

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

6th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), 20 April 2022

PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel.

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner David Gallant

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/PE1928>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 9 February 2022.
2. The petition seeks to provide free rail travel for disabled people. The petitioner points out that rail fares are unaffordable and that there are significant issues with some local bus services, which prevent disabled people being able to benefit from free bus travel. 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. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected not to collect signatures.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from Transport Scotland and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

6. The Committee has also received a submission from Sight Scotland. This can be found in **Annexe D**.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel

Petitioner

David Gallant

Date Lodged:

09/02/22

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel.

Previous action

I've written to the First Minister but she did not reply.

Background information

Many disabled people who meet the qualification for free bus travel cannot actually use buses either because rural bus routes have been withdrawn or because the buses used in rural areas of Scotland have toilets that are unsuitable for disabled people.

Therefore, there is a need for free bus travel. Here is an example: the bus service from Kyle of Lochalsh to Glasgow has toilets that are unsuitable for disabled people but Scotrail trains have toilets that are suitable for disabled.

I have written to the First Minister about this matter.

I explained to her that train fares are unaffordable. I also explained that the cost of providing free rail travel for disabled people could easily be met by raising the starting age for free bus travel for senior citizens from 60 to 61. The First Minister did not reply so this petition is necessary.

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The logo for The Information Centre, featuring the text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark blue background.

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel, lodged by David Gallant

Background

The Scotland-wide national concessionary travel scheme for elderly (aged 60+) and disabled people, administered by Transport Scotland, provides free travel on nearly all local and long-distance bus services within Scotland. A companion can travel for free to assist people with certain disabilities. Scottish island residents also receive two free return ferry trips between their home island and the Scottish mainland every year.

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 scheme is subject to an annual cap, with no further payments made to any bus operator if the cap is reached. The payment cap and reimbursement rate are set following negotiations between Transport Scotland and the Confederation of Passenger Transport, representing bus operators. The reimbursement rate and payment cap are set at a level intended to ensure Scottish Ministers' objective of bus operators being no better and no worse off than they would have been in the absence of the national concessionary travel scheme is met. The payment cap for 2022- 23 has been set at £226.1m.

Several local authorities and SPT offer concessionary rail fares to disabled residents, usually limited to travel within the local authority area or SPT boundaries. The Disabled Persons' Railcard offers one third off most rail fares across Britain. Blind people can travel for free on rail services in Scotland.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government has not considered extending the national concessionary travel scheme to include rail travel for disabled people.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not considered extending the national concessionary travel scheme to include rail travel for disabled people.

Alan Rehfish
Senior Researcher
10 March 2022

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

Transport Scotland submission of 17 February 2022

PE1928/A - Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel

ScotRail currently has no plans to introduce free travel for disabled people, but do offer discounted fares through the Disabled Persons Railcard as well as providing free travel for blind passengers by participating in that scheme owned by Scotland's local authorities. The Scottish government is committed to considering discounted and concessionary fares across public transport as part of its Fair Fares Review.

Our Fair Fares Review is part of a broader package of work being taken forward by Transport Scotland to ensure that there is a viable and sustainable transport system for the future. Immediate priorities for this work include ensuring that our transport system is aligned with the prevailing Covid-19 conditions, the Scottish Government's updated Covid-19 Strategic Framework and the Covid Recovery Strategy, providing up to date guidance and communications support to passengers and operators, and securing a safe and confident return to public transport as we recover from the pandemic.

The Fair Fares Review, which is currently in its planning stages, is being undertaken to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares in the future. The review will look at the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available on all modes including bus, rail and ferry. It will take cognisance of the cost and availability of services, and will consider options against a background where the costs of car travel are declining and public transport costs are increasing.

We anticipate that the Fair Fares Review will be ongoing until the end of 2023 and we will engage with stakeholders as this work progresses.

You may wish to note that through the Accessible [Going Further: Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework | Transport Scotland](#) we seek to ensure that disabled people can travel with the same freedom, choice and dignity as other travellers.

Annexe D

Submission from Sight Scotland of 6 April 2022

PE1928/B: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel

Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans are in support of PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel and are campaigning for a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions, akin to that of the free bus travel scheme.

Our Fair Rail Vision

Sight Scotland is calling on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to establish a new national policy for free rail travel across Scotland for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions.

