

Response to the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2026 targeted Call for Views

Correspondence from Scottish Youth Parliament, 14 January 2026

Summary of our recommendations:

- Continue to meaningfully involve young people in legislative, policy and practice development to make public transport safer.
- Invest in youth-specific spaces and local youth work provision to ensure young people have safe, affordable and supported spaces in their community.
- Challenge the harmful stereotype and perception that young people are solely responsible for anti-social behaviour on transport, including in communication on this measure.

This response was formulated from the SYP manifesto consultation response, a consultation workshop with MSYPs that took place in September 2025, and ongoing work with SYP's Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee.

1. Prior to the instrument being laid, were you aware of the proposal to introduce powers to suspend or withdraw concessionary bus travel? Were you consulted during its development?

SYP first heard about this proposal in a speech made by the First Minister in the Scottish Parliament during First Minister's Question Time on 1st May 2025. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) were disappointed and concerned at the announcement. They took action by co-authoring a letter to the FM with other organisations to express their concerns [attached as appendix].

At the same time, SYP began engagement with Transport Scotland to better understand the proposal and to feed in the views of young people. This resulted in a consultation workshop with MSYPs at SYP's national Sitting in September 2025 focused on safety on public transport, namely the introduction of safety officers, a behaviour code for concessionary travel and how to improve education around safe transport use. The consultation workshop was part of informing the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact

Assessment on concessionary travel usage (such as the Under 22 Free Bus Travel Scheme).

2. How significant a problem is anti-social behaviour on buses from your perspective?

Young people have continually expressed they wanted buses, and indeed all public transport, to be safe and accessible. SYP's 2026-2031 manifesto, Dear Scotland's Future, calls for young people to be involved in measures to ensure public transport is safe for all passengers and transport staff without compromising young people's ability to access and afford it. Some young people in the consultation raised the issue of anti-social and violent behaviour on public transport, although this was not a majority of respondents.

Young Scot's Truth About Youth report 2025 showed **51% of young respondents felt unsafe on public transport**. Qualitative responses showed adult men were often those responsible for making young people feel unsafe on buses and trains:

"I don't feel safe on public transportation because men are very likely to say [something] or touch you especially as I am a young girl." (Young Scot, Truth About Youth, 2025)

"Public transport is a big one. As a woman especially. Random men sit next to you while in a more or less empty carriage. I have been filmed by creepy men before and have had to move carriages because of this." (Young Scot, Truth About Youth, 2025)

They also expressed that there is a stereotype that young people are causing trouble:

"Many places aren't suitable for young people, there aren't many activities, so we end up just sitting. Other people also assume all teenagers are drinking/high/causing trouble, which makes us feel unwanted." (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

"There are a lot of people that have this pre-conceived notion that when a group of young people are hanging around in public places they are up to trouble." (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

“Too many times I have been chased out of cafes or public places and parks for trying to spend time outdoors with my friends. Our parents don't want us inside but nobody else wants us outside.” (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

This was echoed in Together Scotland's *State of Children's Rights 2024* report:

“[C]hildren and young people are conscious of adults' perceptions of them when using public transport. Many say these perceptions are unfair – judging all young people on the basis of their age rather than their actions. Some are worried by calls from some adults to remove the free bus pass scheme, pointing out that buses are sometimes the only free, indoor spaces that children and young people have available – particularly in winter. Some children feel worried that their parents might decide to take their bus pass away.”

Young people in *Dear Scotland's Future* also emphasised the importance of buses as a public space for young people in the absence of other public spaces:

“Young people have turned to buses as a space to hang out so there needs to be more spaces for us to go.” (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

The Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour found no data evidencing a rise in anti-social behaviour since the introduction of the under-22 bus pass scheme.

3. Do you agree in principle that access to free bus travel should be capable of being suspended or withdrawn in cases of serious or persistent anti-social behaviour?

SYP believes punitive measures in isolation are unlikely to make a difference in reducing anti-social behaviour.

