

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 12 November 2025  
17th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

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

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PP3904>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 19 March 2025.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from Transport Scotland and the petitioners, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity responded to a written question on a related topic on 19 August 2025. The question and the response are set out in **Annexe D**.
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 27 June 2023.](#)
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 2,596 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**November 2025**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2028: Extend the concessionary bus travel scheme to include people seeking asylum in Scotland**

#### **Petitioner**

Pinar Aksu on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer on behalf of the Voices Network

#### **Date Lodged**

5 June 2023

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the current Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland regardless of age.

#### **Previous action**

We have raised the issue with Paul Sweeney MSP, who submitted a [\*\*motion in the Scottish Parliament\*\*](#), which achieved cross-party support.

We also met with the then Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth, to highlight the need for free bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland.

#### **Background information**

Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. They are prevented from working, housed in hotels or private rental accommodation, often in isolated areas, and given less than £50 per week to survive.

Those in hotel accommodation are forced to live on as little as £9 a week, just over £1 a day.

Access to concessionary bus travel is viewed by us as a key social justice policy. We believe it will be positively life-changing and mentally transformative for those otherwise stuck in a dreadfully inadequate and slow asylum system. Most of all, we believe it will enable asylum seekers as a group to become much more integrated in our communities.

Our campaign started in December 2021 with members from the Voices Network, followed by support from the Maryhill Integration Network Voices group.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2028 on 19 March 2025**

**The Convener:** PE2028, which was lodged by Pinar Aksu, on behalf of Maryhill Integration Network, and Doaa Abuamer, on behalf of the VOICES network, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the concessionary travel scheme to include all people who are seeking asylum in Scotland, regardless of age.

We are joined, as we have been in the past, by our colleague Paul Sweeney, who continues to take a keen interest in the issue. Good morning, Mr Sweeney.

We previously considered the petition on 15 May, when we agreed to write to Transport Scotland. In June 2024, we received a response from Transport Scotland indicating that work was on-going to establish the most appropriate way to deliver free bus travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland. At that stage, Transport Scotland told us that it was using the £2 million budget allocation to develop a national pilot scheme to provide free bus travel for people seeking asylum who were not already covered by existing concessionary travel schemes. It was noted that the funding was allocated for a single year only.

Members will likely be aware that, since Transport Scotland's response was received, plans to extend free bus travel to people seeking asylum—which was secured in a previous Conveners Group meeting, when the First Minister at the time, Humza Yousaf, agreed to look at the matter and subsequently agreed to the policy—were initially scrapped as part of the Scottish Government's plans to cut public spending. However, the plans have since been revived, with funding for the scheme included in the 2025-26 budget, which was recently approved by the Parliament.

We have also received a submission from the petitioners, which calls on the committee to seek further information from Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government on next steps and a timeframe for taking forward the commitment to providing free bus travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland.

Given that the aims of the petition have been secured, the committee will need to consider whether there is more that we can do. However, before we have that discussion, I invite Paul Sweeney to offer his thoughts.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you, convener. It is a pleasure to join the committee this morning.

I echo your comments about the work of Pinar Aksu from the Maryhill Integration Network and Doaa Abuamer from the Red Cross VOICES network, who drove the public campaign on extending free concessionary bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland, given the fairly onerous conditions in which they live, with no recourse to public funds and so on.

I am pleased that your efforts in the Conveners Group pressed the First Minister to consider the adoption of the policy. That was successful, although, as you mentioned, there was a mishap when the Government declined to carry it forward. I welcome the news that, in the most recent budget, the Government has included the policy in its programme.

I believe that the initial allocation in the budget for 2024-25 was £2 million, but the detail of how that latest iteration will be rolled out remains to be seen. That is where the concern of the petitioners continues to lie. There has been a stop-start approach from the Government in the past, and there is also concern that the scheme will not be on the same statutory footing as the other concessionary travel schemes in Scotland, including the over-60s scheme and the under-22s scheme. There is, therefore, a desire to ensure that it is done via statutory instrument, so that it is not some tokenistic measure that could simply expire after a year or so. The petitioners want a degree of permanence in the process, so, until that comfort is provided and the Government is prepared to furnish the committee with the detail of how the scheme will operate, I appeal to committee members to keep the petition open. We have had only a high-level commitment in the budget, which has never been progressed into how it will be operationalised.

