

Response to the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2026 targeted Call for Views

Correspondence from Scottish Association for Public Transport, 12 January 2026

- 1. Prior to the instrument being laid, were you aware of the proposal to introduce powers to suspend or withdraw concessionary bus travel? Were you consulted during its development?*

Yes aware in principle, although SAPT were not directly consulted. Industry contacts had provided updates regarding a proposed multi-agency approach to address anti-social behaviour on buses.

- 2. How significant a problem is anti-social behaviour on buses from your perspective?*

Groups of teenagers travelling on buses have a tendency from time to time to exhibit boisterous and disruptive behaviour, which may become abusive or threatening to others. This can occur on public bus services around school times, and has become more common on evening services when such groups can now travel around quite extensively using their free passes.

Other passengers avoid sitting near such groups and may choose to get off the bus. Some are deterred from using bus services, for example one female non car driver who tends to avoid using the bus, and considers evening services too risky.

Other random occurrences of anti-social behaviour may occur at any time, some may be related to drugs or alcohol consumption or mental health issues.

- 3. Do you agree in principle that access to free bus travel should be capable of being suspended or withdrawn in cases of serious or persistent anti-social behaviour?*

Definitely yes, and it is understood that the need for such sanctions was foreseen when the Under 22 free passes were first introduced in Scotland.

Unfortunately, it is taken a fatal incident in 2024 to focus a spotlight on this issue. This resulted from a serious assault on a bus driver at Elgin Bus Station. The 15 year old who was being refused travel for being drunk was a repeat offender, who had previously been reported for assaulting another bus driver.

4. *Does the instrument seem to set out a workable way of addressing antisocial behaviour? And are the procedural safeguards set out in the instrument (such as notice, reasons for suspension and the opportunity to make representations) sufficient to ensure decisions are fair, transparent and workable in practice, including how breaches would be identified and evidenced?*

Yes, the procedural safeguards are important, linked to a new Code of Conduct. However, identification and evidencing may prove problematic and bureaucratic. For example, CCTV may not be able to identify the actual perpetrator(s) amongst a group of people as this won't provide sound recordings of any alleged verbal abuse. Also there are practical difficulties of matching the photos on various passes with someone who may have altered their facial appearance or might be wearing a hood.

5. *What impact, if any, do you anticipate this policy could have on frontline staff and service delivery?*

If successfully applied, it should improve staff health and wellbeing and retention, and make services more attractive to all types of potential bus passengers.

However, underreporting of incidents is a strong possibility as drivers often prefer to remain in the cab behind their 'bandit screen' and continue driving, in the hope that any troublemakers will soon reach their destination and get off the bus.

6. *Are there alternative and better approaches to addressing anti-social behaviour on buses than the approach proposed in this Order?*

In the 4 years since free travel for under 22s was introduced, there is evidence to show that a minority of young people have used the scheme to travel to other areas with the intention of causing trouble both on and off the bus. The common perception is that such anti-social behaviour is most common in the evening, causing others to avoid bus travel at such times.

Some operators have been applying what appears to be a curfew by stealth, by gradually reducing evening services which are not considered to be commercial. It has also been difficult to get enough drivers willing to work such shifts.

A widely recognised view from drivers and some passengers is that there should be a curfew on young persons' free travel in the evenings. This would be unpopular as it would restrict the opportunities for the vast majority of those who benefit from the scheme. However, there have been situations where certain operators have had to temporarily suspend services due to anti-social behaviour, so the overall impacts on communities will need to be monitored and kept under review.

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