

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

Transport Scotland written submission, 11 June 2024

Thank you for the letter dated 20 May 2024 from Jackson Carlaw MSP on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee about Petition PE2028. I have been asked to reply as Team Leader of the Concessionary Travel Policy Unit.

In particular, the Committee is seeking:

- an update on the work being undertaken to explore options for extending concessionary travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland.
- The Committee would particularly welcome clarification on how the £2million budget allocation is being utilised, specifically how much of this funding will be directly used to fund a concessionary travel scheme or whether Transport Scotland are planning to use some of this funding for additional research and evaluation work.

Update on work being undertaken to explore options for extending concessionary travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland

You will be aware that on 28 October 2023 the Scottish Government announced that £2 million would be made available in the budget for 2024-5 to progress free bus travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland. Since that time work has been ongoing to establish the most appropriate way to deliver this support, with eligibility for those not already covered by the existing concessionary travel schemes, building on the learning from local and regional pilots delivered by third sector organisations over recent years.

Around a third of people seeking asylum in Scotland are thought to already be eligible for free bus travel for the existing National Concessionary Travel Schemes through age or disability criteria. If a person is aged under 22, aged 60 or over or meet the disabled eligibility criteria, I would encourage them to apply for a National Entitlement Card.

How the £2million budget allocation is being utilised

Following the announcement in October 2023, Transport Scotland have been developing a national pilot scheme for delivery of this funding during this financial year with eligibility for those not already covered by the existing schemes, building on the learning from local and regional pilots delivered by third sector organisations over recent years.

Third Sector organisations and representatives with lived experience of the asylum system are contributing to the design of the pilot through a Working Group with Transport Scotland officials. This pilot will provide valuable evidence on nationwide delivery, costs and demand and will inform future progression of policy.

Work has been progressing to establish what is affordable and practical for delivery during 2024-25 within the budgetary envelope. As the funding has been allocated for a single year only, we will not be extending the statutory National Concessionary Travel Schemes to include people seeking asylum as an eligible group. Rather, it is anticipated that through the pilot a certain number of journeys or weekly tickets will be available per eligible person over a set period of time to provide support with travel. The date of launch and duration of the pilot are being considered as part of work to develop the pilot.

We are intending to use as much of the funding allocated as possible to provide free bus travel to people seeking asylum but will be ensuring the results of the scheme are evaluated to inform future policy decisions. Further information will be provided via the Scottish Government's website and these Third Sector organisations as preparations are made for the pilot to be opened.

I hope that the information provided is helpful for the Committee.