Obviously, there is a real and continuing social need for the scheme. Government ministers expressed previously that it could be interdicted by adjustments to the no recourse to public funds rule by the Home Secretary. The nature of the change in Government since the election means that that risk is less obvious. There is a great opportunity to press ahead with the statutory instrument to introduce the scheme on a sure footing. Until we get that commitment from the Government, the petition merits being kept open.

**The Convener:** Colleagues, we therefore have to consider whether there is more that the committee could have oversight of—or more of which the committee could have oversight; I can hear my wife correcting my grammar as I speak—or whether the committee has taken matters as far as we can. Do members have any suggestions for action?

**Foyso! Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** In the light of what Mr Sweeney has said, we should write to the Scottish Government seeking further information on the working group with the third sector representatives and other interested parties, specifically on whether consideration is still being given to the development of a national pilot scheme for the delivery of free bus travel for people seeking asylum, and on when it expects the working group to offer recommendations on the practical delivery of free bus travel on a longer-term basis.

**The Convener:** I couple that with the points that Mr Sweeney made about real detail in relation to longer-term commitment.

I was kind of minded to let the petition close, but, on the appeal of Mr Sweeney and in the light of Mr Choudhury's recommendation, are members content to keep it open?

**Members *indicated agreement.***

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **Transport Scotland written submission, 17 April 2025**

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

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**

## Petitioners written submission, 29 October 2025

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

We welcome the Committee's continued consideration of Petition PE2028 and appreciate the opportunity to provide further input.

We believe the need for concessionary bus travel for people seeking asylum in Scotland is more urgent than ever. People seeking asylum are facing increasingly inhumane and restrictive policies, including being banned from working and surviving on as little as less than £7 per day. These conditions severely limit their ability to access essential services, attend legal and medical appointments, participate in language classes, and engage in community life.

We welcome the Scottish Government's announcement to launch a pilot scheme for concessionary bus travel for people seeking asylum. However, **we are still waiting for this pilot to begin.**

We hope that the provisional pilot program will successfully show the positive changes we predict to the lives of people seeking asylum in Scotland, making life and the enjoyment of the fully interconnected human rights more accessible; improving mental and physical wellbeing; and accessing different parts of social life and necessary public services.

Scotland has already shown a strong commitment to fairness and inclusion by accepting to trial this pilot program, yet in this petition we continue to urge the Scottish Government to commit to a **sustainable and long-term solution** that protects the dignity of people seeking asylum.

As identified by Transport Scotland, one third of current people seeking asylum in Scotland qualify already for concessionary travel according to other available schemes. Meaning, the overall significance of introducing concessionary bus travel for people seeking asylum, would require a relatively small commitment, but imply a significant difference and improvement in the daily lives of people seeking asylum on par with other residents of Scotland.

Extending the Concessionary Travel scheme to include people seeking asylum is thus a natural next step to support diverse vulnerable groups, facilitating integration of people seeking asylum into Scottish society, and upholding human rights commitments.

To conclude, we continue to call on the Scottish Government to extend the National Concessionary Travel Scheme to include all people seeking asylum in Scotland. This is not only a matter of transport policy, it is a matter of dignity, inclusion, and human rights.

## **Annexe D: Written question S6W-39566**

**Question reference:** S6W-39566

**Asked by:** Ash Regan, MSP for Edinburgh Eastern, Alba Party

**Date lodged:** 28 July 2025

**Current status:** Answered by Jim Fairlie on 19 August 2025

### **Question**

To ask the Scottish Government, as part of the £2 million made available in its 2025-26 Budget to progress free bus travel for people seeking asylum, how many asylum seekers have accessed free bus travel through this funding to date, and what assessment it has carried out on any potential benefits of this scheme.

### **Answer**

The 2025-26 Scottish Budget, which was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 25 February, has funding allocated to provide free bus travel for people seeking asylum. My officials have reconvened the Working Group with Third Sector representatives and other interested parties to work through delivery options for a pilot scheme this financial year.

The pilot will provide free bus travel for those people seeking asylum who are not eligible for the existing statutory free bus travel schemes. It is anticipated that the pilot will commence in the Autumn. Delivery of the pilot will be monitored and an evaluation carried out to determine demand, costs and potential benefits of free bus travel to people seeking asylum in Scotland.

People seeking asylum in Scotland who are aged under 22, aged 60 or over or have an eligible disability are already entitled to concessionary travel through the existing National Concessionary Travel schemes.