Currently, there is no national policy for rail travel across Scotland which entitles free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions. With different concessionary and companion schemes in different areas, this is causing confusion to both passengers and rail staff. With coronavirus restrictions and social distancing measures return, we want to make rail travel better for those living with sight loss. Having a companion can mean the difference of travelling or not at all.

As ScotRail is set to transfer into public ownership in April 2022, we are calling on the Scottish Government to establish a national policy for rail travel across Scotland which entitles free rail travel for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companions.

We are calling for:

- Free rail travel for those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card and their companion

- Accessible rail travel for blind and partially sighted people
- A consistent policy across Scotland, wherever you are travelling

Costings

The figures below are based on data obtained from the Office of Rail and Road.

Summary:

- Average cost of a rail journey in Scotland is £4.74
- Each Scottish resident made 16 rail trips within Scotland during 2019-20.

The Office of Rail and Road, the economic and safety regulator for the British railway industry, reports in its Rail Industry Finance (UK) 2020-21 [report](#):

“The average passenger fare per journey in 2020-21 was £4.74 for all operators, an annual reduction of 20.2%, which was largely caused by shorter average journey lengths. The average journey length decreased by 15.8% to 32.1 kilometres.”

The Office of Rail and Road states that [90m rail journeys](#) were made within Scotland during 2019-20. Given a [Scottish population](#) of 5,466,000, that means, on average, each Scottish resident made 16 rail trips within Scotland during 2019-20.

Based on the average rail journey cost, average number of journeys per person year and the number of NEC eye/eye+1 holders, we estimate the proposed scheme to cost around **£2 million** to provide free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions.

Calculations

$£4.74 \times 16 \text{ trips} = £75.84 \text{ per person per year}$

$£75.84 \times 12,768 \text{ (NEC eye / eye +1 card holders)} = £968,325.12$

$£968,352.12 \times 2 \text{ (to account for companions)} = £1,936,650.24$

Key Figures and Findings

[Chapter 2: Bus and Coach Travel \(transport.gov.scot\)](#)

[Summary Transport Statistics](#)

- 1.4 million people had a National Entitlement Card (NEC) in 2020

- Of this, 12,768 hold the eye or the eye +1 card (this accounts for 0.9% of all NEC holders)
- Of those who have a NEC for a disability or visual impairment 73% have the +1 entitlement to travel with a companion

[Chapter 7: Rail Services \(transport.gov.scot\)](https://transport.gov.scot)

- 2018-2019: 43.5 million reduced fare journeys out of 92 million journeys
- 2019-2020: 96.4 million passengers

[Disability and Transport: Findings from the Scottish Household Survey](#)

- Reasons for not using the train more were not greatly different between disabled and non-disabled people, although 'cost' was named by more disabled people than non-disabled people (16% compared to 12%)
- 'Health reasons' were given by 3% of disabled people compared to 0% of non-disabled people
- Average household incomes for disabled people tend to be lower than for those who are not (median £19,778 compared to £31,800)
- Those whose condition affects their ability to carry out activities a lot have lower household incomes than those whose condition affects everyday activities a little (£18,793 compared to £21,184)
- 18% of disabled people used the train in the past month, compared to 34% of those not disabled. For use at least once a week, the figures are 5% and 11% respectively
- Those whose disability affected everyday activities a lot used the train less frequently than those whose activities were only affected a little, with the number using the train in the past month 12% and 24% respectively

Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework Annual Delivery Plan 2021-22

[Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework - Annual Delivery Plan 2021-22
\(transport.gov.scot\)](https://www.transport.gov.scot/scotland-accessible-travel-framework-annual-delivery-plan-2021-22)

The Scottish Government sets out its Accessible Travel Framework in its Annual Delivery Plan for 2021-22. We believe providing free rail travel for blind and partially sighted people and their companions contributes to the 4 outcomes (detailed below) to achieve the vision “that all disabled people can travel with the same freedom, choice, dignity and opportunity as other citizens”.

4 outcomes:

1. More disabled people make successful door-to-door journeys, more often
2. Disabled people are more involved in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure
3. Everyone involved in delivering transport information, services and infrastructure will help to enable disabled people to travel
4. Disabled people feel comfortable and safe using public transport – this includes being free from hate crime, bullying and harassment when travelling