIM FAIRLIE