However, young people in the consultation workshop agreed a tiered system (a traffic light system was suggested) aligning consequences with severity of behaviour would be appropriate. Young people suggested that when in red, the perpetrator of anti-social behaviour has displayed unacceptable behaviour and will be removed from services/have their card taken away. Red would indicate a very serious incident. When in amber, they receive a verbal warning where they are asked to improve their behaviour and are made aware of the consequences if they display anti-social behaviour again, with the additional support of their local authority. If they continue to misbehave, they should be suspended from bus services and educated on anti-social

behaviour. When in green, the person has not displayed anti-social behaviour and can continue to use public transport.

If and when a person is removed/their card is removed, they should have the chance to appeal the decision. Young people do not think suspensions should be permanent as it could constrain their education and employment opportunities.

4. Does the instrument seem to set out a workable way of addressing antisocial behaviour? And are the procedural safeguards set out in the instrument (such as notice, reasons for suspension and the opportunity to make representations) sufficient to ensure decisions are fair, transparent and workable in practice, including how breaches would be identified and evidenced?

The safeguards are sufficient in principle. In practice, it needs to be clear for young people what it means to make representations and have feasible options for support to do so. SYP recommends that Transport Scotland and other providers continue to work with young people to ensure that the safeguards are communicated clearly, accessibly and are reviewed regularly to ensure their proper and fair implementation. For young people, this looks like:

- Young people should be included as key stakeholders in all meetings and discussions where decisions are made, and are given full, timely, youth-friendly feedback;
- Young people are active contributors and participants in the development of the child rights and wellbeing impact assessment, and the child rights impact evaluation of the Order;
- Young people are involved in designing communication methods and messaging to peers to ensure effectiveness, accessibility and understanding.

Additionally, although the Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) does not identify different impacts of the Order for people residing in the islands, we believe that young people living in the islands may be more significantly impacted if their concessionary travel pass is suspended or withdrawn.

5. What impact, if any, do you anticipate this policy could have on frontline staff and service delivery?

SYP does not have information on this issue. However, young people have expressed concern that this Order would be used discriminately against young people. SYP recommends that service providers continue to work with young people

to understand their concerns, and to ensure that frontline staff and young people have positive relations.

6. Are there alternative and better approaches to addressing anti-social behaviour on buses than the approach proposed in this Order?

The Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour found “strong evidence from research that approaches which are purely punitive and deterrent in orientation (involving no support for those causing antisocial behaviour) are not effective in reducing antisocial behaviour, in the case of both young people as well as adults, and indeed may be counterproductive (increasing rather than reducing antisocial behaviour)” (Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour, [Antisocial Behaviour - Whose responsibility? Towards a more effective response to antisocial behaviour in Scotland](#), 2025). With this in mind, addressing anti-social behaviour across Scotland needs to be tackled with a multi-disciplinary approach that deals with the underlying causes.

In SYP’s *Dear Scotland’s Future* consultation, young people directly linked a lack of welcoming youth-specific spaces and anti-social behaviour:

“A lack of [youth-specific] spaces can not only be damaging to mental health, but can lead young people to doing things in their spare time which are neither good for themselves nor their community.” (SYP, *Dear Scotland’s Future*, 2025)

“Boredom and lack of community leads to anti-social behaviour and crime.”
(SYP, *Dear Scotland’s Future*, 2025)

“Current sentiment towards young people is constantly souring with issues like youth violence and vandalism, by giving young people space to be themselves is shown to improve their mental health. This change would benefit all, and bring an ever-divided population closer together.” (SYP, *Dear Scotland’s Future*, 2025)

“Giving safe spaces for children to express themselves would likely decrease youth violence and therefore be very positive.” (SYP, *Dear Scotland’s Future*, 2025)

“The lack of ‘third spaces’ is often a reason for antisocial behaviour and higher delinquency in public spaces. Spaces for teenagers that are affordable is very important.” (SYP, *Dear Scotland’s Future*, 2025)

“This is incredibly lacking in our communities and one of the reasons that there is such an issue of young people vandalising/ causing trouble for local areas.

