

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

Transport Scotland written submission, 17 April 2025

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.

In February 2025, the Scottish Budget 2025-26 was approved by Parliament. It contained the commitment to extend free bus travel to people seeking asylum who are not eligible for the existing National Concessionary Travel Schemes. Funding has been allocated in the current financial year 2025-26, but it should be noted that this funding is for one year only.

Accordingly, we are reconvening the Working Group that was established in 2024, with an initial meeting scheduled at the beginning of May, to seek views on how best to provide free bus travel on an interim basis during 2025-26, whilst consideration of a potential longer-term intervention is considered.

With regards to a longer-term intervention, the Scottish Government committed to explore if free bus travel could be extended to all people seeking asylum before the end of the current Parliamentary session in a Parliamentary debate on 9 October 2024. This would be subject to successful passage of a Scottish Budget containing this matter and an agreed way forward on the policy in terms of practical delivery. In line with this commitment, officials are giving ongoing consideration as to whether inclusion of people seeking asylum in the statutory National Concessionary Travel Schemes will be possible in the longer term. This will be discussed with the Working Group.

As the Committee will be aware, extending the statutory National Concessionary Travel Schemes is the preferred position of many of the third sector and other organisations who have campaigned on this issue for several years and is the subject of petition PE2028.

As much of asylum policy is reserved to the UK Government, particular care needs to be taken to ensure that any Scottish Government proposal does not subvert the regime put in place by the UK Government as to the circumstances in which people seeking asylum are able to enter and remain in the UK and the support they are entitled to.

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

Bus Strategy and Funding Policy Unit