

PE2188/E: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over

Petitioner written submission, 29 January 2026

I thank the Cabinet Secretary for her submission of 20 January 2026 in response to Petition PE2188/D. While I note the explanation of existing schemes, I find the Scottish Government's position deeply disappointing and fundamentally unjust.

The current policy results in clear and ongoing discrimination against older people who live on Scotland's islands. People aged 60 and over on the mainland are entitled to free bus travel for all essential journeys — to hospitals, shops, family, community services, and social connection. Older island residents, however, must pay to access the very same necessities simply because our only road is a ferry.

Ferries are not a lifestyle choice or a discretionary service for islanders. They are essential infrastructure. Treating ferry travel as optional while buses are treated as essential exposes a two-tier system of entitlement based solely on geography. This directly contradicts the principles of fairness, equality, and inclusion that the National Entitlement Card scheme claims to uphold.

The limited number of free ferry journeys offered to some island residents does not come close to providing parity with unlimited mainland concessionary travel. It is a rationed substitute for a right that others receive automatically. This leaves older islanders isolated, financially penalised, and effectively punished for remaining in their communities.

The Scottish Government's decision to extend concessionary ferry travel only to under 22s, while excluding over 60s, sends a troubling message: that the mobility, independence, and wellbeing of older people in island communities is a lower priority.

If equality of access is truly a national commitment, then ferry travel for island residents must be recognised as equivalent to bus travel on the mainland — and funded accordingly. Anything less is indefensible.

I urge the Scottish Government to reconsider this position as a matter of urgency and to end this ongoing inequality for older islanders.