

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

18th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday
6 December 2023

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 [3 May 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
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 new responses from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner, which are 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](#).

7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 13 signatures have been received on this petition.

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who meet the qualification for free bus travel cannot actually use buses either because rural bus routes have been withdrawn or because the buses used in rural areas of Scotland have toilets that are unsuitable for disabled people.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 3 May 2023

The Convener: PE1928, which was lodged by David Gallant, calls 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. We last considered the petition on 21 December 2022, when we heard evidence from the petitioner and Sight Scotland, and we agreed to write to the Scottish Government.

At the time, we agreed to wait until responses had been received from the local authorities that offer discount fares for companion travel before writing to the Scottish Government. I am pleased to say that we have now received responses from Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, West Lothian Council and Fife Council. Those responses highlight the financial pressures that are faced in operating the existing concessionary fares travel scheme, with West Lothian Council actually removing its rail concession scheme as part of its budget-saving measures.

Previously, the committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government to ask what consideration it is giving to introducing a national policy for companion rail travel—you may recall that there were issues depending on where people accessed and alighted from trains—and to ask it to confirm that the fair fares review would consider free travel for companions and people with disabilities.

We have received a submission from the petitioner ahead of this morning's meeting. He does not feel that the local authorities' responses were relevant to the aims of his petition and has suggested that free rail travel for disabled people could be restricted to specific routes or localities in order to benefit those who live in more rural areas.

In the light of the comments that we have received, do members have any comments or suggestions relating to the petition that we might consider for further action?

David Torrance: I suggest that the committee writes to the Scottish Government, as previously agreed, to ask what consideration has been given to the introduction of a national policy for companion rail travel and to seek confirmation that the fair fares review will consider the option of extending the national entitlement card scheme to provide free rail travel as well as bus travel for people with disabilities.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We got information from some councils, which was useful. In that correspondence, the committee might also want to highlight the responses that we received from West Lothian Council and Fife Council, because they had an impact. I am content with David Torrance's suggestion.

The Convener: Are members generally content with the proposals that have been made?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 6 June 2023

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

Thank you for your letter dated 10 May 2023 seeking information following the meeting of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on 3 May 2023 where the petition “PE1928: Provide free rail travel for disabled people who meet the qualifications for free bus travel” was considered.

Transport Scotland officials have provided an update on the following areas, attached as Appendix A to this letter:

- to ask what consideration it has given to introducing a national policy for companion rail travel
- to ask it to confirm that the Fair Fares Review will consider the option of extending the National Entitlement Card scheme to provide free rail as well as bus travel for people with disabilities

I hope this information is helpful.

Appendix A

The Scottish Government continues to progress its Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares that supports the future long-term viability of a public transport system that is accessible, available and affordable for people throughout Scotland. The review is considering both the cost and availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available on all modes including bus, rail and ferry to ensure our public transport system is more accessible, available, and affordable, with the costs of transport more fairly shared across government, business, and society.

I can confirm that this remit includes consideration of the scope and extent of existing concessionary travel schemes in Scotland, including provision for disabled people and their companions travelling by rail, and assessment of potential options for change that deliver on the objectives set out above within the broader context of affordability.

I would like to highlight a change to the timescale previously advised to the Committee for completion of the Fair Fares Review and the reasons for this.

As part of the Fair Fares Review, a pilot for the removal of ScotRail peak-time rail fares will run for six months starting October 2023. This will make rail a more attractive proposition for travellers and support modal shift from car. It will also provide us with an opportunity to test new fares structures in response to the changes in travel patterns that have emerged since the onset of the Covid pandemic.

The Fair Fares Review advice will report by the end of 2023, taking into account emerging findings from the removal of Scotrail Peak-time rail fares pilot, and will recommend a package of measures which can be considered for implementation from 2024-25 and onwards. These will provide opportunities to address the wider issues for the cost and availability of public transport services across all modes of public transport.

Petitioner submission of 13 November 2023

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

I would just like to point out that that the Equalities Act 2010 **requires that reasonable adjustments must be made to meet the needs of disabled people**. Since all long-distance buses in Scotland (such as those operated by Scottish City-Link, Parks of Hamilton, and Stagecoach Megabus) have onboard toilets that are unsuitable for most disabled people, and trains operating in Scotland do offer toilet facilities

suitable for people with disabilities, free train travel would help ensure disabled people have equitable access to public transport.

In order to comply with the Equalities Act, free rail travel should be provided to disabled people under the same terms and conditions that free bus travel is also available to disabled people, and for this purpose includes travel to and from Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle.

Since the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010 are not devolved, the Scottish Government has no choice but to ensure these provisions are complied with.