There's nothing to do and they are disempowered and disenfranchised without connection to their local space - of course they don't care and are mucking stuff up.” (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

“The only place we can reliably hang out is the library but it's not open often and it's a library. It's not the place for excitable teenagers sometimes.” (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

“There aren't nearly enough places for young people to meet up and have fun, which is, imo [in my opinion], part of the reason so many kids and teens go on shopping sprees or drink at their friend's houses. They don't have anywhere to go and have fun, and kid parks are too childish for most teens, so they're often forced to go above and do 'adult' things for fun.” (SYP, Dear Scotland's Future, 2025)

Young people are clear that there needs to be welcoming, supportive, accessible and affordable spaces for young people in their communities, along with adults to support them.

Further Information

If you require further information about this response, please contact Emily Beever, Head of Policy and Public Affairs.

21st May 2025

Dear First Minister,

We are writing to ask for an urgent rethink of proposals announced in the Programme for Government 2025-26 which could see the concessionary bus pass suspended or removed.

As has been widely recognised, the concessionary travel card for under-22s has been very successful in connecting young people with education and employment opportunities, as well as increasing their ability to experience new social and cultural opportunities otherwise unavailable to them due to transport costs. It has helped to break down significant transport barriers previously faced by young people.

There is a prominent media narrative which often blames young people for antisocial behaviour, and the children and young people we work with have told us they can often feel excluded and marginalised in society. Yet, the evidence shows that antisocial behaviour is caused by different age groups across society and takes place in many contexts and settings, not just on public transport.

Despite extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across Scotland, the Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour were presented with no data evidence of the need to suspend or remove concessionary travel cards for under-22s. Nor is there any strong evidence that the introduction of the concessionary card has led to an increase in antisocial behaviour from young people on buses and their recommendations for a preventative approach were to explore a preventative approach, recognising the wider social and economic context of poverty and inequality connected to much antisocial behaviour.

We want everyone to feel safe on public transport and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the issue of preventing antisocial behaviour to make public transport safer for all. Our work shows that feeling connected and supported, with good youth work, education or employment opportunities, alongside access to key services such as youth work, are all critical factors in enabling children and young people to not get involved in, or move away from, antisocial behaviour.

We believe the suspension or removal of any under-22 travel card will not prevent further acts of antisocial behaviour, and will only serve to disperse these actions somewhere else. It could in fact increase antisocial behaviour by preventing young people from accessing key education and employment opportunities and by further marginalising and stigmatising them. It is also uncertain how that process would be carried out safely and, in a rights-respecting manner, and if the young person could then be left in a potentially vulnerable situation, far from home.

Due to all of these concerns, we urge the Scottish Government to think again about the proposed suspension or removal of travel passes and engage in dialogue with children and young people and organisations who represent them to review and implement the recommendations of the Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour, ensuring that children and young people are involved meaningfully in the process.

On behalf of:

Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) - Ellie Craig MSYP, Chair

Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) - Professor Fiona Dyer, Director

Young Scot - Kirsten Urquhart, Chief Executive

Youth Scotland - Mike Strang, Chief Executive

YouthLink Scotland - Tim Frew, Chief Executive

Together Scotland - Juliet Harris, Director

Lorraine Gillies, Co-Chair of the Independent Working Group on Antisocial Behaviour

National Youth Work Voluntary Organisation Scotland Network (NYVOS) - Mike Strang, Chair

includem - Martin Dorchester, Chief Executive

Poverty Alliance - Peter Kelly, Chief Executive

MCR Pathways - Sharon McIntyre, Chief Executive

LGBT Youth Scotland - Dr Mhairi Crawford, Chief Executive

Fast Forward - Allie Cherry-Byrnes, Chief Executive

Youth Theatre Arts Scotland - Kenny McGlashan, Chief Executive

Venture Scotland - David Brackenridge, Chief Executive