

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 26 November 2025  
18th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## PE2188: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Claire Sparrow

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2188>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 30 September 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 69 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

### Action

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

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

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

**PE2188: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over**

**Petitioner**

Claire Sparrow

**Date Lodged**

30 September 2025

**Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over.

**Background information**

Living in Orkney, my partner and I rely heavily on the ferry services for our daily necessities. Everything from groceries to healthcare services necessitates travel, as our island has nothing and the costs can quickly accumulate. This reliance is not unique to us; countless residents, particularly older adults, experience the burden of these travel expenses.

Recently, it's come to light that the Scottish Government has not allocated necessary funds to support travel for Orkney's older adults on the boats, which is necessary before we can get on the free buses. This situation has left many residents, who are dependent on the ferry services, in a difficult position. Without financial assistance, these individuals face challenges in accessing essential services outside their immediate vicinity.

The lack of funding for Orkney's elderly travel not only impacts individuals but also threatens the social and economic well-being of our community as a whole.

## Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2188



### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

All Scottish residents aged 60 and over currently qualify for free bus travel on almost all scheduled local bus and coach services within Scotland and on cross-border services as far south as Carlisle or Berwick-upon-Tweed under the statutory national concessionary fares scheme for older and disabled people. The only exceptions being premium fare night buses, tours/excursions, and group hire services.

Under the concessionary fares scheme, bus operators are paid a proportion of the full adult fare for each concessionary traveller carried, known as the reimbursement rate. The total amount payable to operators taking part in the is also subject to an annual cap, with no further payments made to any bus operator if the cap is reached.

The reimbursement rate and payment cap are set following negotiations between Transport Scotland and the Confederation of Passenger Transport, representing bus operators, at a level intended to ensure Scottish Ministers' objective of operators being no better and no worse off than they would have been in the absence of the scheme is met.

The reimbursement rate for the current fiscal year (2025-26) is 52.9% of the full adult single fare for the journey being taken, with the payment cap set at £215.1 million.

In addition to free bus travel, any resident of the Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands or Outer Hebrides aged 60 or over also receives vouchers for four free single ferry trips (two return trips) as a foot passenger between their home island and the Scottish mainland each year. This Scottish Government funded voucher scheme operates on a non-statutory basis.

Similarly, island residents aged 16 to 21 also receive vouchers for two round trips between their home island and the Scottish mainland each year. In addition, [from 1 April 2025](#), residents of the Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, and Outer Hebrides aged under 22 have also been eligible for Scottish Government funded free inter-island ferry travel, as foot passengers, within their own local authority area. When announcing the launch of this scheme in March 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport stated that "I also remain committed to extending free ferry travel to more young people on our islands in 2025-26". Information on the cost of providing the voucher schemes and free inter-island ferry travel for residents aged under-22 is not readily available, being reported within the wider 'concessionary fares' budget line.

**Alan Rehfish**  
**Senior Researcher**

4 November 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **Scottish Government written submission, 23 October 2025**

**PE2188/A: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over**

**Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask of the petition to be practical or achievable?**

Ferry fares policy was fully considered and consulted on through the recent Fair Fares Review and Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) processes. The final ICP Strategic Approach was published on 2 May 2025 and confirmed expansion of concessionary ferry travel for under 22s only.

The Scottish Government considers the specific ask of the petition not to be achievable as it is not affordable to expand ferry concessions any further to include over 60s at this time, beyond what is already provided (see below).

**What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask of this petition?**

The Scottish Government does provide significant funding to keep ferry fares low for everyone, including over 60s, through Road Equivalent Tariff, islander fares, and funding of local authority ferries.

On a non-statutory basis, the Scottish Government provides 4 free ferry journeys to or from the Scottish mainland per year for over 60s and disabled people, and our funding supports a number of local concessionary ferry schemes that provide older people with free or discounted ferry travel.

Fare levels are set by Scottish Ministers for the Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles Ferry Services and by the relevant local authority (supported by their Regional Transport Partnership in some instances) or private operator for ferry services they are responsible for.

The Scottish Government is providing the full funding requested by local authorities to run their inter-island and internal ferry services in 2025-26, around £50 million.

At this time, the Scottish Government is not considering any further action on this request.

### **Transport Scotland**

### **Petitioner written submission, 30 October 2025**

**PE2188/B: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over**

#### **Introduction**

I am submitting this evidence in support of Petition PE2188, which calls on the

Scottish Parliament to extend the National Entitlement Card (NEC) scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over.

Currently, young people **up to age 22 travel free on buses and ferries**, and older adults on the **mainland benefit from free bus travel**. Residents of island communities, however, cannot access equivalent free travel without ferry support. This leaves older island residents at a significant disadvantage compared with mainland peers.

### **Experience and Community Impact**

Ferry travel is essential for older adults living on islands:

- to attend healthcare appointments not available locally
- to purchase groceries and other necessities
- to maintain social and family connections.

Without financial support, older island residents face restricted independence, social isolation, and financial strain. Mainland older adults have the freedom to travel without cost on buses, while we must pay for ferries to access the same services, creating inequity.

This discrepancy not only affects individuals but also impacts the wider community. Reduced travel limits engagement with local businesses and services, which rely on residents' mobility.

### **Rationale for Extending NEC**

**Equity:** Older adults on islands should have the same travel freedoms as those on the mainland. Young people already travel free on buses and ferries; older residents should receive the same support.

**Independence and Wellbeing:** Affordable ferry travel allows older adults to remain active, attend healthcare appointments, and stay socially connected.

**Community and Economy:** Supporting travel sustains local businesses and strengthens community engagement.

**Social Inclusion:** Reducing travel costs prevents isolation and promotes mental health.

### **Conclusion**

Extending NEC ferry travel to residents aged 60 and over is fair, practical, and necessary. It addresses a clear inequity between mainland and island residents, supports independence and wellbeing, and benefits island communities socially and economically. I urge the Scottish Government to prioritise this extension and provide the necessary funding.

## **Petitioner written submission, 10 November 2025**

### **PE2188/C: Extend the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for people aged 60 and over**

While the existing National Entitlement Card scheme provides valuable support to older people across Scotland through free bus travel, this provision does not deliver equal access for those of us who live on islands.

Older island residents are effectively excluded from the same freedom of movement that their mainland counterparts enjoy. The current arrangement means that before we can even reach a bus service where our entitlement applies, we must first pay for ferry travel – often at considerable cost. This is not simply a matter of inconvenience; it is a matter of geographical inequality and social isolation.

For island OAPs, the ferry is our “bus” to the mainland. It is the essential first step to access healthcare, shopping, family, and community support. Without parity in travel entitlement, older island residents are left trapped by geography, discriminated against purely because of where we live.

It is also worth noting the inconsistency in provision. While young people under 22 on islands now receive free ferry travel, older residents – many on fixed incomes and facing health or mobility challenges – are excluded from equivalent support. This creates a clear imbalance and sends an unfortunate message that older islanders’ needs are of lesser importance.

The extension of the National Entitlement Card scheme to include ferry travel for over-60s would not only promote fairness and inclusion but would also align with the Scottish Government’s wider aims of tackling isolation, promoting wellbeing, and supporting rural and island communities.

In short, we ask the Committee to recognise that island OAPs are being denied equal access to the benefits of the concessionary travel scheme, and to consider this petition as a matter of equity, not privilege.