

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 25 February 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

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

Introduction

Petitioner Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2028>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 12 November 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. A more recent update was provided by the Minister in response to a written question from Paul Sweeney MSP. A copy of this is included at **Annexe D**.
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 27 June 2023.](#)
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,599 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee

CPPP/S6/26/5/5

February 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

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

Petitioner

Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

Date Lodged

5 June 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.

Previous action

We have raised the issue with Paul Sweeney MSP, who submitted a [motion in the Scottish Parliament](#), which achieved cross-party support.

We also met with the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth, to highlight the need for free bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Background information

Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. They are prevented from working, housed in hotels or private rental accommodation, often in isolated areas, and given less than £50 per week to survive.

Those in hotel accommodation are forced to live on as little as £9 a week, just over £1 a day.

Access to concessionary bus travel is viewed by us as a key social justice policy. We believe it will be positively life-changing and mentally transformative for those otherwise stuck in a dreadfully inadequate and slow asylum system. Most of all, we believe it will enable asylum seekers as a group to become much more integrated in our communities.

Our campaign started in December 2021 with members from the Voices Network, followed by support from the Maryhill Integration Network Voices group.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2028 on 12 November 2025

The Convener: PE2028, lodged by Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the VOICES Network, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current concessionary travel scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland, regardless of age.

Paul Sweeney, our MSP colleague, joins us for our consideration of the petition, as he has done previously. Good morning, Paul.

The committee last considered the petition in March, when we agreed to write to the Scottish Government. We received a response from Transport Scotland, which states that the working group that is responsible for designing a pilot scheme to progress free bus travel for all asylum seekers has reconvened this year and was due to have its first meeting in May. It also indicates that officials are considering, and would discuss with the working group, whether it is possible to include people seeking asylum in the statutory national concessionary travel schemes in the longer term.

In August, in a response to a written question, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity said that it was

“anticipated that the pilot will commence in the Autumn.”—[Written Answers, 19 August 2025; S6W-39566.]

However, in an additional submission, the petitioners indicate that they are still waiting for the pilot to begin, and they continue to urge the Scottish Government to commit to a sustainable and long-term solution.

I recall that we raised the issue directly with Humza Yousaf, the then First Minister, at an earlier stage. The scheme was agreed and then disrupted. We were then told that the petition’s aims were once again being pursued, but although the will is supposedly there to make it happen, the matter seems to be going on for a little bit longer than we were told. Before the committee considers what further it might do, I invite Mr Sweeney to comment.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): As you know, the petition has been part of a long-running campaign that began in December 2021 around the extension of free concessionary travel to people seeking asylum, who are often the most destitute members of the community, with an income of less than £50 per week. The rationale for extending the existing concessionary travel schemes to a relatively small group of the population made sense. The Government accepted that rationale but, as you have said, convener, we have been caught in the teeth of the logistics of how to best implement such a proposal.

The preferred solution is a straightforward extension of eligibility under the existing concessionary travel schemes. The Government intimated that it was piloting a project, and I believe that a pilot in Aberdeen was very successful, but that was based on the ad hoc issuing of bus passes through charitable organisations, which is not really the systemic approach that would be the ideal.

The Convener: Might I just come in here? I recollect that the cabinet secretary at the time was concerned that the extension of the scheme in the way that you have identified might have had a knock-on effect on the Home Office's subsequent consideration of the level of support that asylum seekers were receiving, and that it could have proved counterproductive if it was implemented in that way.

Paul Sweeney: Yes—the Government at the time identified a risk that the rules on no recourse to public funds, which contain an explicit list of prohibited benefits, could be extended to include such a scheme if it were introduced. That comes across as being a bit of a bad-faith and vindictive thing to do. I do not think that, politically, it is a real risk now, certainly with the change in Government.

I think that it is worth exploring the matter again. The Government previously said that it would extend the scheme, and it then rescinded that commitment. It has now reinstated it, but we are still stuck on the issue of when an extension is going to be implemented through a statutory instrument. It would be helpful if the committee could press the Government further on its timetable for the statutory instrument. There is no real rationale for further delay and hindrance—let us just get on with it.

I pay tribute to Maryhill Integration Network and the VOICES network for their persistence in that regard; Doaa Abuamer and Pinar Aksu have been excellent advocates on behalf of their membership. The need for such an extension is well established, from a health perspective as much as for any other reason. I hope that we can get on with it without further delay, and I think that there is the political will to do so.

The Convener: I hope that the commitment on behalf of the UK Government does not prove to be a cross that you have to bear and subsequently repent in relation to.

Paul Sweeney: One hopes so.

The Convener: Notwithstanding that, we have been engaging on the petition for some time, and we have raised it with the First Minister. Are colleagues content that we ask the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity for a progress update on the pilot scheme that was due to commence this autumn and see what efforts we can make to direct the thing and move it forward? I would just note that we hope that it will materialise in the lifetime of the current session of Parliament, given the duration of the petition and the acceptance from Government at various stages of the aims that it seeks to secure.

Are colleagues content with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That is what we will do. I thank Mr Sweeney for attending.

Annexe C: Written submission

Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity written submission, 8 December 2025

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

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

Annexe D: Written question

Question reference: S6W-43522

- **Asked by:** Paul Sweeney, MSP for Glasgow, Scottish Labour
- **Date lodged:** 3 February 2026
- **Current status:** Answered by Jim Fairlie on 12 February 2026

Question

To ask the Scottish Government whether the current pilot scheme that provides free bus travel for people who are seeking asylum and live in Scotland using the National Entitlement Card (NEC) will be extended beyond 31 March 2026.

Answer

The free bus travel pilot scheme will operate until 31 March 2026. We recognise that bus travel has the potential to be transformative for people seeking asylum, who are among the most vulnerable in society. The pilot scheme is providing important evidence of the effect of free bus travel in helping people seeking asylum to access essential services and integrate into society, in line with the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.

Asylum policy and the regime put in place to support people seeking asylum, is reserved to the UK Government. The evidence being gathered through the pilot will be important in considering our next steps, including assessing the benefits and viability of providing free bus travel for all people seeking asylum on a longer-term basis.

People seeking asylum in Scotland can already access the statutory National Concessionary Travel Schemes if they meet the eligibility criteria of aged under 22, aged 60 and over, or with an eligible disability.