



## Extension of National Concessionary Travel Scheme to Under 22s

**Committee** Operations

**Date of meeting** 20 August 2021

**Date of report** 3 August 2021

### Report by Assistant Chief Executive

#### 1. Object of report

To update the committee on plans announced by Transport Scotland to extend the National Concessionary Travel Scheme to those under 22 years of age.

#### 2. Background

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS) provides free travel on registered local and long-distance bus services throughout Scotland, at any time of day for any number of journeys, for those aged 60 and over, as well as for eligible disabled people of any age (including children under 5). NCTS is available only to residents of Scotland. Further details are available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/concessionary-travel/60plus-or-disabled/#>

Annually (pre-Covid 19) there are around 138m concession trips by bus per annum, representing 40% of all bus journeys undertaken in Scotland. In 2019/20, £216 million in reimbursement was provided by Transport Scotland to Bus Operators to support these trips.

On behalf of the 12 Local Authorities in the west of Scotland, SPT's Concessionary Travel Card Unit provides support and assistance to eligible Strathclyde residents in applying for their National Entitlement Card (NEC). An NEC card is required to access the NCTS. SPT also administers the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme, which provides discounted travel for NEC cardholders in Strathclyde on Rail, Subway and Ferry services for island residents. Further details are available at; <http://www.spt.co.uk/travelcards/concessions/>

In July 2021, Transport Scotland announced that the NCTS would be extended to include all residents in Scotland under the age of 22, providing free bus travel to this passenger group from 31 January 2022 onwards. Further details on this announcement are available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/free-bus-travel-for-under-22s/>

#### 3. Outline of proposals

Legislation was approved by the Scottish Parliament in March 2021 enabling the introduction of a new statutory scheme to allow 5-18 year olds resident in Scotland to access free bus travel through the Young Scot branded NEC. Following a further commitment made by the Scottish Government to extend this scheme to 19 to 21 year olds also, further legislative changes are scheduled to be introduced to the Scottish Parliament this summer, by means of a Scottish Statutory Instrument (SSI).

Subject to parliamentary approval, Transport Scotland estimates that approximately 930,000 young people could benefit from the new scheme. However, it should be noted that likely

usage of the scheme by young people aged 5 to 21 will to some extent be determined by the availability of bus services in their respective locales.

The total budget for the extended scheme is yet to be finalised by Transport Scotland. SPT understands that financial reimbursement arrangements for the extended scheme have though been agreed in principal with local bus operators, however the reimbursement rates have not yet been made publicly available.

Delivery of the extended scheme is being taken forward on behalf of Transport Scotland by the Improvement Service, National Entitlement Card Programme Office and Young Scot, respectively. Representatives from SPT's Travel Card Unit, (who assist Strathclyde residents who are over 60 and/or disabled in applying for their National Entitlement Card (NEC)) are in discussions with the delivery partners on the roll out for the extended scheme in Strathclyde and any support required in applying for the new Young Scot NEC. Feedback to date has suggested that the Young Scot NEC roll out will require limited input from SPT's TCU team and will primarily be led by the respective Young Scot representatives within Local Authorities.

In terms of the technical operation of the scheme, it is anticipated that a concessionary travel card product will automatically be loaded onto the new Young Scot NEC, providing parental consent has been granted where applicable. New applications to the scheme will be processed via [www.getyournec.scot](http://www.getyournec.scot), Post Offices and/or Young Scot teams within Local Authorities.

It is anticipated that some existing NEC disabled cardholders under 22 years of age, may elect to switch to the new Young Scot NEC, as this would remove the present need to renew such cards every three years.

Similarly, in respect of Home to School Transport, it is anticipated that in certain instances where SPT currently procure bus passes from local bus operators for travel on local bus services, Local Authorities are likely to direct those pupils towards the new Young Scot NEC to meet their travel requirements. Such arrangements will be subject to the availability of suitable local bus services, and there being available capacity to carry the school pupils in question. SPT currently arranges circa 2,000 bus passes per annum on behalf of Local Authorities. The impact of the extended scheme on dedicated Home to School transport services (secured when no suitable local bus services are in operation) is unknown as yet. SPT anticipates some Local Authorities may elect to review their policies & eligibility criteria for dedicated school transport in light of the announcement. SPT officers have raised these issues with Transport Scotland's delivery team and our partner Local Authorities for consideration.

A further consideration is the potential negative impact on Subway patronage by those under 22. Research undertaken by SPT suggests that Under 22s represent 17.2% of all travellers who make circa 2.2 million trips per annum (pre-Covid). SPT officers have highlighted to Transport Scotland the potential for modal shift away from Subway to local bus services, due directly to the extension of the NEC scheme. Without additional financial support from Transport Scotland this will have a direct impact on SPT revenues and may have implications for our partner Local Authority partner requisition levels, whilst budgets are increasingly stretched due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. SPT understands that colleagues from Edinburgh Tram have made similar representations to Transport Scotland on this matter. Whilst the benefits of free bus travel for under 22s are acknowledged, the extended NEC scheme will present a further challenge as Subway continue to rebuild passenger volumes & revenues already significantly impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme delivers free bus travel for eligible users across Scotland. Extension of the scheme to those aged under 22 will allow those eligible to access the same benefits of free bus travel, where bus services are available and suitable for their needs. Such measures are likely to support growth in local bus patronage across Scotland, which has been in significant decline over the past decade and was significantly impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic.

However, whilst the potential benefits of the extended scheme to young people under 22 is acknowledged, it should be recognised that there are likely to be unplanned impacts on other transport services, notably Home to School Transport and Subway services. As yet, no compensation arrangements have been put in place by Transport Scotland to offset modal shift & revenue loss from Subway. SPT officers therefore continue to make representations to Transport Scotland on these issues, highlighting the need for a holistic, long term, sustainable approach to rebuilding passenger volumes across the public transport network as we emerge from the Covid 19 pandemic and work towards a sustainable economic recovery.

## 5. Committee action

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

## 6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>The extension of National Concessionary Travel Scheme to Under 22s is in line with the Priorities' of the National Transport Strategy and supports the Regional Transport Strategy Access for All Outcome. The revised national policy position will be acknowledged in the development of future SPT policy.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>As stated in the report the extended scheme will have a significant financial impact on Subway income which will require future funding support from Transport Scotland and/or other funding partners.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Transport Scotland has undertaken the required statutory impact assessments in developing the policy. This policy will expand opportunities for young people under 22 and benefit those from low income households where travel costs are a disproportionate element of overall household income.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None directly.</i>

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