

Public Petitions Committee
Thursday 10 September 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

PE2216: Extend Young Persons' Free Bus Travel to include all under-26s

Introduction

Petitioner James Bond

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend eligibility for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme to include everyone aged 22 to 25 inclusive, using powers under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

The current age limit of 21 creates an unfair cliff-edge for young people entering work, apprenticeships or higher education. Extending the scheme would reduce socio-economic disadvantage, boost workforce participation and aid net-zero targets.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2216>

1. This is a new petition that was published on 18 June 2026.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 1,069 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received a submission from the Scottish Government, which is set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.
7. The Petitioner submitted a written submission which exceeded the word limit stipulated by the Committee's guidance. As the Petitioner would not agree to reduce the submission to comply with the word limit, the submission has not been published.

Action

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

PPC/S7/26/2/14

**Clerks to the Committee
September 2026**

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2216: Extend Young Persons' Free Bus Travel to include all under-26s

Petitioner

James Bond

Date Lodged

18 June 2026

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend eligibility for the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme to include everyone aged 22 to 25 inclusive, using powers under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

The current age limit of 21 creates an unfair cliff-edge for young people entering work, apprenticeships or higher education. Extending the scheme would reduce socio-economic disadvantage, boost workforce participation and aid net-zero targets.

Background information

The current age threshold at 21 creates a significant "cliff-edge" for young people transitioning into the workforce, apprenticeships, or higher education. While the scheme has been transformative for those under 22, the 22-25 age group remains heavily affected by high transport costs during a critical career establishment period.

The Government's Fairer Scotland Duty requires reducing socio-economic disadvantage. The Under 26 Concessionary Fares Review (2022) identified transport costs as a major barrier to employment. Transport Scotland's Year 1 Evaluation showed affordability rose from only 26% to 38% even after free travel for under-22s, highlighting ongoing barriers for 22-25 year-olds.

With £414.5 million already allocated to concessionary travel in 2025-26, the estimated £100 million for this extension is a strategic investment in Scotland's workforce and net-zero goals. As major parties pledged this in their 2026 manifestos, Parliament must now turn these promises into action.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing



Scottish Parliament
Information Centre
Ionad Fiosrachaidh
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2216: Extend Young Persons' Free Bus Travel to include all under-26s, lodged by James Bond

Background

National concessionary travel schemes in Scotland: Transport Scotland operates two national concessionary travel schemes, under the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. These are:

1. **Scheme for older and disabled people:** Launched in April 2006, this scheme offers free travel on registered local bus services and scheduled coach services within Scotland to Scottish residents aged 60+ or to disabled residents of any age.
2. **Scheme for young people:** Launched in January 2022, this scheme offers free travel on registered local bus services and scheduled coach services within Scotland for Scottish residents aged five to 21 years (children aged 0-4 already travel on buses for free).

As part of these schemes, 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 each scheme is also subject to an annual cap, with no further payments made to any bus operator if the scheme cap is reached. 2026-27 is the first year that the young persons' scheme has been subject to a payment cap. To date, the payment cap has rarely been reached.

The reimbursement rate for the national concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people for 2026-27 is 53% of the full adult single fare for the journey being taken, with the annual payment cap set at £248.2 million.

The reimbursement rates for the young persons' concessionary fares scheme are 48.1% of the full adult single fare for journeys taken by people aged 5 to 15 and 72.5% for those aged 16 to 21. The annual payment cap is set at £220.6 million.

Trends in concessionary travel: The number of concessionary journeys was on a long-term downward trend between 2006-07 and 2019-20 (the last year unaffected by the covid pandemic) falling from 156 million to 137.5 million trips over this period. By 2024-25, two years after the introduction of the young persons' scheme, there were 184 million concessionary trips made in Scotland – an increase of 28 million trips (18%) on the previous high in 2006-07.

Despite this increase, the introduction of the young persons' scheme has not noticeably slowed the continuing long-term decline in Scottish bus patronage. During 2019-20 (the last full pre-covid year) 361 million bus trips were made, which had

fallen to 334 million trips in 2024-25, a reduction of 7.5%. For comparison, during 1999-00, the year the Scottish Parliament was established, 455 million bus trips were made.

