

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

Petitioner written submission, 23 February 2026

We appreciate the continued consideration of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on the key social justice issue of extending the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland.

As of the official beginning of applications for the concessionary pilot scheme for people seeking asylum in Scotland in December 2025, Transport Scotland have confirmed they have received the first monthly figures of the Pilot. By January 1st, over 1,800 people seeking asylum had signed up to the pilot, with Transport Scotland expecting a substantial increase in participants in February 2026.

By 18 January, almost 90,000 journeys had already been made, noting that the urgency to navigate and access practical freedom of movement and autonomy has permitted people to travel further afield to necessary services and contacts. The majority of travel has happened in larger cities, primarily Glasgow, but also Edinburgh and Aberdeen, together with a number of inter-city journeys.

We appreciate the recognition by the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity of the practical limitations on access to employment that people seeking asylum are imposed under current UK Government policy, and additionally the need to “attend essential legal and health appointments” in his letter dated 8 December 2025.

Limited access to employment during the asylum process, which can last several years for some due to a severe backlog of cases, results in heavy reliance on provided accommodation, often located in isolated areas. As a result, individuals depend on as little as £50, or in some cases just £9 per week, depending on the type of accommodation they are assigned, to cover travel and living expenses. In Glasgow, one of the primary dispersal cities in the UK, the bus fare for a Day Ticket has increased to £6.30 for city/local routes as of 2026, taking up a significant portion of a person’s available funds often needed to access essential and mandatory legal or medical appointments.

With the support of a strong network of third sector organisations and civil society partners, as well as effective signposting from Mears, and other local authority services that provide assistance to people seeking asylum, we have been able to reach a large portion of the asylum community to ensure as many people can benefit from this pilot scheme as possible before it is set to end on the 31st of March, 2026.

At the moment, as we near the end of the financial year, we have begun collecting feedback from participants who have benefitted from the pilot scheme. Many have shared with us that access to free bus travel has been life-changing. It has allowed people to partake in ESOL classes, to bring their children safely to school, to visit friends and family members that are located in different Scottish cities to where they are accommodated, to visit and explore new cultural elements of Scotland, to increase their ability to volunteer and be part of social and community groups. This has significantly helped improve mental health and wellbeing in this past month, and

has also significantly helped improve people's ability to access mandatory and essential meetings with legal or medical services.

While we emphasise that the additional workload placed on third sector organisations acting as trusted verifiers has created some challenges around capacity and the speed at which individuals have been able to receive their concessionary bus passes, the overall progress has been greatly encouraging. A strong commitment to effective signposting, alongside clear recognition of the importance of enabling access to the scheme, has resulted in significant uptake during the first month, with figures expected to increase further in February and March. With the implementation of this concessionary travel scheme for people seeking asylum in Scotland, we anticipate that feedback will continue to be positive.

We look forward to continuing the discussion of ensuring holistic and human-rights-aligned support for people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Maryhill Integration Network