

Scottish Government submission of 27 June 2023

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

In the Programme for Government 2022-23, the Scottish Government committed to working with third sector partners and local authorities to consider how best to provide free bus travel to people seeking asylum.

As the Committee will be aware, asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government. People seeking asylum in the UK are generally restricted from working and have no recourse to public funds. However, in many cases they require to travel to access legal advice, social support, medical appointments and other essential services.

A short term pilot led by the Refugee Survival Trust and third sector partners commenced on Monday 30 January and will finish in July 2023 and is funded through the Scottish Government's Smarter Choices, Smarter Places scheme. This pilot is providing travel support to 150 people seeking asylum living in Glasgow through the provision of a 12-week digital First Bus pass, along with information and digital support to access and use the pass. The funding secured will also provide short term bus tickets to those in immediate need.

Participants in the pilot are being asked to provide information on how often they make use of bus travel, the reasons that journeys are made and the impact that having access to free bus travel has on their lives. This information will help inform options on how to deliver our Programme for Government commitment.

In parallel to the work on the pilot, Scottish Government officials are exploring options, including eligibility for the statutory concessionary travel scheme, to provide free bus travel to people seeking asylum in the longer term, recognising that asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government.

Officials have estimated that around one-third of people seeking asylum in Scotland are already eligible for concessionary bus travel under the existing Young Persons and Older and Disabled Persons Schemes (by virtue of being under 22, aged 60 and over or via disability eligibility).