The cost of concessionary travel: There has been a significant increase in annual Scottish Government investment in concessionary travel since the introduction of the scheme for older and disabled people in 2006. At constant 2025-26 prices the equivalent of £252.5 million was spent on concessionary fares in 2006-07, compared with £472.8 million for 2026-27 – an 87.3% real terms increase (that is the increase over and above general inflation). Much of this increase can be attributed to the introduction of the young persons' scheme in January 2022.

Cost of extending eligibility for the young persons' scheme: Transport Scotland has estimated that extending eligibility for the young persons' scheme to those aged under 26 would likely cost between £95 million and £113 million per year.

Transport Scotland position on extending eligibility: Transport Scotland has no plans to increase the age of eligibility for the young persons' concessionary travel scheme.

Proposed £2 bus fares cap: Transport Scotland is currently [running a year-long pilot of a £2 bus fare cap](#) for single trips within the Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Highland, Moray, and Argyll and Bute Council areas. The pilot has a budget of £10 million. The [2026 SNP manifesto](#) included a commitment to extend this cap across Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session.

Prior to the 2026 Scottish General Election, the [First Minister stated](#) "Within the first one hundred days, we will extend the £2 bus fare cap to Glasgow, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Inverclyde", a goal that was reconfirmed by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport during [a debate on Bus Fares](#) on 17 June 2026. It is currently unclear when the £2 fare cap will take effect in these areas, or the cost implications of its extension.

Key Organisations and relevant links

Organisations representing people and businesses potentially interested in this petition, such as the bus industry, people aged under 26, local authority transport officers, and younger workers, include:

- [Confederation of Passenger Transport](#): Bus industry representative organisation.
- [Scottish Youth Parliament](#): Representing young people's interests.
- [Scottish Collaboration of Transport Specialists](#) (SCOTS): Organisation representing senior local authority transport officers.
- [Scottish Trades Union Congress](#): Scottish trade union representative body.

Alan Rehfishch
Senior Researcher
12 August 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 3 August 2026

PE2216/A: Extend Young Persons' Free Bus Travel to include all under-26s

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable?

- The Scottish Government is committed to the continuation of the National Concessionary Travel Schemes and will continue to monitor them to ensure their longer term sustainability. It is not our current intention to change the age eligibility for free bus travel.
- Spending pressures are increasing due to rising demand and operator costs. Any extension to eligibility, such as to under 26-s, would carry significant additional costs (estimated at £95-£113 million per year), raising ongoing affordability considerations.
- The Scottish Government is however keen to test the feasibility of a fare cap model, and launched a £2 Fare Cap pilot from January across the HiTrans and ZetTrans RTP areas.
- Work is now also underway with partners, including operators, to progress a £2 bus fare cap to Glasgow, Ayrshire, Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Inverclyde as quickly as is practicable.
- The Scottish Government is committed to bringing forward legislation for a nationwide £2 fare cap across Scotland by the end of this parliament, building on the evidence from the current pilot.

What, if any, action is the Scottish Government currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

- The Scottish Government has already invested £10 million in the delivery of a 12-month £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot across the Highlands and Islands, with the aim of making bus travel more affordable for passengers and improving access for low-income families.
- The pilot presents a valuable opportunity to assess the potential of the fare cap to increase patronage, strengthen bus services and improve connectivity – particularly for rural and island communities.
- More than 835,000 journeys have been made through the pilot (figures correct as of 20 July).
- The pilot is being delivered in partnership with bus operators, Regional Transport Partnerships and local authorities to carefully consider and agree reimbursement rates for the pilot, both to protect the public purse and the bus industry.

- Transport Scotland officials are now working with partners to assess the deliverability of the pilot's expansion into the SPT area, building on the positive impact of the pilot in the Highlands and Islands.
- Expansion of the fare cap into the SPT region will be a complex undertaking, requiring detailed legal, technical and operational assessment to ensure legislative compliance, value for money and effective delivery.

Bus, Concessionary and Active Travel, Scottish Government