

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

17th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
7 December 2022

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

Lodged on	9 February 2022
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/petitions/PE1928

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [20 April 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to hear evidence from the petitioner and Sight Scotland at a future meeting. The Committee also agreed to write to Transport Scotland.
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 response from Transport Scotland, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

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

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

9 February 2022

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who meet the qualification for free bus travel cannot actually use buses either because rural bus routes have been withdrawn or because the buses used in rural areas of Scotland have toilets that are unsuitable for disabled people.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

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1928 on 20 April 2022

The Convener: Our final new petition today is PE1928, which calls on the Scottish Government to provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel. The petition has been lodged by David Gallant, who notes that many disabled people who qualify for free bus travel are unable to benefit from it due to the withdrawal of some rural bus routes and the lack of access to suitable toilet facilities on board many buses that operate in rural areas. He also points out that train fares are unaffordable, so train travel is not currently a viable alternative in those areas.

We have received a submission from Sight Scotland highlighting the need for a consistent national policy for rail travel across Scotland that entitles blind and partially sighted people and their companions to free rail travel. Sight Scotland points out that there are different concessionary and companion schemes in different areas, which can cause confusion to passengers and rail staff.

Transport Scotland has also sent us a submission, which I should state was drafted prior to ScotRail's move into public ownership. It indicates that ScotRail has no plans to introduce free travel for disabled people but points out that it offers discounted fares through the disabled persons railcard and that there is free travel for blind passengers via a scheme that is operated by local authorities.

Transport Scotland also highlights a planned fair fares review that is designed

“to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares in the future”,

and suggests that existing discounts and concessionary schemes across a range of transport will be considered as part of that review.

This is an interesting new petition. Do colleagues have any comments on it?

David Torrance: We should keep the petition open, and I suggest that we hold an evidence-taking session with the petitioner and Sight Scotland at a future meeting.

Alexander Stewart: I concur. The issue is important because, as you have identified, convener, there seems to be a bit of a mismatch across regions and areas with regard to individuals with certain disabilities getting travel support.

We should also write to Transport Scotland to request an update on the fair fares review that you mentioned, which is important with regard to ensuring that there is consideration for disabled people across the piece.

The Convener: Are we content to proceed on the basis of those recommendations?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Transport Scotland submission of 1 June 2022

PE1928/C – Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel

Thank you for your letter of 6 May 2022 requesting an update on the progress of the Fair Fares Review.

As was highlighted in our correspondence of February 2022, this review forms part of a broader package of work being taken forward to ensure that there is a sustainable and viable public transport system for the future as we recover from the pandemic. Given this context, our initial work undertaken to date has focussed on analytical work assessing changing trends in transport demand and usage as a consequence of Covid-19 and working with stakeholders across the transport sector to encourage people back onto public transport as more people begin to return to workplaces and travel for leisure purposes more often.

We anticipate that the review will proceed with a detailed assessment of the existing discounted fares and concessionary schemes as well as the overall cost and availability of services across bus, rail and ferry in the coming months. It will thereafter consider options taking cognisance of the relative changes to the overall cost of travel. We will engage with stakeholders throughout this process and will keep the Committee regularly updated as the review progresses.