



# BRIEFING: Concessionary Travel

## Key Messages

- Commissioner opposes Welsh Government proposals to increase eligibility age from 60 to state pension age
- Concessionary travel brings significant benefits to individuals, communities, local economies and the environment
- Welsh Government proposals likely to increase risk of loneliness and isolation; increase costs on health and care services; hit incomes of thousands of older people; and undermine response to climate emergency

In July, the Welsh Government announced that it intends to increase the eligibility age for concessionary travel for older people from 60 to the state pension age (67 years by 2021).

The Commissioner has been consistently clear in her opposition to the proposed changes and has recently written to Ken Skates, Minister for Economy and Transport, to outline her concerns with the proposals and urge him to reconsider the Welsh Government's position.

## Benefits of Concessionary Travel

The concessionary bus pass, introduced in Wales in 2002, provides invaluable support to older people of all ages, in supporting their physical and mental health, as well as promoting their independence, enabling them to stay in employment or access opportunities for learning and training, and supporting them in caring responsibilities. An older person caring for a loved one could lose nearly a third of their monthly carers allowance to cover the costs of bus travel.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous studies have found that the concessionary bus pass has contributed to a greater level of physical activity,<sup>2</sup> improved protection against dementia,<sup>3</sup> a better quality of life, greater life satisfaction and greater levels of happiness amongst older people,<sup>4</sup> as well as "substantial economic, social and environment benefits" across society, including in economic productivity, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and public health.<sup>5 6</sup>

**Every £1 spent on concessionary fares returns at least £2.87 in benefits for older people, their communities and local economies<sup>7</sup>**

The concessionary bus pass also helps us to reduce our impact on the environment and tackle the climate emergency. We should be encouraging as many people as possible to use public transport and withdrawing the concessionary bus pass from 60-66-year olds is counterintuitive to achieving this goal.

## **Impact of proposed change**

Limiting the concessionary bus pass to people over the state pension age will have a detrimental impact on the lives of thousands of older people throughout Wales. The Welsh Government's own Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment estimates that up to 300,000 older people will be affected by the change, with around half of these forced to pay for bus travel and the other half choosing alternative methods of transport or not to travel at all. This is likely to have the effect of increasing the level of loneliness and isolation amongst older people; limit opportunities to stay active and independent; and hit the already stretched incomes of some of the most disadvantaged older people in our communities.

**Over 150,000 older people in Wales either will not travel or choose other travel modes<sup>8</sup>**

**Welsh Government Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment**

Research conducted by the Commissioner's office in 2010 found that older people place significant value on their bus pass. Our survey of older people found that:<sup>9</sup>

- 81% believe their quality of life would suffer without their bus pass
- 78% agree that they would feel more lonely and housebound without their bus pass
- 85% agree they wouldn't get out as much without their bus pass
- 92% agree that the bus pass allows them to be independent

The proposed change to the eligibility age offloads the cost of providing support from the Welsh Government directly on to older people and bus companies. These companies, with the lost revenue from concessionary fares, are then likely to pass this cost onto users of all ages through ticket price increases and a reduction in non-profitable routes, which the Welsh Government has described as bus companies "adapting their services to changing demand".<sup>10</sup>

**The proposed changes would cut an average of only £4.92m a year from the Welsh Government's budget between 2021-36<sup>11</sup>**

## **Protecting Concessionary Travel**

It was clear from the reaction to the Welsh Government's announcement that this is a policy that is not popular with older people or the wider public and the Commissioner has heard first-hand from older people throughout Wales that they do not agree with the Welsh Government's proposals.

The Commissioner will be continuing to make the case to the Welsh Government to reverse their decision and would urge all Assembly Members to oppose the Welsh Government's proposal and ensure that all older people continue to benefit from concessionary travel, which promotes older people's independence and wellbeing; strengthens our communities and local economies; and contributes towards tackling the climate emergency.

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- <sup>1</sup> A monthly ticket in Bridgend, Carmarthenshire or Swansea costs £80. Carers Allowance is paid at £66.15 per week.
- <sup>2</sup> Coronini-Cronberg, S., Millett, C., Laverty, A. & Webb, E. (2012). The Impact of a Free Older Persons' Bus Pass on Active Travel and Regular Walking in England; *American Journal of Public Health* (102:11) pp.2141-2148
- <sup>3</sup> Kings College London. (2019). *Free bus rides essential for healthy brain function*; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2ZaAqiB>
- <sup>4</sup> University College London. (2019). *Bus passes linked to increased happiness for older adults*; Available at: <http://bit.ly/31Tg1MK>
- <sup>5</sup> Greener Journeys. (2014). *The costs and benefits of concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people in Britain*; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2Mryoo6>
- <sup>6</sup> Transport Scotland. (2014). *Concessionary Travel - Customer Feedback Research Year Two Report*; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2IIW0IN>
- <sup>7</sup> Greener Journeys (2014). *The costs and benefits of concessionary bus travel for older and disabled people in Britain*; p.7; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2Mryoo6>
- <sup>8</sup> Welsh Government. (2019). *Public Transport (Wales) Bill Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment*; 18 July 2019; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2pfwlZV>
- <sup>9</sup> Older People's Commissioner for Wales. (2010). *Concessionary Bus Pass Research*; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2TRtisz>
- <sup>10</sup> Welsh Government. (2019). *Public Transport (Wales) Bill Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment*; 18 July 2019; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2pfwlZV>
- <sup>11</sup> Proposed £73.8m total benefits for the Welsh Government between 2021/22 and 2035/36 in: Welsh Government. (2019). *Public Transport (Wales) Bill Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment*; 18 July 2019; Available at: <http://bit.ly/2pfwlZV>

# The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of older people throughout Wales, scrutinising and influencing a wide range of policy and practice to improve their lives. She provides help and support directly to older people through her casework team and works to empower older people and ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. The Commissioner's role is underpinned by a set of unique legal powers to support her in reviewing the work of public bodies and holding them to account when necessary.

The Commissioner is taking action to end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

**The Commissioner wants Wales to be the best place in the world to grow older.**

## How to contact the Commissioner:

Older People's Commissioner for Wales  
Cambrian Buildings  
Mount Stuart Square  
Cardiff  
CF10 5FL

Phone: 03442 640 670

Email: [ask@olderpeoplewales.com](mailto:ask@olderpeoplewales.com)

Website: [www.olderpoplewales.com](http://www.olderpoplewales.com)

Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)