

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2188: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over, lodged by Claire Sparrow

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

All Scottish residents aged 60 and over currently qualify for free bus travel on almost all scheduled local bus and coach services within Scotland and on cross-border services as far south as Carlisle or Berwick-upon-Tweed under the statutory national concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled people. The only exceptions being premium fare night buses, tours/excursions, and group hire services.

Under the concessionary fares scheme, bus operators are paid a proportion of the full adult fare for each concessionary traveller carried, known as the reimbursement rate. The total amount payable to operators taking part in the is also subject to an annual cap, with no further payments made to any bus operator if the cap is reached.

The reimbursement rate and payment cap are set following negotiations between Transport Scotland and the Confederation of Passenger Transport, representing bus operators, at a level intended to ensure Scottish Ministers' objective of operators being no better and no worse off than they would have been in the absence of the scheme is met.

The reimbursement rate for the current fiscal year (2025-26) is 52.9% of the full adult single fare for the journey being taken, with the payment cap set at £215.1 million.

In addition to free bus travel, any resident of the Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands or Outer Hebrides aged 60 or over also receives vouchers for four free single ferry trips (two return trips) as a foot passenger between their home island and the Scottish mainland each year. This Scottish Government funded voucher scheme operates on a non-statutory basis.

Similarly, island residents aged 16 to 21 also receive vouchers for two round trips between their home island and the Scottish mainland each year. In addition, [from 1 April 2025](#), residents of the Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, and Outer Hebrides aged under 22 have also been eligible for Scottish Government funded free inter-island ferry travel, as foot passengers, within their own local authority area. When announcing the launch of this scheme in March 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport stated that "I also remain committed to extending free ferry travel to more young people on our islands in 2025-26". Information on the cost of providing the voucher schemes and

free inter-island ferry travel for residents aged under-22 is not readily available, being reported within the wider 'concessionary fares' budget line.

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